Norfolk in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Meet at the hotel. An afternoon excursion possible. Outline the plan for the weekend

Day 2 & 3 Exploring the north Norfolk coast between Snettisham & Cley.

Dates
November – March

Focus
A birdwatching short-break in north Norfolk.

Grading
Grade A – easy day walks.

Dates & Prices
Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GBR04)

Highlights:
- Explore the Norfolk coastline, one of the UK's premier birdwatching counties
- Pink-footed Geese, Brent Geese, Pintail & numerous other wintering wildfowl
- Scan for wintering seaduck, divers & grebes
- Wintering raptors such as Marsh Harriers, Merlin & Short-eared Owl
- Look for rare wintering passerines including Shore Lark, Twite & Snow Bunting
- Chance of something unusual such as Waxwing or Rough-legged Buzzard







From the top: Pink-footed Geese, Barn Owl & Shore Lark

Naturetrek

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Itinerary

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.

Day 1

Your tour leader will meet you at our hotel base in Hunstanton, The Caley Hall Hotel. To make the most of the daylight hours available, we shall arrange an afternoon excursion on the first day likely starting at around 3pm. Although official check in is not until 3pm, the hotel reception can look after your luggage if your rooms are not ready when you arrive. Please be prepared to arrive at the hotel in time for this excursion. After the excursion, once you return to the hotel, you can settle in, enjoy your first dinner of the holiday and your tour leader will outline the plans for the next couple of days and some of the birds we will hope to see.

Day 2

The itinerary will be kept flexible over the next two days to take account of such factors as the weather, tides and recent bird sightings. If the tides are high enough and the times of high tide suitable, we will make an early start this morning to enjoy a high tide wader roost at the RSPB's Snettisham Reserve. Snettisham lies on the south-eastern edge of The Wash at a point where wading birds such as Knot, Dunlin, Oystercatchers and others are concentrated on a high tide. The sight of thousands of waders twisting and turning over the mudflats is one of the finest in the UK. Other species to look out for include Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Ringed Plover and Sanderling, plus flocks of Pink-footed Geese.

We will spend the afternoon exploring the north Norfolk coastline between Snettisham and Burnham Overy. The RSPB's flagship reserve at Titchwell is well worth a visit. The reedbeds, fresh and brackish water lagoons and saltmarsh here hold large numbers of wintering waders and wildfowl. A walk from the reserve entrance out along the raised bank to the sea is sure to yield a wide variety of birds. Bearded Tits are frequently observed close to the path, whilst on the freshwater scrape flocks of Golden Plover, Avocet, Dunlin and Lapwing often congregate. Mixed in amongst these commoner species we hope to find a variety of others such as Spotted Redshank or Ruff. More waders can be found on the sandy beach, whilst a scan of the sea may yield Long-tailed Ducks, Common Scoters, Red-throated and Great Northern Divers and perhaps a passing skua, Gannet or Little Gull.

As the sun goes down here, birds come in to drink and bathe before heading to roost and there can be a very busy atmosphere. Marsh Harriers and Little Egrets roost in good numbers, whilst other species to look out for include Merlin, Peregrine and Short-eared Owl. Norfolk is home to a bumper population of Barn Owls and we should always keep our eyes open for this beautiful bird when travelling around at dusk and dawn.

Day 3

This morning, we will drive further east along the coast, choosing our destination according to our local knowledge of what birds are around each winter. At this time of year, the grazing meadows and saltmarshes all along the coast hold huge numbers of wintering wildfowl, including thousands of Brent Geese, Wigeon and Pintail. This is also a good area for a range of waterbirds, including seaduck, divers and grebes, as well as some scarce wintering passerines such as Water Pipit, Twite and Snow Bunting. In exceptional years, we'll keep an eye

on any berry-bearing trees along the coastline to check for parties of 'tinkling' Waxwings. The number of Waxwings that reach our shores varies greatly from winter to winter, but Norfolk is one of the best places to chance across a group of these beautiful birds.

At some point during our stay, we are likely to visit the Holkham Estate and the Holkham National Nature Reserve. To the south of the A149 lies Holkham Park, an extensive area of parkland, ponds and woodland which surrounds the 18th Century Holkham Hall. As well as numerous Fallow Deer, the park is a winter haunt of woodland species such as Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Great Spotted Woodpecker, while Ravens have recently returned to the area after a very long absence. The freshwater lake gives us our best chance for species such as Great Crested Grebe, Tufted Duck and Common Pochard, while the local Egyptian Geese have recently been joined by a growing population of Barnacle Geese. The National Nature Reserve hosts huge numbers of wintering wildfowl, as well as Little and Great Egrets; while Spoonbills now breed here in good numbers, they typical head south for the winter, but one does occasionally linger. The expansive beach beyond the dunes will likely give us our best opportunity to find Snow Buntings and Shore Lark.

Almost half of the world's population of Pink-footed Geese winter along the north Norfolk coastline and we shall certainly spend time seeking them out. Their feeding areas can change suddenly if a field is harvested or cultivated, so it will take time to track them down but we shall do our best. If we get very lucky, we may chance across birds flying off to distant roosts out beyond the saltmarshes and, if this happens, the sight – and sound – of thousands of 'Pink-feet' passing overhead should be a fitting finale to our tour.

On the final day, the tour will end back at the hotel at between 4 and 4.30pm.

Tour grading

Grade A. Walks will be on mostly flat terrain on good footpaths. There are some times where you may be walking along the beach for a short time on shingle. You can expect to walk around 6-8 miles per day in total. The walk at Snettisham alone (if tides are right) will be 3.5 miles in total. This will be at a slow pace as you will be stopping frequently to look at the wildlife. The days will be quite long with optional pre-breakfast walks.

Clothing and Equipment

Plenty of warm clothing will be essential as the weather in north Norfolk in the winter can be very cold. Do bring with you some boots, waterproof trousers and binoculars. A telescope, if you have one will also be very useful.

Food & accommodation included in the price

Accommodation, breakfasts and dinners are included in the cost. Lunches (either in the form of a pub lunch or a picnic) and drinks are not included.

We stay at The Caley Hall Hotel, Old Hunstanton. There is free parking at the hotel.

Reserve Entry

Unless you are members, you may need to purchase permits to enter any RSPB or Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserves that we visit. Please see www.rspb.org.uk and www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk.

Transport

We use 9-seat minibuses for this tour. Please assist our tour leaders in ensuring that there is a rotation of seats around the tour vehicle to allow each tour member to enjoy approximately equal time in the front. In order to be fair to all participants, we regret that we are unable to guarantee a permanent front seat to those who might suffer from motion sickness or other concerns.

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.

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