

The Strait of Gibraltar - Whales, Dolphins & Autumn Migration

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Gibraltar, transfer Vejer de la Frontera

Day 2/4 Exploring The Strait area

Day 5 Fly London

Departs

September

Focus

The autumn bird migration, whales and dolphins

Grading

A. A standard wildlife tour, including boat trip and gentle wildlife walks

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP02) or brochure

Highlights

- Up to 18 species of raptor, clouds of White Storks and a wealth of migrant passerines
- European Bee-eater, Northern Bald Ibis and Purple Swamphen
- Cory's, Scopoli's & Balearic Shearwaters, Wilson's Storm-petrel, Caspian & Sandwich Tern
- Common, Bottlenose & Striped Dolphins and Long-finned Pilot Whale
- Fin & Sperm Whales and Orca possible



Montagu's Harrier



Long-finned Pilot Whales



Northern Bald Ibis



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, local wind and weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available. We aim to have a cetacean-watching trip on this tour, but please bear in mind that these trips are entirely dependent on the weather (and wind).

Day 1

Tarifa

We depart this morning on a flight to Gibraltar. On arrival we will drive for approximately an hour to the west, to our accommodation for the next four nights, in a traditional-style Spanish *cortijo* or farmhouse. After checking into our hotel, and enjoying a welcome lunch, we will head for the hills in search of birds of prey.

Given the right weather, any day can witness spectacular raptor movements and this is a particularly good time of year for both numbers and diversity of species. Within sight of the town of Tarifa, there are several excellent vantage points ideally suited for the viewing of the migration of raptors and other soaring birds. As soon as warm thermals begin to rise, from mid-morning onwards, there are always birds on the move overhead and we will hopefully spend many happy hours watching one of the best migration spectacles that Europe has to offer. The numbers of Honey Buzzards, Booted Eagles, and Short-toed Eagles are all peaking around now. Several other species of raptor are also numerous including Black Kites, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers, Egyptian and Griffon Vultures, Lesser Kestrel, Hobby, Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Western Osprey, whilst amongst other species that are seen from time to time are both Bonelli's and Spanish Imperial Eagle. Both White and Black Storks are also prominent at this time of year. When witnessing migration in the right conditions the species become less important than the sheer majesty of the spectacle.



Of course, for those in the group preferring to relax amongst the spacious grounds back at the *cortijo*, or perhaps take a dip in the pool, the option will be available to you!

We will return to our hotel for dinner this evening.

Day 2

Tarifa

After breakfast, and providing the weather is good, we will head into Tarifa and embark on our organised cetacean-watching trip into The Strait of Gibraltar. The Straits is a very rich area for cetaceans, with four species being resident and several others visiting from time to time. Striped, Common and Bottlenose Dolphins are all seen regularly and there is also a population of around 200 Long-finned Pilot Whales in the area. The latter is a particularly social and fascinating species of cetacean and we will hopefully spend some time with them. By choosing to cruise in a relatively small vessel, we should be able to get some close

encounters if the animals co-operate. It must be noted that this is not a dedicated Naturetrek charter but we know the crew well and they have delivered excellent cruises over the years and some superb sightings.



Common Dolphins

The Straits is also an excellent area for other marine wildlife. Ocean Sunfish are regularly seen here, and can often be observed waving their paddle-like pectoral fins in the air as they 'sunbathe' on the surface of the water. Numerous seabirds use the Straits as a flyway between the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. There is a fairly constant passage of Cory's, Scopoli's and Balearic Shearwaters and Northern Gannets, with the occasional pelagic skua and petrel thrown in for good measure.

Of course, when planning boat trips the weather can always play a determining hand and it will be down to the discretion of the captain as to whether the sea conditions are good enough to allow us to go out. Hopefully though, if it is not too windy, we will spend the whole morning at sea, from around nine until midday. If Tarifa is too windy (and it can be!), another option is to divert into Algeciras Bay, off Gibraltar; this is more sheltered, and has a substantial resident population of Common Dolphin.

Our options for the rest of the day will again largely depend on the weather conditions. The raptor passage between Tarifa and Gibraltar is highly weather dependent. The influence of the wind is particularly crucial, with birds choosing at which points to cross the Straits, or not to cross at all, depending on the wind's direction and strength. Your experienced local guides will read the weather each day and pick the best sites and times to watch the migration. Hopefully today we'll enjoy our picnic lunch whilst watching for soaring birds, and spend the afternoon doing the same...



The whale-watching boat heading out in search of cetaceans

We will return to our hotel in plenty of time for pre-dinner drinks and perhaps a quick dip in the pool!

Day 3-4

Tarifa

Depending on the conditions and what we have seen so far, we will keep our plans fluid for today, but we will likely explore further local sites of interest. For example, the wetlands and plains of La Janda, just to the north-west, is an excellent site for both steppe and wetland birds as well as migrant raptors and passerines. Many species, such as Montagu's and Marsh Harrier, European Bee-eater and Red-rumped Swallow breed here, and this area is one of our best chances to see Spanish Imperial Eagle and roosting Red-necked Nightjar.

The salt pans at nearby Barbate are also packed with interest at this time of year, attracting large numbers of breeding and migrating waders such as Kentish and Common Ringed Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint. Gulls and terns can include such treats as Slender-billed and Audouin's Gull and Caspian Tern and Little Tern.

We'll also be on the look-out for one of the area's rarest residents, the quirky and endearing Northern Bald Ibis. This Critically Endangered bird is doing well here thanks to a successful reintroduction programme, and we even be lucky enough to see them on one of their regular visits to our hotel grounds, when we return there for dinner!



Day 5

Fly London

Depending on flight times, we may have a choice this morning. Perhaps we'll head back to a favourite viewpoint, or look for a species we may have missed thus far. Later we'll drive back to Gibraltar for our flight home to London.

Tour grading & focus

This single-centre tour will be based at Cortijo el Indiviso for all four nights, a comfortable rural house with a pool situated between Tarifa and Vejer de la Frontera. The tour focuses on migration-watching, short walks birdwatching in natural habitat, and, weather permitting a dolphin/whale-watching boat trip. Although we will not be going out if the sea is rough, it is worth bearing in mind the possibility of sea-sickness, even in calm conditions. In terms of physical exertion, this is likely to be a relaxed tour as we are unlikely to cover more than 3-4 miles on foot during the course of a day.

Daily schedule

A typical day will begin with a leisurely breakfast from around 8am, leaving the hotel around 9am and returning by 6pm at the latest, giving you plenty of time to relax before dinner at around 8pm. Picnic lunches will be taken in the field each day, usually at around 1pm rather than the local Spanish lunchtime which is much later!



Each day's itinerary and timing will be fairly flexible and depend very much on the weather and the vagaries of migrating birds. Our priority is to see as much wildlife as possible without having to work too hard for it!

Weather

This part of Europe generally has quite reliable weather. By mid-September temperatures will have calmed a little from the blazing heat of mid-summer and we should enjoy daily temperatures between the mid-20s and low 30s °C. The easterly *levante* and westerly *poniente* winds are very much a part of life in The Straits, and what make bird-watching here so exciting! The wind can be strong, but of course your guides know the absolute best and most comfortable places to be whatever the wind conditions! Rainfall is fairly infrequent, although the *poniente* can bring rain in from the Atlantic at times.

Food and accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.