

# China

SICHUAN & TIBETAN PLATEAU

LIMOSA HOLIDAYS | TOUR INFO PACK



Amongst many stunning species in Sichuan, the male Firethroat is arguably the best? © Tang Jun, [www.chinabirdtour.com](http://www.chinabirdtour.com)

## **2019**      **Sunday 19th May – Monday 3rd June (16 days)** **Small group tour with Brian Small & local guide**

**NEW!** Sensational and spectacularly scenic tour to the Qionglai Mountains and eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau. This is among the most botanically rich regions in the world outside the tropical rainforests, with a correspondingly rich and diverse fauna. Famous for its Giant Pandas, Sichuan also sparkles with many wonderful birds - the focus of our tour. Up to 9 species of pheasant (including Blue Eared Pheasant, Chinese Monal and Temminck's Tragopan), Tibetan Snowcock, Black-necked Crane, the brilliant blue Grandala, Firethroat, White-browed Tit-warbler and Przevalski's Finch. If you are looking for some of the very best birding in the Palearctic, with many highly desired species, this tour is a must!

- Superb new tour, starting in the Qionglai Mountains
- Abundance of birdlife amidst majestic landscapes and snow-capped peaks
- Up to 9 species of pheasant possible, including Temminck's Tragopan and Lady Amherst's
- Firethroat, Grandala, White-browed and Crested Tit-warblers, Giant Laughingthrush
- Bird the eastern Tibetan Plateau – Tibetan Lark, White-rumped and Rufous-necked Snowfinch
- Black-necked Crane, Tibetan Snowcock, Ground Tit, Himalayan Marmot, Plateau Pika
- Up to 16 species of *Phylloscopus*, nine species of rosefinch and seven parrotbills
- Expertly led by Limosa's Brian Small and specialist English-speaking Chinese bird tour guide

### **What's Included?**

- Limosa Tour Leader
- Expert English-speaking Chinese ornithologist guide
- Return flights - London Heathrow to Chengdu (Sichuan)
- 14 nights accommodation in China
- All main meals - with drinking water provided during the day
- Transportation by small coach
- All excursions, entry fees, local guides, tour based tips and taxes

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## Outline Itinerary

- Days 1-2:** Fly London Heathrow-Chengdu. Afternoon arrival on day 2 and transfer to hotel. Night Chengdu
- Day 3:** Morning birding at Chengdu and Huan Hua Xi Park. Southwest to Longcanggou. Longcanggou (3 nts)
- Days 4-5:** Two days in Longcanggou Forest, at varying altitudes up to 2400m
- Day 6:** We travel via Tian Quan and the Erlangshan Pass tunnels to Luding. Luding (2 nts)
- Day 7:** All day at Erlangshan, birding on the old pass road up to 3000m
- Day 8:** From Luding, we travel via the Zhe Duo Pass to Rilong. Rilong (3 nts)
- Days 9-10:** Two full days exploring the bird-rich Balangshan Pass region
- Days 11-12:** After early birding at Balangshan we continue west to Maerkang (Barkam). Birding the forests of the Mengbishan Pass. Maerkang (2 nts)
- Day 13:** North via Hongyuan to Rouergai, on the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau. Rouergai (2 nts)
- Day 14:** Baxi Forest and the Tibetan Plateau
- Day 15:** We return full circle today, driving from Rouergai to Dujiangyan via Baxi Forest and the Gar Tai Pass. Night Dujiangyan
- Day 16:** Fly Chengdu-London Heathrow

## Tour Overview

At the very eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau lie the Qionglai Mountains. The elevation of many mountains here exceeds 9,800ft (3,000m). At its heart lies Mount Siguniang ('Four Girls Mountain'), which at 20,510ft (6250m) is the second highest mountain in Sichuan Province and known as the 'Queen of Sichuan's Peaks'.

The Qionglai are home to a large, primitive forest and wild mountainous tracts that boast both spectacular scenery and superb wildlife. Safeguarding more than 30% of the world's highly endangered Giant Panda population (access to which is heavily regulated for scientists only), they are also among the most botanically rich sites of any region in the world

outside the tropical rainforests. Such diversity has resulted in an equally rich and varied birdlife, with many truly wonderful species to look for - including nine species of pheasant, Tibetan Snowcock, Giant Laughingthrush, the luminous blue Grandala and stunning Firethroat, the pastel-coloured White-browed Tit-warbler and the gorgeous Przevalski's Finch.

Our adventure begins with a flight to Chengdu, capital of China's Sichuan Province, and follows a clockwise circuit into the Qionglai Mountains and beyond onto the easternmost part of the Tibetan Plateau. Here, beautiful Black-necked Cranes, Upland Buzzards, Tibetan Larks and White-rumped and Rufous-necked Snowfinches grace high elevation fields alongside the curious Ground Tit. Along the way, we might also encounter the likes of Snow Pigeon, Daurian Jackdaw, Azure-winged Magpie, Sichuan, Père David's and White-browed Tits, Przevalski's Nuthatch, Père David's Laughingthrush, Golden and Grey-hooded Parrotbills, Kessler's Thrush, Chinese Rubythroat and Chinese Grey Shrike.

Our travels are designed to allow for some acclimatisation at lower altitudes - our port of entry, Chengdu, sits at an elevation of 1,600ft (500m) - before climbing up into the higher mountains. As a journey, it promises to be an absolute delight, both in terms of the amazing range of birds to be seen and for the fabulous landscapes and fascinating towns we travel through. Join Brian Small and our experienced English-speaking Chinese bird guide Tang Jun for Limosa's inaugural Sichuan tour in May 2019 - and get to grips with some of the finest Palaearctic birding and landscapes!

## Daily Itinerary

### Days 1-2

#### FLY LONDON-CHENGDU

Our birdwatching tour to China begins with an afternoon departure from London Heathrow to Chengdu, where we arrive about lunchtime on day two.

Our first birding will be in the city of Chengdu itself, where having checked into our hotel rooms we pay a visit to the local Baihuatan Park.

Resident species include Spotted Dove, Light-vented Bulbul, Chinese Blackbird, Vinous-throated Parrotbill and White-browed Laughingthrushes. In May, these might also be joined by migrants such as Taiga Flycatcher and Yellow-browed Warbler, while Pale Martins hawk insects over the river. David's Fulvetta, the gaudy Red-billed Leothrix, Collared Finchbill and the chunky, yellow-billed Chinese Grosbeak are also possible. *Night Chengdu*

### Day 3

#### HUAN HUA XI PARK (CHENGDU), SOUTHWEST TO LONGCANGGOU

Adjacent to our hotel, Huan Hua Xi is a typically Chinese park, where people gather to walk about exercising or chatting, doing Tai Chi or playing Mahjong. Walking the paths at Huan Hua Xi might reward us with views of Black-throated Bushtit or Rufous-capped Babbler. In stands of bamboo we should, with perseverance, get good views of the stunning Rufous-faced Warbler – one not to be missed! A lake here holds the attractive Chinese Pond Heron, whilst White Wagtails of the white-masked race *alboides* chase about the grass and House Swifts zap by.

Leaving Chengdu, we then head west into the foothills en route to Longcanggou, our base for the next three nights. We stop along the way for lunch and again near a suspension bridge over a river. Ashy-throated Parrotbills and Swinhoe's Minivets occur, as do Red-billed Blue Magpies, Chinese Hwamei, the large-billed Tiger Shrike and both Japanese Tits and Japanese White-eyes. *Night Longcanggou*

### Days 4-5

#### LONGCANGGOU FOREST

We have two full days to explore this excellent area, with its mix of woodland habitats across a range of altitudes from 4200ft (1300m) to 7900ft (2400m) holding a multitude of key bird species.

In May, when the mixed woodlands will be coming into leaf or flowering, early morning starts will help us to find the birds when they are most active. This is a terrific spot for tits: Fire-capped, Yellow-browed, Yellow-bellied, Green-backed, Japanese, Coal and Père David's Tits are all possible. *Phylloscopus* warblers are well represented too, and include the relatively

common Sichuan Leaf Warbler as well as Ashy-throated and Claudia's Leaf Warblers, while the bright-and-stripy Kloss's Warbler is a must-see! Not strictly a 'Phyllosc', but certain to test our ID skills, *Seicercus* warblers are often rather trickier to see - but well worth putting in time for as Alström's and Grey-crowned Warblers might be joined by Bianchi's Warbler... when they deign to come out!

This area is notable for the appealing white-faced Przevalski's Nuthatch that creeps along the branches high in the treetops, and for Red-winged Laughingthrush – superb in flight as they flash their red wings. Golden, Three-toed, Great and endemic Grey-hooded Parrotbills, Emei Shan Liocichla (easier to hear than see), Spotted Laughingthrush and Golden-breasted Fulvetta also await our discovery. Pallas's Squirrels scramble about the branches as we search for Darjeeling Woodpecker and overhead Himalayan Swiftlets stitch through the deep blue skies. *Two further nights Longcanggou*

### Day 6

#### LONGCANGGOU TO LUDING

Meeting early for a pre-breakfast walk, we'll enjoy another hour or two of birding around Longcanggou, perhaps watching Black-naped Oriole or Russet Sparrow or listening to Lady Amherst's Pheasant calling on distant hillsides.

After breakfast, we set off towards Luding County, going via Tian Quan and the tunnels through the Erlangshan Pass. Though we've a good distance to travel today, we will stop to bird along the way, visiting an area of forest where the secretive White-browed Shortwing and Alstrom's Warbler can be found.

A nice lunch will be taken Yujia village, south of Ya'an, before we swing west and then north to reach our next hotel.

At 2,000ft (600m) elevation, a spell of afternoon birding on the southern side of the Erlangshan Pass could produce the lovely Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher and Ashy-throated Warbler. A series of new tunnels have shortened the drive to the town of Luding, our destination this evening, where we arrive for dinner and a two-night stay. *Night Luding*

**Day 7****BIRDING THE ERLANGSHAN PASS**

An early start to the day is needed to get to the best habitat along the old road to the Erlangshan Pass. In themselves, Lady Amherst's Pheasants are truly stunning, but we will be here early for the amazing Firethroat – one of the special birds of this tour! The mix of trees and bushes here is perfect for them and we will devote some time to getting good views of this little cracker! Not quite so colourful, Yellow-streaked Warbler, Chinese Song Thrush and Black-browed Bushtit also inhabit the bushes and trees, where the buzzing calls of Spotted Nutcrackers are often heard.

After a picnic breakfast, we continue to ascend the Erlangshan Pass. As we climb higher, the handsome Chestnut Thrush and snazzy Yellow-throated Bunting might be seen and, as the vegetation gradually thins out, we hope to encounter four different rosefinches: Vinaceous, Sharpe's and Chinese White-browed as well as Crimson-browed Finch (which is really a 'rosefinch'). Olive-backed and Rosy Pipits can be found here, along with very smart Rufous-breasted Accentors that sing atop the scattered trees.

Once over the pass at an altitude of 9,800ft (3000m), we descend the south side a little, where the mix of scrub and open ground will help us scan for views of the exquisite Lady Amherst's Pheasant. Walking down an old gravel road we look and listen for Black-faced Laughingthrush and Rufous-bellied Niltava, whilst in patches of rhododendrons we could be lucky to find the stunning Golden Bush Robin. Sichuan Leaf Warblers nest low down in the bushes - but with such majestic vistas we may well be distracted! Yet another lovely *Phyllosc*, the Alpine Leaf Warbler is often to be found here and we'll also be searching for such treats as White-browed Fulvetta, Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler, Rufous-tailed Babbler, the water-loving White-capped Redstart, Hill Blue Flycatcher and the surprisingly smart Brown-breasted Bulbul as well as a much more familiar bird - Goldcrest!

After an exciting day of birding we return for a second night at our Luding hotel. *Night Luding*

**Day 8****LUDING VIA ZHE DUO PASS TO RILONG**

After our bird-packed day in Luding County yesterday, today is mainly a travel day as we arc northeast through some amazing upland scenery to Rilong, where we spend the next three nights.

Our route will take us up and over the Zhe Duo Pass at 14100ft (4300m) and on to Xin Du Qiao, where we break for lunch. We'll stop from time to time to take in the magnificent landscape and stretch our legs - or perhaps to admire a Golden Eagle or Himalayan Vulture soaring overhead. White-capped Redstarts dot the boulders along the gushing rivers and we could well find a trio of captivating corvids: Daurian Jackdaw and Red-billed and Alpine Choughs.

After a long journey today, in the evening we arrive at our next hotel - in Rilong, a Tibetan-style town full of character, at an elevation of 10500ft (3200m). *Night Rilong*

**Days 9-10****RILONG & BALANGSHAN**

During two full days around Rilong we shall have access to some higher elevations, where early mornings offer the chance of three more stunning pheasants. Incredible looking White Eared Pheasants are generally less shy than the distinctly unusual Koklass Pheasant - but the real star here could well be the iridescent Chinese Monal shining in the early morning sun.

As the day warms up, Common Rosefinches (here a different colour to Western birds) begin to sing and dark hooded Snow Pigeons become active, as do birds of prey. Himalayan Buzzards could well be joined - and dwarfed - in the skies by the immense Himalayan and Black Vultures, and Lammergeier. On a very different scale, passerines such as the stunning Blue-fronted Redstart, orange-flanked Himalayan Bluetail and Asian Brown Flycatcher feed busily the bushes.

On reaching the highest part of the incredible Balangshan Pass at around 14,800ft (4500m), we have a good chance of finding Brandt's and Plain Mountain Finches, and search excitedly for the unbelievably brilliant Grandala, a vision in blue - and "bluer than a very blue thing!" Further careful checking of the ridges and rocky slopes

might produce views of Snow Partridge on distant rocks and though hearing Tibetan Snowcock is invariably easier than actually seeing one, we do have a chance here.

As we head back from the summit on our way back down to Rilong, we will check an area of low scrub for the chiffchaff-like Buff-throated Warbler and yet another superb rosefinch – this time, the crimson-bodied Streaked Rosefinch. But the real prize here is the stunning Chinese Rubythroat – a recent 'split' with the division of what was formerly 'White-tailed Rubythroat' into two species - a fitting end to a fine day in the mountains above Rilong!

Next morning will find us heading back up towards the summit of Balangshan for further investigation of the high pass area. Three 'new' pheasants await us here - though Golden and Blood Pheasants are usually somewhat easier to find than the amazingly colourful but elusive Temminck's Tragopan! And if we missed them yesterday, we have another chance to look for Tibetan Snowcock as they forage snow patches. Giant and Barred Laughingthrushes also inhabit the slopes, but (like the pheasants) both can be tough to see. As we 'reach for the stars', Maroon-backed Accentor, Hodgson's Treecreeper and the diminutive Chestnut-headed Tesia should hopefully prove a little easier to track down, along with Twite (of the race *miniakensis*). Plus there's yet another exquisite rosefinch to add to our growing collection: Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch, looking resplendent in purple-pink. *Two further nights Rilong*

### Days 11-12

#### BALANGSHAN TO MAERKANG

An exciting day of birding and travel begins with a pre-breakfast visit to a patch of mixed woodland near Rilong. It's a good spot to find Sichuan Jay and Crested Tit-warbler, Pink-rumped Rosefinch (still they come!) and the stunning, tail-bobbing Siberian Blue Robin. The wren-like call of Taiga Flycatchers betrays their presence and we should see a rufous-throated male or two about the trees, where other goodies to watch for can include Daurian and Hodgson's Redstarts, the appealing Long-tailed Rosefinch and the stripe-headed Godlewski's Bunting. It will be hard to tear ourselves away from here!

Leaving Rilong, we first travel east then swing north through the mountains to Fubian (8900ft / 2700m). We break our journey here with a stop for lunch, before continuing on our way north.

Encircled by awe-inspiring mountains, at the lofty Mengbisha Pass (13,400ft / 4100m) we may well find Upland Buzzard or enjoy further views of the very beautiful Crested Tit-warbler; there are Rufous-vented and funky Grey Crested Tits to watch out for, too. Eventually, we arrive at the modern town of Maerkang (Barkam), for dinner and a two-night stay.

Next morning, we head out to the forests of the Mengbisha Pass, devoting some time to getting better views of Maroon-backed Accentor and Chinese White-browed Rosefinch. We will also be hoping for the attractive Kessler's Thrush, Collared Grosbeak and maybe a calling Black Woodpecker; White-throated Needletails may be seen bombing through the pass, whilst the trees hold typical pine-forest inhabitants such as Buff-barred and Hume's Leaf Warblers, and White Eared Pheasants 'bark' from deep within the woods.

Dropping a little lower, we enter the realm of White-winged Grosbeak, Chinese Fulvetta and (can you believe it!) yet another rosefinch: the frosty-faced Three-banded Rosefinch, although this will probably be our last new rosefinch of the tour! As a bonus, we have further chances to watch for Blood Pheasant here, along with the streaky Chinese Babax and desirable Long-tailed Thrush - another fine *Zoothera* to go with the similar Sichuan Thrush. *Two nights Maerkang*

### Day 13

#### MAERKANG TO ROUEGAI

With a fair distance to cover today, we make an early start from Maerkang for Rouergai, on the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau. As well as having picnic breakfasts and lunch, stops en route will be relatively short - but very sweet!

We should see our first eastern Black Kites today and, before heading out of the Qionglai Mountains, areas of grassland and bushes that mark the start of the Tibetan Plateau host the rather plain Père David's Laughingthrush and maybe the odd migrant passing through (such as

Brown Shrike) or the local Sichuan Tit, with its buzzing, Willow Tit-like call. As the landscape levels out a little, we may well pick out our first stately Black-necked Cranes, along with Black Stork, Ruddy Shelduck and the bulky Himalayan Marmot.

After a small pass, the valley opens out and the meandering river has created a series of ox-bow lakes that form a sinuous area of wetland. Great Egret, Ferruginous Duck, Brown-headed Gull, Common Tern and Common Redshank occur and eye-catching Citrine Wagtails like to sit up on grass stems. Groups of exotic Azure-winged Magpies could be about - and the presence of a few more prey items adds a realistic chance of finding Saker Falcon (here of the race *milvipes*). Another honorary 'raptor' to watch out for is Chinese Grey Shrike and, although a rare bird, we will be keeping our eyes peeled.

Smart Siberian Stonechats perch prominently on sticks and stones, and we have a chance to find the pallid and curiously wheatear like Ground Tit. Black-winged Snowfinch and the rosy-tailed Przevalski's Finch are two more key birds to look for in the valley, along with the pale-faced *khamensis* race of Horned Lark – possibly to be treated as a species in future...

We should arrive at Rouergai (Zoige) in the late afternoon, with time to settle into our rooms before enjoying a delicious meal in town. *Night Rouergai*

#### Day 14

##### **BAXI FOREST & TIBETAN PLATEAU**

Rising early to make use of the early part of the day, we head east for around 20 miles to reach an area of forest near Baxi. In the crisp, early morning air we'll scan for the immaculate Blue Eared Pheasant and might also encounter Red Deer, Snowy-cheeked Laughingthrush and the skulking White-bellied Redstart, which all make their homes here. In the relatively old woodland with some remarkably tall pines, 'real' Common Pheasants, Chinese Leaf Warblers and Père David's Laughingthrushes can also be found.

Venturing 'off piste' along a steeper trail may reveal such treats as Snowy-browed and Slaty-backed Flycatchers, Chinese Nuthatch, Yellow-

streaked Warbler and Chinese Fulvetta. We also have another chance to find the impressive Giant Laughingthrush, with its song full of mimicry.

Returning west, a diversion onto the Tibetan Plateau will take us to fields that can be alive with tiny, black-nosed Plateau Pikas. White-rumped Snowfinches nest in the pika burrows, as do wheezy Rock Sparrows. A nearby wetland holds yet more interesting species, including Black-necked Cranes and perhaps a few migrant waders - but we have another important 'target here: the big Tibetan Lark. Flurries of Rufous-necked Snowfinches across the plain may well be joined by actual snow flurries... and maybe the odd Lammergeier!

As another exciting day's birding draws to a close, we will head back to town for dinner and our second night at the hotel. *Night Rouergai*

#### Day 15

##### **ROUERGAI TO DUJIANGYAN**

We take breakfast taken in town this morning before heading back to Baxi Forest for one last chance to pick up specialities such as White-browed Tit. From there, we steadily descend to the Gar Tai Pass at 12,500ft (3,800m), hoping to come across the exquisite little White-browed Tit-warbler and fabulous Siberian Rubythroat.

The long journey back to Chengdu will take most of the rest of the day, along roads through the spectacular mountains. Taking in the superb scenery as we drive will give us time to reflect on the many memorable moments of the tour. Evening arrival at our hotel. *Night Dujiangyan*

#### Day 16

##### **FLY CHENGDU TO LONDON**

Our flight home today is scheduled to depart Chengdu in the early afternoon. So for those that wish, there should be time to enjoy an optional pre-breakfast birdwalk locally, hoping to pick up a last few species for the tour.

After breakfast, we transfer to Chengdu Airport and check in for our flight home. Evening arrival at London Heathrow, where our spring birding tour to China concludes.

## Trip Information

**Group Size** Max 10 participants & 2 leaders (both guides will travel regardless of group size)

**What To Expect** A 16-day, small group birdwatching tour to Sichuan, China, beginning in the provincial capital Chengdu and looping north through the Qionglai Mountains to the Tibetan Plateau. Along the way, we will visit Erlangshan and Balangshan passes, ascending to more than 4000m (14,800ft), and exploring the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau at 3500m (11,500ft).

This trip calls for something of a 'pioneering spirit'. In order to make the most of our stay in China **please be aware** that days will be long and tiring - but extremely rewarding - with long journeys necessary on some.

Early morning is by far the most productive time for bird activity so we anticipate making early or very starts most days - leaving the hotel at times that will vary between 5.00am to 7:00am. Most days, we will have picnic breakfasts provided for us by our ground agent. [There may sometimes be the opportunity to opt out of early morning sessions on days where we either return to the hotel later or when our 'ground crew' will catch us up on the road later.]

At the higher altitudes we will limit our physical activities, avoiding excessive uphill walking and choosing (where possible) to walk downhill. We move at a very sedate pace watching birds and this can help to avoid altitudinal headaches and breathlessness. Most problems can be overcome by drinking plenty of water and resting quietly in or near the vehicle.

Our guides will advise you locally about the day's events. If you wish to opt out of a particular activity or walk, please don't be afraid to ask them.

**Birds** 260-280 species

**Mammals** 10-15 species

**Accommodation** 14 nights accommodation at hotels in China. Hotels on this tour are of a variable but improving standard, ranging from

rustic to good or best available Western-style hotels in this 'less-visited' corner of China. All rooms have Western-style private facilities (not the traditional Oriental-style toilets). Please note that at some hotels the hot water supply can be intermittent. Laundry service is erratic and it may not be easy to get clothes laundered on tour - taking travel soap with you is a good idea.

**Wifi** Most hotels do have internet access in the lobby and/or rooms, but please note that some services are blocked in China. These include all Google services including Gmail.

**Meals** All main meals are included in the tour price (and with bottled drinking water also provided), commencing with dinner on arrival in Chengdu on Day 2 and concluding with breakfast there on Day 16. Chinese cuisine is tasty, widely appreciated and usually plentiful. The Chinese way of eating is to share a selection of dishes. Few restaurants are likely to provide knives and forks; chopsticks are provided instead so if you are unused to using these you may wish to bring your own knife, fork and spoon. Green tea will be served with food.

On longer days, particularly when we are travelling, our leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time. However, occasionally early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Snacks will be provided to help fill the 'gaps' and you may also wish to bring your own 'trail food'.

We will have very few hotel breakfasts on this tour, opting instead to have picnic breakfasts in the field. These typically consist of items such as muesli, instant noodles, biscuits, chocolate, fruit, peanuts, and bread and jam (where bread is available).

On quite a few days we will also have picnic lunches and these will consist of similar items to breakfast with probably cheese and/or ham or jam sandwiches.

Hot water is available in hotels and restaurants so you may like to bring your own tea, instant coffee or drinking chocolate and powdered milk and sugar. Cups are rarely provided so a travel mug or 'flat pack' mug is recommended.

**Walking** Inevitably when walking in the mountains there will be some steeper sections along the roads and tracks. These are usually quite short and, wherever possible, we will aim to drive uphill and bird as we walk back down. Comfortable, lightweight waterproof walking shoes or boots with stout soles and good grip are recommended. Walking poles or seat sticks can often be a good idea on slopes and for resting while birding.

**Altitude:** Though Chengdu sits at an elevation of 1600ft (500m), **this is a tour based largely in the mountains.** Much of the tour is operated at quite high altitude and we will spend some time above 11,500ft (3500m), with the highest point being at Balangshan, 14,800ft (4500m). Our birding at high altitudes will necessarily be very leisurely – we expect to stay mostly on the road and to walk slowly downhill from the upper slopes. The list below gives an idea of some of the altitudes (height above sea level) we visit:

- Chengdu (1600ft/500m)
- Longcanggou (4000ft/1200m)
- Longcanggou Forest (4200-7900ft/1300-2400m)
- Ya'an (2,000ft (600m)
- Luding (4200ft/1300m)
- Erlangshan Pass old road (max. 9800ft/3000m)
- Zhe Duo Pass (14,100ft/4300m)
- Rilong (10,500ft/3200m)
- Balangshan (max. 14,800ft/4500m)
- Mengbisha (11,800-13,100ft/3600-4000m)
- Maerkang (8,900ft/2700m)
- Rouergai (11,200ft/3400m)

The altitudes of the hotels vary: at Longcanggou we are at ca. 4000ft (1200m); Maerkang 8600ft (2615m); and Rilong 10,500ft (3200m). For our two nights near the end of the tour at Rouergai, on the edge of Tibetan Plateau, we are situated at 11,200ft (3400m).

**Weather** At low altitude at Chengdu in mid-late May, it should be fairly warm and humid (25-30°C/77-86F). As we climb higher, temperatures will cool considerably and it will become much less humid. On some early mornings, it can even

be cold. This will be especially true near the summit of Longcanggou, at the Erlangshan and Balangshan Passes between Rilong and Wolong, and on the Tibetan Plateau around Rouergai. We anticipate making early starts in these areas and temperatures at that time could well be below freezing (rarely dropping to as low as minus 4°C/25F if skies are clear). There will probably still be some snow lying at higher elevations and on the highest peaks.

Rainfall occurs throughout the year in Sichuan. On this tour, precipitation is perhaps most likely at Longcanggou and in the Wolong area; it is perhaps least likely at Rouergai on the Tibetan Plateau, but cannot be discounted anywhere.

**Flights** Return flights from London Heathrow to Chengdu (Sichuan), typically with a change of planes in either Hong Kong or Amsterdam.

**Ground Transport** By small coach with local driver.

**Insects** Biting insects are not numerous, but mosquitoes may be present in small numbers at Chengdu, where it is lower, warmer and more humid. As anywhere, there can be a few tiny biting insects but often in the mountains in May they can be completely absent. You might like to pack some repellent, just in case.

**Photos** Many and varied in open landscapes, though sometimes difficult in early morning light. The landscapes are wonderful and extremely photogenic - as are some of the birds!

## Tour Cost

**2019** (16 days): £4695 (inc flights from London)

Land only cost: £4045

Deposit: £600

Single Supp: £455

### Cost includes

- Limosa Tour Leader
- Expert English-speaking Chinese bird guide
- Return flights London Heathrow-Chengdu
- 14 nights accommodation in China
- All main meals (with drinking water included)
- Transportation by small coach
- All excursions, entry fees, local guides, tour based tips (including driver, guides) and taxes
- Map and Limosa checklist of birds

### Cost excludes

Insurance, China visa costs, drinks, airport meals/snacks & other items of a personal nature.

## About Your Guides

**Brian Small** A teacher for 12 years, Brian now works full time in the Limosa office - when he's not away guiding our tours that is! He has travelled widely around the globe and is the inspiration behind a growing number of new Limosa tours, including the Swiss Alps, Italy, Argentina, Brazil, Borneo, Thailand and this exciting tour to China. He regularly leads our guided *BirdWalks* in Norfolk and Suffolk. Brian is an accomplished bird artist and his current projects include illustrative work on major new guides to birds in Brazil, and various parts of Africa. He enjoys an identification challenge, such as gulls, and when at home concentrates largely on his local patch on the Suffolk coast, where he lives with his wife Janet and their son Ben. Brimming with infectious enthusiasm, Brian has been guiding tours for Limosa since 2002 and has excellent experience of Eastern Palearctic species, having first visited China in 2001.

**Local guides** Brian will be ably assisted throughout the tour by our excellent English-speaking, Chinese birding guide, Tang Jun.

## Financial Security

Limosa Holidays is a fully bonded Tour Operator and a member of the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). We hold an ATOL (Air Tour Operators Licence) granted by the CAA, providing for your protection in the event of Limosa Holidays' insolvency. Our licence number is ATOL 2950.

For tours not including the cost of a flight from the UK or for holidays booked by you as 'Land Only', all payments made to us are fully bonded through the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT). Our ABTOT membership number is 5230. For details please see our brochure or website: <http://www.limosaholidays.co.uk/financial-protection>

## Limosa Loyalty Discount

We are proud of the number of loyal customers who travel regularly with us. As our way of saying 'thank you', we offer a **Frequent Travel Discount**. Under the scheme, everyone who takes four trips with us is entitled to claim a 5% discount on their 5th trip<sup>\*1</sup>. Remember to request your discount at time of booking!

<sup>\*1</sup> **Please note:** This offer applies to the basic tour cost only and excludes certain commission-based trips, extras such as additional flights, private extensions and cancellations. Discounts cannot be given in lieu of tour deposits or off the cost of single room supplements.

## How To Book

Check availability on our website or with our office. We are happy to hold Provisional Reservations for up to 7 days. After this, we do require a Booking Form and deposit to confirm your place on tour. Any unconfirmed space will be released.

### Book Online, by Phone or by Post

You can book and pay the deposit simply and securely **Online** via our website, using the '**Book This Tour**' button on the relevant tour page or the **Booking** tab at the top of the page.

Telephone bookings must be confirmed in writing by completion of a Booking Form (there's one tucked inside every brochure or as a PDF download from our website), which can be mailed to us in the time honoured way.

Be sure to read our **Booking Conditions** and **General Information** (found at the back of our brochure, on our website or available from our office on request) prior to booking.

## When to Book

Early booking is advised since flights and accommodation are much more easily secured well in advance. To encourage early booking, we are pleased to offer an **Early Bird Discount** - see our current brochure or website for details.

Our tours are limited to small group sizes. So they can fill up quickly - sometimes even before our new brochure comes out! Single rooms in particular can often be in short supply and among the first to go, so do try to plan well ahead if you definitely require one of these.

**Last-minute Bookings:** We inevitably receive a few unexpected cancellations over the course of a season so it is always worth enquiring about vacancies on any tour - even for those departing in just a few weeks!

## Payments

**Deposit:** The amount of **booking deposit** per person is shown alongside every tour. We accept deposit payments by **debit card**, **cheque** (*made payable to Limosa Holidays and drawn on a UK bank in GB Pounds Sterling*) or by **electronic bank transfer** (*please ask for our bank details*).

For payment of booking deposits only we also accept Visa and MasterCard **credit cards**.

**Balance:** Full payment of the **tour balance** is due not later than 12 weeks prior to departure (20 weeks in the case of certain tours such as cruises or those involving rail travel). We will send you an invoice before the balance is due.

We accept balance payments and any additional payments (*e.g.* interim flight deposits, flight upgrades, extra hotels etc) by **UK debit card**, **cheque** or **electronic bank transfer**.

**Please note:** From 1 January 2018, credit card payments and overseas debit card payments will not be accepted for interim / balance payments.

**Payment by overseas customers** must be in GB Pounds Sterling and may be made by transfer to our bank (*please ask for our bank details*). Note that we do **not** accept cheques on US Banks in US Dollars, or cheques in Euros or Eurocheques.

**Late Booking Payments:** In order for us to guarantee your airline seats, hotels etc., full payment is required at time of booking for all late bookings (*i.e.* bookings made within 12 weeks of departure).

## Other Things You Need To Know

### Passports & Visas

Your **passport** must be valid for a minimum period of 6 months from the date of entry into China.

- **Fingerprinting** China has recently introduced a requirement for all foreign passport holders aged 14-70 years to have their fingerprints taken on arrival in China. This new process was introduced at Shenzhen Airport (Guangdong) in February 2017 and will be gradually rolled out at other points of entry around the country.

- **VISA REQUIRED by UK passport holders.** British nationals need a visa to enter mainland China. For latest details of entry requirements to China contact the Chinese Embassy or the China Visa Application Service Centre (CVASC) well before your proposed trip. You may be asked to provide a copy of a previous China Visa or passport in support of your visa application.

You are advised to apply 6 weeks in advance of your visit but no sooner than 3 months before your travel. Two months before departure our office will send you the latest information on how to apply for an ordinary Tourist Visa.

Details about how to apply are available at CVASC: <http://www.visaforchina.org/>

There are Chinese Embassies in London (tel: 020 7631 1430), Manchester (tel: 0161 224 8672) and Edinburgh (tel: 0131 316 4789). Citizens of other nations should contact the nearest Chinese Embassy for entry requirements.

You may apply for your China Visa by Postal Application or by an Appointment Application – the former is the easiest. When you apply it is important that you submit all of the required documentation – **if you have obtained a China Visa before you will be required to add a copy of that (even from an old passport)**. Limosa will provide you with the relevant documents and information (including letter of invitation) required to successfully apply.

#### Visa Agencies

In the UK, a good way to apply for your visa is through an agency that makes the application for you and posts your visa/passport back to you – they will check your application and make sure all of the documentation is in order before applying - saving wasted time or a visit to the embassy yourself.

Recommended is the Manchester-based China Visa Bureau: <http://www.chinavisabureau.co.uk> or tel: 0161 260 0335. The total charged (January 2018) by China Visa Bureau is currently £171.67 – this includes all CVB, CVASC and Chinese Consulate fees.

• **Important!** When you book on the tour, we request that you email or mail the Limosa office a colour scan of your passport – the page with your photograph and passport details. These are needed by our ground agent in order to obtain clearance for us to travel in some areas.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously, you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

#### • Registering with the Chinese authorities

You must register your place of residence with the local Public Security Bureau within 24 hours of arrival in China. Chinese authorities enforce this requirement with regular spot checks of foreigners' documentation. **On this tour, registration will be done on your behalf by our ground agent.**

#### Health & Vaccinations

Visit your health professional at least 4 to 6 weeks before your trip to check whether you need any vaccinations or other preventive measures. Specific information and advice is published by the **National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC)**, visit: <http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/destinations.aspx>

Useful information and advice about healthcare abroad is also available at NHS Choices website: <http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/Pages/Healthcareabroad.aspx>

**Compulsory vaccinations:** None (yellow fever certificate required only if arriving in China from infected areas).

**Recommended immunisations:** tetanus, typhoid, diphtheria and hepatitis A. Consult your doctor for current advice regarding polio, TB and hepatitis B, which may be recommended in some circumstances.

**Medication:** special medication may be difficult to obtain on the tour, so please travel with your own. Be sure to check that you are not travelling with any medications that might contravene other countries regulations.

*Malaria:* There is no malaria risk in China – see Fit for Travel map that gives details for China - [http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/destinations/asia-\(east\)/china/china-malaria-map.aspx](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/destinations/asia-(east)/china/china-malaria-map.aspx)

Areas of risk can and do change however and you must consult your GP or health centre for the latest malaria advice in good time prior to travel.

The above information, together with that contained within our Travel Information sheets

(sent to everyone who books), outlines health requirements for this tour. **Please note that these details are given for guidance only - and are only for certain diseases - and you must consult your doctor in good time prior to travel as to what immunisations (if any) are needed for your chosen holiday.**

For full and latest health information **we urge everyone to consult The National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) website prior to booking any overseas holiday.** NaTHNaC is funded by the UK Government's Health Protection Agency and provides health information for both health professionals and travellers, with information compiled by its own clinical and scientific team. You can search for individual country requirements, which are updated regularly.

## Your Safety & Travel Advice

An unavoidable aspect of travelling abroad nowadays is the threat it may pose to your safety and security. The UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) encourages British nationals to be better prepared for their overseas trips with a view to avoiding common travelling traumas, risks and dangers. In order for you to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination it is **strongly recommended** that you refer to the relevant FCO Travel Advice - [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) - both prior to booking and regularly before you travel.

It is standard Limosa policy for our office to send a copy of the relevant FCO Travel Advice about the tour to all participants along with their Final Letter (ca. 2-3 weeks prior to the trip).

'**Travel Aware**' - staying safe and healthy abroad - is a travel safety campaign run by the FCO, and another useful resource. Go to: <https://www.gov.uk/travelaware>

## Travel Insurance

Good travel insurance is **essential** before setting off on any overseas trip. In common with all responsible tour operators, **it is a condition of**

**booking** that all clients are fully and adequately insured before travelling overseas with us.

Be aware that some destinations may require you to produce proof of comprehensive travel insurance (*e.g.* valid insurance certificate) at immigration on arrival in the country, so you should carry your documentation with you.

Your travel insurance should cover against cancellation, curtailment, missed departure, delay, personal accident, death, loss of baggage and valuables (see note below), personal liability and legal expenses.

Most importantly, your insurance must cover you fully in respect of medical care and repatriation should you become too ill to continue with the tour, including the cost of emergency evacuation by helicopter or air ambulance should this be necessary. Note that passenger liability insurance covering the transportation that we hire, particularly in Third World countries, may be inadequate; it is therefore important that your insurance cover includes sufficient provision for your dependents in the event of an accident.

**We recommend that you obtain travel insurance as soon as possible after booking** your holiday to ensure you are protected right from the word go in the event of unexpected cancellation prior to departure due to accident or illness. You must inform your insurers of any pre-existing medical conditions (including those of persons not necessarily travelling but upon whom your holiday may depend) that may require treatment during a period of overseas travel or might cause you to cancel the trip.

**Once you have arranged your insurance, please be sure to send us the following essential details:** name and contact details of your insurance provider, your policy number, expiry date and your insurers 24hr Emergency Assistance number.

## Important things to note about Insurance

- Travel Insurance does **not** normally provide sufficient cover for valuable optical equipment, which is often best

protected under your own household insurance policy. If in doubt ask your insurers for advice prior to travel.

- Most travel insurance policies limit the amount of cover, typically up to a maximum tour cost of £5000 per person. If the tour you are booking exceeds this amount, additional cover can usually be provided upon payment of additional premium. **We recommend all travellers** check their individual policy limit to ensure the full cost of their holiday is covered.

**Arranging Your Insurance:** due to UK Government legislation, under Financial Services Authority (FSA) regulations, we are not allowed to offer or recommend travel related insurance to customers. Premiums can vary widely according to your age, needs, health, choice of destination and other factors, while many people nowadays have Annual Travel Insurance cover. For these reasons, we leave you free to shop around and pick your own policy, one best suited to your own individual needs.

## General Information

[www.limosaholidays.co.uk](http://www.limosaholidays.co.uk)

Our website gives easy access to detailed tour itineraries (Tour Info Packs), trip reports, trip photos and the latest Limosa News.

### Special Diets & Other Requests

We pass on all such requests to airlines, hotels and other suppliers, and do our best to ensure (but of course cannot guarantee) that your needs will be met. Please be sure to tell us about these (in as much detail as possible) at the time of booking, to allow good time to make the necessary arrangements.

### Smoking

Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. For the enjoyment and comfort of all, we ask that smokers refrain from smoking in proximity to the group and respect our NO SMOKING policy in the vehicle, at meal times and when watching wildlife.

### Any Questions?

If you have any questions at any time, you'll find our office staff friendly, efficient, approachable - and just a phone call away, eager to assist you in every way.

Our office is open 09.00-17.00 hrs Mon-Fri, and can also be reached by email. In the event we are unable to take your call, please leave a message on our answerphone (24hrs) and our office will contact you as soon as we can.

*Thank you for your interest in our tours. We do hope that you will be able to join us - and we look forward to hearing from you again!*

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