



Natural Selections

BIRDING, WILDLIFE, AND PHOTO TOURS



Atlantic Puffin

Iceland Birding: The Land of Fire and Ice

9 Nights/10 Days

An other-worldly accident of volcanoes, glaciers, waterfalls, lava fields, geysers, fjords and black sand beaches, Iceland must be seen to be believed. Astride the American and European tectonic plates, this island on the edge of the Arctic Circle is still being shaped by the geologic forces that created it. And, with fewer than one-third of a million people, nature dominates. The quality of the birdlife here cannot be understated. Perusing the mossy fields beyond the capital city of Reykjavík, common roadside birds include Snow Bunting, Common Redshank and European Golden-Plover, executing slow-motion, butterfly-like display flights. The lumbering take-off of an immense White-tailed Eagle may also freeze our progress. Along the Snæfellsnes peninsula, nesting Parasitic Jaegers and Red-throated Loons dot the tundra and coastline. Lava fields adjacent to the glacier-filled volcano Snæfellsjökull, are home to Rock Ptarmigan and Northern Wheatear. Basalt cliffs hold colonies of all five of Iceland's breeding alcids, including Thick-billed Murre, plus large numbers of Black-legged Kittiwake. Purple Sandpipers at Grundarfjörður are downright tame, and with luck a knobby-billed King Eider can be teased out from the more numerous Common Eiders. Orcas are frequently spotted just offshore.

A short boat excursion among the innumerable islets of Breiðafjörður Bay provides excellent views of Atlantic Puffin, Black Guillemot, and European Shag. Pink-footed Geese graze in the valley bottoms, and rushing rivers harbor the improbably patterned Harlequin Duck, while Eurasian Wren and Redwing fill wooded lots. We're sure to encounter the magnificent Whooper Swan – at up to 30 pounds, one of the world's heaviest flying birds. The picturesque town of Húsavík has emerged as a whale-watching hub: White-beaked Dolphin, Minke, Humpback, and Blue Whale are regulars. Nearby, Lake Mývatn offers a smörgásbord of breeding avifauna. The main attraction, the powerful Gyrfalcon, can occur anywhere in the vicinity. Breeding nowhere else in Europe, Barrow's Goldeneye shares the tundra ponds with Common Scoter, Eurasian Wigeon, Long-tailed and Tufted Ducks. Other boreal birds include Short-eared Owl, Merlin, Common Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, White Wagtail and Meadow Pipit. With no standing army and virtually non-existent crime, Iceland is ranked as the most peaceful country in the world. Join us this summer under the midnight sun in one of the world's most unique and welcoming destinations.

Black-tailed Godwit



Tour Overview

- Day 1: Arrive Keflavík International Airport (KEF), on to Borgarnes
- Day 2: Snæfellsnes Peninsula
- Day 3: Breiðafjörður Bay and Sauðárkrókur
- Day 4: Skagafjörður and Eyjafjörður Fjord
- Day 5: Lake Mývatn
- Day 6: Vatnajökull National Park to Langanes
- Day 7: Melrakkaslétta, Kelduhverfi and Tjörnes
- Day 8: Skjálfandaflói Bay and Kaldbakstjarnir Lake
- Day 9: Return to Reykjavík
- Day 10: Departure from Keflavík International Airport (KEF).

9 Night/10 Day Itinerary:

Day 1, Arrival and Iceland's Golden Circle:

We'll arrive in Iceland this morning and meet with our driver-guide and tour leader. The day is dedicated to the wonders of the Golden Circle, starting with the peculiar crater of Kerið, and then we reach Gullfoss, queen of the Icelandic waterfalls with its double jump. We then move to Geysir geothermal area, which gave the name to this natural phenomenon, and Þingvellir National Park, place of the first parliament, where it's possible to admire one of the most impressive tectonic plates. Roadside birding en route will be possible. Overnight in Borgarnes area.

Meals: Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Hotel Glymur or similar

Day 2, The Snæfellsnes Peninsula:

Today, we explore Snæfellsnes peninsula which has rich diversity of habitats, with shoreline, cliffs,

lakes, rivers, wetland and various vegetation. Such a day might give us good number of species in various landscape. The lava fields blanketing the flats below Snæfellsnesjökull glacier, which is the core of Snæfellsnes National Park, are home to Rock Ptarmigan and leucorhoa race of Northern Wheatear. Striking basalt cliffs hold colonies of all five breeding Icelandic alcids, including Black Guillemot, plus large numbers of Black-legged Kittiwake. The northern side of the peninsula is quite different in character to the southern shore, with huge numbers of breeding Glaucous Gulls and a vast Arctic Tern colony. Common Eider is abundant along the coast, and careful searching may reveal a lingering King Eider. The harbor in the village of Grundarfjörður is usually a reliable place to find very approachable Purple Sandpipers. Overnight in Snæfellsnes area.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Hótel Rjúkandi or similar

Day 3, Breiðafjörður Bay and Sauðárkrúkur:

In the morning we reach Stykkishólmur, from where we depart for a sea tour, sailing around Breiðafjörður's innumerable islands. The area provides great birdlife and possible close encounters with nesting European Shags and Atlantic Puffin, and perhaps Great Cormorant or Red-necked Phalarope. This boat trip also affords good chances for Iceland's largest raptor, the White-tailed Eagle. We then head to the northwestern region and start following the "Birding Trail of North Iceland". The rich bird life of the North, distributed over widely varying habitats, displays a diversity seldom surpassed in Iceland. Along the way, we might pause to admire molting flocks of Whooper Swans and we'll search the valley bottoms for Pink-footed Geese and the indescribably patterned Harlequin Duck. By the river mouth in Blönduós, we're likely to make the acquaintance of the island's namesake Iceland Gull. Also, Black-headed Gull should be common, and we'll try to get a crippling view of White Wagtail. Overnight in Sauðárkrúkur area.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at ótel Tindastóll or similar

Day 4, Skagafjörður and Eyjafjörður Fjord:

We start the day by having sightseeing in Skagafjörður, with views to wetlands, ponds and rivers, in combination with mountains and further out to the fjord. Next, we move to Eyjafjörður



Gyrfalcon

area which offers a range of birdwatching locations, such as many wooded areas where there should be good numbers of Common Redpoll, Eurasian Wren and Redwing. The delightful Goldcrest, a type of kinglet, may also be found. Closer to Akureyri, our first Common Gulls await. Last phase of the day is to drive to Mývatn with stops en-route such as by the lake Ljósavatn and at the scenic waterfall Goðafoss, the "Waterfall of the Gods", probably the main attraction along this stretch. Overnight in Mývatn area.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Guesthouse Brekka or similar

Day 5, Lake Mývatn:

The Lake Mývatn region is renowned for its incredibly rich birdlife, which makes it a paradise for birdwatchers. At the lake, we will find the home to more species of nesting ducks than you would find at any other single area on

earth. The Mývatn area features almost all the ducks of the species known as Barrow's Goldeneye that are found in any European country, as well as substantial numbers of the Harlequin Duck species. They share the waters of Mývatn with Common Scoter, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Long-tailed Duck, Greater Scaup and Tufted Duck, while American vagrants such as Ring-necked Duck and American Wigeon are recorded regularly. This area is also well known for its large populations of Gyrfalcons. Its smaller cousin, the Merlin, often frequents the region and, with luck, Short-eared Owls can be found hunting in the 24-hour daylight. This day features a drive around the lake, stops at selected locations, but the tour also includes other points of interest, such as the river Laxá, ponds and marshes as well as intriguing lava fields and formations. Overnight in Mývatn area.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Lodging at Guesthouse Brekka or similar

Day 6, Vatnajökull National Park and Langanes:

From Mývatn area we drive along the Tjörnes and to the north of Vatnajökull National Park, glacial rivers have sculpted stone into a stunning horseshoe-shaped canyon at Ásbyrgi, which we visit before heading straight to Langanes, the narrow peninsula situated between Þistilfjörður and Bakkaflói, shaped like a bird with a large head. Langanes has quite a rich birdlife and very good shorebased observation points for watching bird species such as Guillemots (incl. Brünnichs Guillemot), Razorbills, Puffins, Thick-billed and Common Murres, Black-legged Kittiwakes and Northern Fulmars. This area is about as wild as coastal Iceland gets, perfect for exploration off the beaten track. A rough road leads to Fontur, the tip of the peninsula, and along the sides of the road there

are the nesting grounds of Purple Sandpipers and Snow Buntings. Below Skoruvík cliffs, there is the rock column known as Stóri Karl, which features one of Iceland's most accessible Gannet colonies. Overnight in Langanes area.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Ytra Lón or similar

Day 7, Melrakkaslétta, Kelduhverfi and Tjörnes:

Today we focus on three districts in northeast Iceland: Melrakkaslétta, Kelduhverfi and Tjörnes. This day offers variety in terms of bird life, scenery and local topography. Over the day, we shall be stopping at various sites of interest in order to explore them further and/or we will be using them as steppingstones to explore other more distant and less accessible but noteworthy sites. Öxarfjörður and Melrakkaslétta have some of the most densely populated sites of Red-throated Divers in Iceland. This birding

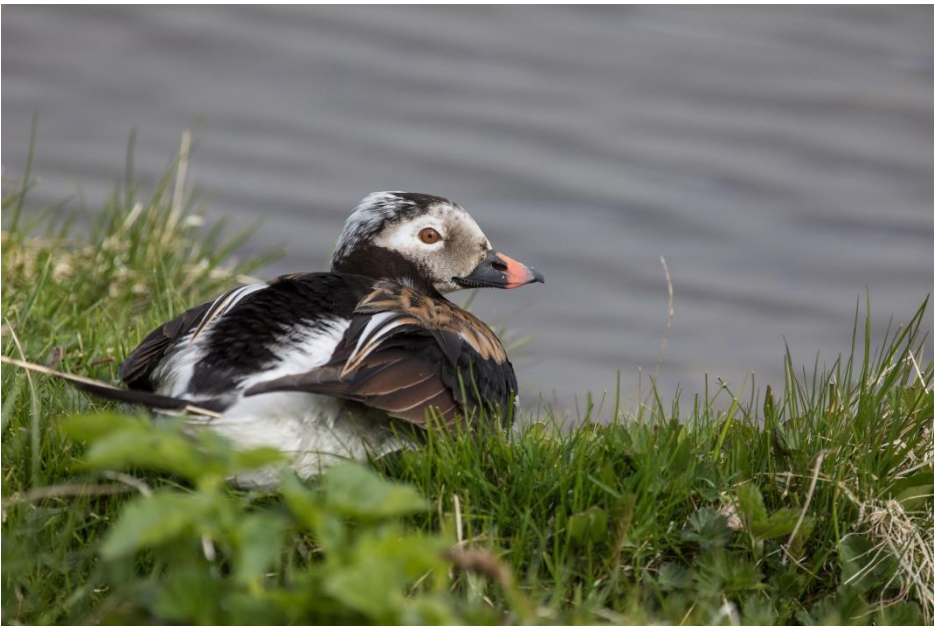
location offers also plentiful Snow Buntings and the odd Lapland Longspur, moreover the area affords a second chance for Gyrfalcon, and finally the beaches should host Arctic shorebirds like Common Ringed Plover, and rarities are regularly discovered in this area. Moving to Kelduhverfi, Horned Grebes are confiding and photogenic at the wetlands around Víkingavatn. The glacial sand flats east of here are the domain of the Great Skua, an impressive predatory seabird seen more often here than anywhere else in the country. This area abounds with breeding waders, including Whimbrel, Black-tailed Godwit and European Golden-Plover. Lastly, the Tjörnes peninsula provides us with one of the best opportunities for the observation of the Ptarmigan. Overnight in Húsavík.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Fosshotel Húsavík or similar

Day 8, Skjálfandaflói Bay and Kaldbakstjarnir Lake:

Today we focus on the bay of Skjálfandaflói as well as the community of Húsavík and adjacent rural areas. We begin the tour in the morning by exploring the harbour and surroundings, as well as the lower regions of the nearby Laxá River and selected ponds and lakes, such as Kaldbakstjarnir, an area frequented by bird species such as the Great Northern Diver. In the afternoon, a whale watching tour aboard a preserved oak fishing vessel will give us the chance to observe cetaceans such as White-beaked

Hávella



Dolphin, Minke Whales, Humpback Whales and even, with some luck, even Blue Whales. Anyway, species such as the Arctic Tern and Puffin are at sea in vast numbers and they can often be observed from the boat. Overnight in Húsavík.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Fosshotel Húsavík or similar

Day 9, Back South to Reykjavik:

Today we'll make the long journey back to the capital city of Reykjavik. The day will be left flexible, to take advantage of clear weather or other opportune conditions for sightseeing or birding where we encounter it. Some interesting natural highlights are Kolugljúfur canyon and Grábrók crater. Overnight in Reykjavik.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Lodging at Fosshotel Rauðará or similar

Day 10, Departure from Reykjavik.

Our Iceland tour concludes this morning after breakfast at our hotel. There is a courtesy shuttle to the airport for departing participants. Many flights to North America depart in the afternoon, but some are earlier.

Meals: Breakfast



Horned Grebe

Included for the duration of this itinerary:

In-country accommodations, ground transportation, tours, whale-watching and boat tours, meals as indicated, guide and entrance fees are included.

Not Included:

Personal items such as travel insurance, alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, gift shop, laundry, etc. are not included.

Travel insurance:

We highly recommend purchasing travel insurance. In the event that you need to cancel your trip due to medical or other reasons, this insurance will protect you.



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