

Georgia Coastal Birding

with Naturalist Journeys



Sept. 30 – Oct. 7, 2022

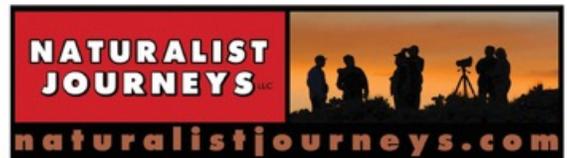
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520.558.1146

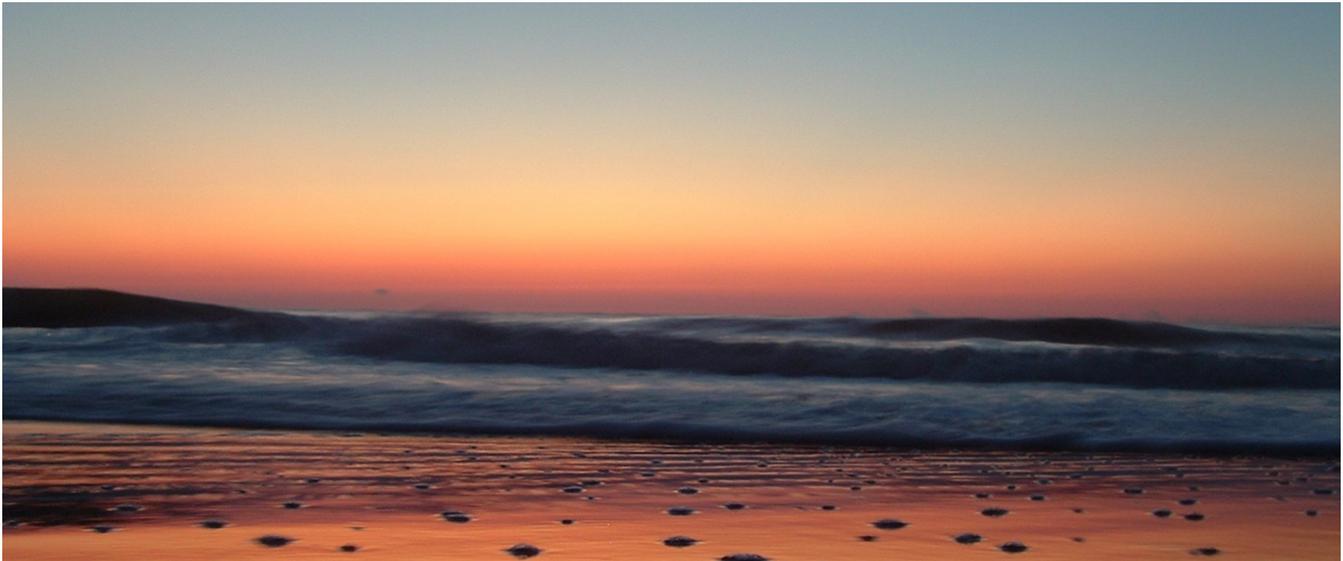
travel@naturalistjourneys.com

www.naturalistjourneys.com

or find us on Facebook & Instagram at
Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Naturalist Journeys, LLC PO Box 16545 Portal, AZ 85632 PH: 520.558.1146 | 866.900.1146
naturalistjourneys.com | travel@naturalistjourneys.com



Tour Highlights

- Enjoy three lovely boutique hotels and indulge in classic low-country cuisine
- Look for migrating Red Knot and Whimbrel, Wood Stork, Black Skimmer, and American Oystercatcher along with Painted and Indigo Buntings
- Visit key sites along the Colonial Coast Birding Trail, including St. Simon Island, the best beach viewing location in Georgia for shorebirds, gulls, and terns
- Board a ferry to the private Little St. Simon Inn located on its own island, where 11,000 acres of almost entirely undeveloped wilderness, miles of beach, and established trails await
- Explore gracious Savannah, the oldest city in Georgia, established in 1773 and a strategic port city in both the American Revolution and the Civil War
- Enjoy cooler weather and migration diversity, timed to maximize your enjoyment

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Georgia Birding & Nature Tour

\$4290, From Savannah

Airport is Savannah/Hilton Head International (SAV)

Join Naturalist Journeys for a coastal Georgia birding and natural history tour on the Colonial Coast Birding Trail. The highlight of our journey is three nights booked at Little St. Simons Island, a private barrier island preserved for wildlife; we cap off the trip with time in the southern jewel of Savannah. Visit inter-dune scrub and maritime forest for migrant land birds, salt marsh for rails, tidal creek and river shoreline for wading birds, and watch for seabirds and shorebirds from long, golden beaches—a tremendous variety of wildlife and habitats awaits your exploration. Georgia’s barrier islands are designated as Landscapes of Hemispheric Importance for shorebirds by the Western Shorebird Reserve Network ... visit and see why!

Superb birding sites include Harris Neck NWR where easily accessible managed freshwater ponds and saltwater marsh feature a range of waterfowl, waders, and other waterbirds including all the herons and egrets,

Glossy Ibis, and Mottled Duck. Brushy fields and paths in classic maritime forest habitat give entry to resting and feeding areas for a wide range of wrens, sparrows, and migrating landbirds. The Altamaha Wildlife Management area, a former rice plantation, is managed to attract and feed waterfowl and shorebirds. Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Mottled Duck, Wood Stork, American Bittern, four species of rails, and more await.

On this Georgia nature tour, we reach St. Simons Island, a barrier island, by causeway, which provides expansive marshlands and waterways, sandbars, and beaches. Gould’s Inlet on the southeast corner of the island is known as the best beach viewing in Georgia for shorebirds, gulls, loons and terns. During migration this is a good place



to see Red Knot and Whimbrel. Spend two relaxing nights in an uniquely decorated, stately room at the charming St. Simons Inn by the lighthouse. Enjoy a boat tour from Jekyll Island on the Intracoastal Waterway for possible dolphin and manatee sightings, and close up views of shorebirds and waterfowl.

The crown jewel of the journey is a three-night stay on Little St. Simon Island, where only 32 guests at a time reside overnight in order to preserve its quiet character. More than 300 species of birds have been recorded on the 11,000-acre Little St. Simons Island, one of Georgia's stunning "Golden Isles," accessible only by boat. Join naturalist-led tours to many of this extraordinary natural sanctuary's best viewing areas, observation towers, and blinds. A birder's paradise, miles of paths and boardwalks on this magical island await you! Return to the lodge for cocktails and social hour before sitting down to delicious gourmet organic meals of low-country, farm-to-table cuisine and a serene environment in which to rest for the next day's adventures.

Round out the tour with an afternoon in and around Savannah, the oldest city in Georgia. Tour the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, with towering live oaks, wading birds, and American Alligator. And take time to enjoy the historic district surrounding the Marshall House, with classic local cuisine at the farewell dinner.

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Fri., Sept. 30 Arrivals in Savannah | Savannah NWR (optional)

Welcome to Georgia! Upon your arrival at the Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport (SAV), gather your bags and take a free shuttle to your nearby airport hotel. Those arriving by 2:00 PM have the option to join our guide for several hours birding locally at nearby Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, the largest wildlife refuge on the Georgia coast. The refuge is a short distance from Savannah and one of a chain of seven refuges that stretch 100 miles along the coastline, featuring fresh and saltwater marshes, tidal rivers and creeks, bottomland hardwoods, maritime forests, barrier island beaches, and more.

Though the refuge is undergoing repair and renovation of the 3,000 freshwater impoundments system, access is available to several special sites. Take the less-than-one-mile walking loop around Kingfisher Pond seeking open water species, and ramble on easy trails around the visitor center for a view into cypress swamp along with pollinator and bird-attracting gardens. Watch for Black-bellied Whistling-duck, Little Blue Heron, White Ibis, Red-bellied Woodpecker, White-eyed Vireos and Carolina Wren among many other species, including your first alligators of the tour! Later arrivals are encouraged to arrive by 6:00 PM to join the group for a welcome dinner at a nearby restaurant.

Accommodations at the Hyatt Place Savannah Airport (D)



Sat., Oct. 1 Harris Neck NWR | St. Simons Island

This morning we drive to the southern tip of St. Simons Island, birding along the way as we work out way south. Options for stops depend on recent sightings and may include a return visit to Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. About half way to St. Simons Island, Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge encompasses six man-made freshwater ponds, as well as extensive salt marsh, open fields, forested wetlands, and mixed hardwood/pine forest. This diversity of habitat makes the refuge an important resource for over 340 species of migratory and resident birds. We can expect to see our first of many Wood Storks, Harris Neck is home to the largest Wood Stork colony in Georgia—plentiful waders, woodpeckers, Eastern Towhee, and warblers like American Redstart, Northern Parula, Common Yellowthroat, and more, all in muted fall plumage. These sites are stops on the Georgia’s Colonial Coast Birding Trail, steeped in human and natural history, and promise a range of species along with easy walking to stretch your legs as you travel south.

We arrive in time to settle into your charming and unique boutique accommodations, home for the next two nights. St. Simons Island is the largest of the “Golden Isles of Georgia.” St. Simons Inn by the Lighthouse has only 34 spacious and uniquely decorated rooms in a boutique setting, with courteous staff and delicious meals. It is located across the street from the St. Simons Island Lighthouse Museum, an historic property. Settle in, take a stroll, and then enjoy dinner as a group to go over our daily checklist and to discuss plans for tomorrow.
Accommodations at St. Simons Inn by the Lighthouse (B,L,D)

Sun., Oct. 2 St. Simons Island & Jekyll Island

We spend the day birding St. Simons Island. From inter-dune scrub and maritime forest for migrant land birds to salt marsh, tidal creek and river shoreline for rails and wading birds, to watching for seabirds and shorebirds on the beach, there is a wide variety of wildlife and habitats to explore.

In a full day, we see much of the island’s natural and historical sites. Birding sites today are chosen depending on recent sightings and are likely to include Cannon’s Point Preserve and East Beach. Gould’s Inlet on the southeast corner of the island is known as the best beach viewing in Georgia for shorebirds, gulls, loons, and terns. During migration this is a good place to see the Arctic nesting Red Knot and Whimbrel, too. A island rich in history, original coastal Native American tribes, Spanish missionaries, colonial and American Revolution soldiers, cotton plantations and the slave trade, as well as the Coast Guard and other WWII facilities have all left their mark.

We cross the Jekyll Island causeway, a great location for wading birds and Wood Stork. After birding on the island and lunch, as a special treat, we take an hour and a half calm water boat trip in a Coast Guard certified vessel along inland waterways and marshes to bird, and to enjoy close views of dolphins and other wildlife



(manatees are a possibility!), and enjoy the low-country scenery from the water. Return to the inn with time to relax before an early dinner.

Accommodations at St. Simons Inn by the Lighthouse (B,L,D)

Mon., Oct. 3 – Wed., Oct. 5 Little St. Simon Island

We depart St. Simons Island today for a short, mid-morning ferry ride to Little St. Simons Island, your base for three full days. A crown jewel of Georgia's famed Golden Isles and accessible only by boat, Little St. Simon Island's pristine beaches, undeveloped wilderness, and abundant wildlife provide many opportunities for exploration and excellent birding. The entire 11,000-acre island is under easement protection by The Nature Conservancy, ensuring that the ecological integrity of the island endures. The island's undisturbed beaches and woodlands are a haven for a number of threatened and endangered species, including the elusive and tiny Black Rail.

Half and full day trips on foot and by boat with local naturalists let us explore the island's 330 plus bird species and wildlife. Evening owl prowls add excitement and new species to your trip list; possible species include Great Horned, Eastern Screech, and Barn. Roseate Spoonbills are common on the island, and depending on the course of migration, massive flocks of Tree Swallows may be present. We decide at breakfast each day which of this extraordinary natural sanctuary's best viewing areas, observation towers, and blinds to visit. A birder's paradise, miles of roads, paths, and boardwalks through almost entirely undeveloped wilderness await you! And if you want to take some time to relax or bird and explore independently; there are bicycles, fishing tackle and kayaks available for your use, a map of birding hot spots, and the seven acres of private beach to stroll.

The island is alive with birds in October. View fall warblers, swallows, and other passerines moving through during migration, along with shorebirds staging and passing through, and huge numbers of Peregrine Falcon on migration. With luck, you may see a few last turtle nest excavations as their nesting season comes to a close. Butterflies abound including Zebra Longwing, Long-tailed Skipper, Gulf Fritillary, Monarch, White Peacock and Little Yellows. And marsh plants are turning shades of yellow, red, and orange as fall proceeds. Keep an eye out for active reptiles including skinks, lizards, and snakes. For those interested in trying their hand at fishing, Bluefish, Tarpon, Reds, Spotted Sea Trout and Flounder are possibilities.

Return to the lodge for cocktails and social hour before sitting down to delicious gourmet organic meals of low-country, farm-to-table cuisine and a serene environment in which to rest for the next day's adventures.

Your stay on the island features the privately-owned Lodge on Little St. Simon Island, the only accommodation on the island. This is a small boutique hotel serving no more than 32 guests at a time. All meals are at the lodge



or taken out for picnics. Menus feature regional cuisine, organic produce, hand crafted cheeses and beer/cider, and local seafood.

Accommodations at The Lodge on Little St. Simon Island (B,L,D)

Thurs., Oct. 6 Savannah

While it may be difficult to contemplate saying goodbye to this island paradise, a very special final day awaits you. With packed bags, we depart early morning for the ferry ride to the mainland and drive back to Savannah, the oldest city in Georgia, established in 1773 and a strategic port city in both the American Revolution and the Civil War. An optional stop on our way may take time for a bit of birding to fill in any missing species or search for new sightings. Once we arrive, enjoy a walking tour of the waterfront and Historic District, where twenty-two park-like squares featuring moss-draped live oaks retain the original town plan prescribed by founder James Oglethorpe with pre-Civil War architecture at every turn, and learn about its storied and complicated history. Or take the afternoon to explore on your own.

Our hotel for the night, Marshall House—built in 1851 and Savannah’s oldest historical hotel—is centrally-located in the very center of the historic district. Rooms are elegantly appointed and comfortable. Be sure to return from your explorations in time for the nightly wine reception in the library! Your farewell dinner tonight is at the Olde Pink House, a classic Savannah restaurant featuring local cuisine. After dinner, we can stroll back to the hotel with stops to visit shops along the cobblestone streets.

Accommodations at Marshall House (B,L,D)

Fri., Oct. 7 Departures

For those departing the city of Savannah, while you may leave at any time, in order to have a relaxed breakfast and walk before returning to the airport, we suggest flights out after 1:00 PM. And we are glad to help you extend your stay as you wish. For those planning to remain, we can transport you to an airport hotel, or you can catch a taxi or shuttle to your destination from the hotel or the airport. *(B)*

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the tour is **\$4290 DBL / \$5420 SGL**, per person based on double occupancy from Savannah. The cost includes seven nights' accommodation, all meals as noted in the itinerary, airport transfers, land and boat transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Not included in the tour cost is round-trip airfare to and from Savannah, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities are at your discretion.

Travel Information

Airport is Savannah/Hilton Head International (SAV). Plan to arrive by 2:00 PM on September 30 if you'd like to join in the optional afternoon birding; if not, please plan to arrive no later than 6:00 PM on September 30. We encourage you to take your time leaving on the last day to enjoy a leisurely morning in Savannah; we suggest you plan your flights home after 1:00 PM on October 7, though earlier flights can certainly be accommodated.

Photo Credits

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