

# Finland - Easter on the Arctic Circle

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

**Day 1** Fly Oulu

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**Day 2** Oulu

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**Day 3/4** Kuusamo

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**Day 5** Fly London

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### Departs

April

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code FIN01) or brochure

### Grading

A. Easy day walks only

### Focus

Birds

### Highlights

- Arctic tundra & taiga landscapes
- Excellent opportunities for seeing owls
- Reindeer & other Arctic mammals
- Comfortable Finnish accommodation
- Guided by our expert local ornithologist



*Hawk Owl courtesy of Jari Peltomaki*



*Ural Owl courtesy of Jari Peltomaki*



*Black Woodpecker courtesy of Jari Peltomaki*



Naturetrek    Minglestone Barn    Wolf's Lane    Chawton    Alton    Hampshire    GU34 3HJ    UK

**T:** +44 (0)1962 733051

**E:** [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

**W:** [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse 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.**

## Introduction

This tour will take you far north of Britain up to the westernmost part of the vast Siberian taiga forest. In April, the Arctic wilderness is awaking up after a very long and harsh winter, the days are getting longer, the weather warmer and the birds and mammals are beginning to prepare for the short and hectic breeding season ahead. This is a very rewarding and spectacular time to visit Finland. All the resident species such as owls, woodpeckers, grouse, crossbills and both Siberian Jay and Siberian Tit are around and active and the spring migrants will be making their way north.

The weather is usually clear and fine and days are quite long - sunrise at around 5 a.m. and sunset at 8.20 p.m. - so there is ample time for birdwatching. In the late evening, as dusk is starting to fall, it is possible to explore the mixed and coniferous forests in search of owls. This tour focuses on central Finland's vast and unspoilt Taiga forests and whilst there will be unmistakable signs of spring in April, winter is slow to relinquish its icy grip on the land and participants should be prepared for possibly cold conditions.

Please note that owl numbers in Scandinavia vary from year to year and are influenced not only by the numbers of rodents present but several other factors as well. Whilst all the species outlined in the dossier have been seen regularly on previous Naturetrek 'Easter in Finland' tours, and we will try our best to find as many as we can, some of the larger owls can be highly elusive and are by no means guaranteed!

## Day 1

Friday

### Oulu

This morning we will leave London and fly to Helsinki before transferring to our flight to Oulu, a town on the north-east shore of the Gulf of Bothnia. Here we will be met by our local guide who will take us to our hotel for the next two nights. Depending on the weather, we may spend our first evening outside in search of owls - in particular Eagle, Tengmalm's and Ural Owls. If vole populations are high, we might well have an encounter with a Hawk Owl as well!

## Day 2

Saturday

### Oulu

After an early breakfast, we shall make the short journey to a local forest near Oulu to look for some of Finland's Woodland birds such as Black and Three-toed Woodpeckers, Black Grouse and the elusive Hazel Hen. Here we also hope to see Capercaillie. These magnificent birds, the largest of the European grouse, are sometimes seen at this time of year sitting atop pine trees eating the needles. Midway through the day we will take lunch at Liminka Bay and have a look at the first spring migrants on the bay area. After lunch we will continue exploring the forests and fields in the afternoon. Following dinner back at the hotel, there will be another opportunity to search for owls.

## Day 3

Sunday

### Kuusamo

We will spend this morning taking a last look at forests and fields around Oulu before departing for Kuusamo, a small town that lies close to the Russian border. Kuusamo is around 200 kilometres to the north-east of Oulu, a journey that will take us through a tree covered landscape dotted with lakes and bogs. The long drive will be broken by several birdwatching stops and we plan to arrive at our hotel late in the afternoon. If time permits we may venture out into the famous old growth taiga forests, bogs and lakes near Valtavaara. Here we hope to find such species as Siberian Jay, Siberian Tit, Waxwing, Hazel Hen, Two-barred Crossbill and Pine Grosbeak.

## Day 4

Monday

### Kuusamo

We will spend today exploring the magnificent Oulanka National Park. The area contains a wonderfully diverse range of habitats that includes vast expanses of old taiga forests, many calmly flowing rivers, bogs, and meadows. All this will still be under snow and ice but we still hope to find here such species as Waxwing, Capercaillie, Golden Eagle, Common, Parrot and Two-barred Crossbills, Pine Grosbeak, Arctic Redpoll and perhaps even Hawk Owl. In addition, we should see Reindeer and with luck some of the other mammals that frequent the area such as Elk, Arctic Hare and Red Squirrel.

The fields and woodlands around Kuusamo are also a good area in which to look for the magnificent Great Grey Owl. In the weeks before our arrival our guides will be talking to foresters and other local contacts to find out if this most majestic of owls is hunting in the area. If it has been a good vole and owl year we just may have the privilege of watching a Great Grey Owl gliding silently over the frozen meadows or perched in a tree; without doubt a highlight of any trip to the Arctic.

## Day 5

Tuesday

### London

After a final early morning walk in the forests around Kuusamo and a last look at the local birds, we will begin the drive back to Oulu airport, birding en-route, for our mid-afternoon departure to Helsinki and our flight home to London.

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## Accommodation

We will be using two hotels on this tour. On arrival in Oulu we will transfer to the Hotel Vihiluoto for two nights, a quiet and small hotel situated on the edge of the frozen Kempele Bay. When exploring the area around Kuusamo we will be based in the Hotel Kuusamo, a comfortable hotel by the frozen Toranki Lake close to the centre of the town. (equivalent standard hotels may be substituted)

## Weather

April is early spring in Finland so you should expect the weather to be cold. Day-time temperatures may only reach 5°C and at night it may drop to -10°C or lower. This however will not be the 'damp cold' you are used to in the UK, with little wind and sunshine common-place it can often feel almost warm! Rain is not common at this time of the year. Obviously, plenty of warm clothes are essential for this tour and you will be sent a full checklist of recommended clothing on booking, as part of the pre-departure pack.

## Transport

We will use a minibus throughout, driven by our local guide.

## Local guides

Our local guide for this tour will be members of the Finnature team of ornithological leaders who have unrivalled knowledge of the birds of the Oulu and Kuusamo areas.

## Your Safety and Security

You have chosen to travel to Finland. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – [www.fco.gov.uk/travel](http://www.fco.gov.uk/travel) regularly prior to travel.

## 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](http://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.