

Undiscovered Iceland

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly to Keflavik.
Day 2/4	Vatnajokull National Park
Day 5	Djupivogur
Day 6/8	Myvatn
Day 9	Fly London via Reykjavik.

Departs

May / June

Focus

Birds, scenery and geothermal activity

Grading

Grade A/B – day walks only

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ISL05) or brochure

Highlights

- Two full days to explore Vatnajokull National Park
- Skogafoss waterfall & Jokulsarlon iceberg lagoon among scenic highlights
- Stay for 3 nights at Lake Myvatn looking for Harlequin & Long-tailed Ducks plus Barrow's Goldeneye & Red-necked Phalarope
- Gyr Falcon & Ptarmigan both possible
- Whale-watching excursion from Husavik
- Led by an expert naturalist guide



From top: Jokulsarlon Iceberg Lagoon, Great Skua (both by M. Stott), Atlantic Puffins.



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

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

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

Forged by a series of volcanic eruptions along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge around 20 million years ago, Iceland may only be a few hours away from the United Kingdom by air but, with landscapes awash with moss-covered lava, steaming vents, hot springs, ice-caps and active volcanoes, it is a world away from the Europe with which we are familiar. However, although Iceland's geology bubbles and steams all year round, its wildlife only erupts into life in the spring, as breeding birds arrive from the south and a colourful flora bursts forth with the lengthening days and warming sun. The majority of this life is concentrated around Iceland's intricate coastline, the centre of the island largely comprised of barren lava-fields, stony deserts and rugged volcanoes. Four ice-caps dot the interior, but the largest by far is Vatnajökull (Europe's largest glacier), which dominates the south-eastern corner of the island, its glacial fingers stretching southward towards the coast. This will be one of the many highlights of this tour which explores both the wildlife and scenic treasures of Iceland's rugged southern and eastern edges.

Day 1

Fly Keflavik, overnight near Reykjavik

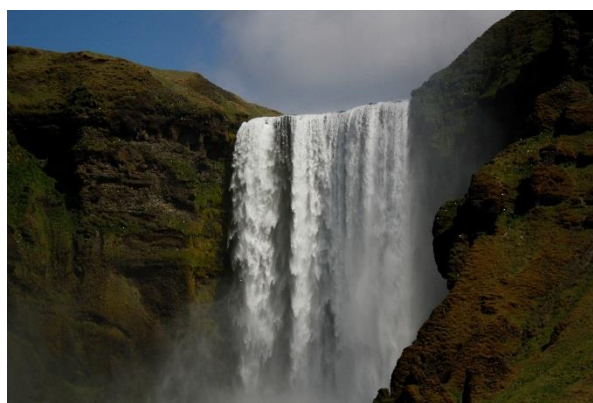
We begin our holiday with a direct Icelandair flight from London Heathrow to Keflavik, Iceland's international gateway, arriving in the late afternoon. From here, we will collect our transport for the next 9 days and travel to a hotel near the capital Reykjavik. The hotel is in a beautiful setting beside a lake where, in spring, there will be many breeding birds including Great Northern Diver, Golden Plover and Slavonian Grebe. It is a fitting place to start our tour and become acquainted with the special birds of Iceland.

Day 2 – 4

Vatnajökull National Park

This morning we begin our journey eastwards across Iceland. Our ultimate destination today is Skaftafell, part of the wider Vatnajökull National Park, and we will have a relaxing day enjoying some of Iceland's beautiful scenery and spectacular landmarks en route. We will stop for lunch at the impressive Skogafoss waterfall, and at Vik, the southernmost tip of Iceland, we can enjoy the attractive sea-stacks and black sand beaches. During the afternoon we will reach the vast coastal outwash plain of Skeidarsandur, where a violent volcanic eruption from underneath the Vatnajökull glacier in 1996 caused a glacial burst.

Our base for the next three nights is situated close to the mighty Vatnajökull National Park. We have two full days to explore this extraordinary national park and to enjoy its stunning landscape of glaciers and snow-covered mountains. On one of these days we will visit the Jokulsarlon iceberg lagoon, in which float the huge icebergs sired by the glacier above. To fully appreciate the



Skogafoss (K Porteous)

beauty and scale of these icebergs, we will take a cruise amongst them, no doubt accompanied by noisy mobs of Arctic Terns! Here, the Atlantic rollers pound the black lava sands, and at the mouth of Jokulsarlon, we are likely to spot Common Seals and some Arctic waders. On our return to the hotel we plan to make several detours to get close to some of the glacier snouts, as this area holds half of the North Atlantic population of breeding Great Skua.



Jokulsarlon (M Stott)

On our second day in this spectacular region we will leave our minibus behind and cross the marshlands and wet sand by tractor and trailer, to reach the small island nature reserve of Ingolfshofdi. First we must climb a steep sand bar, which we will take our time over, and our efforts will be well rewarded! At the top, a leisurely walk should reveal a variety of nesting seabirds, including Puffin, Great Skua and, with a bit of luck, Brünnich's Guillemot. Looking back to the mainland from our vantage point the views are spectacular, and it is easy to see why Iceland is so named! Later, we will spend more time exploring

Vatnajökull National Park, and in particular its wooded regions — so rare in Iceland — as well as the impressive Svartifoss waterfall.

Day 5

Djupivogur

Today, we continue our drive east, and as we progress along the southern leg of Iceland's main road, our fellow road users will quickly become fewer and farther between. The journey to our next stop, Djupivogur, is around three hours' drive, but again we will break the journey at scenic spots along the way. Djupivogur is an attractive fishing community, and behind the town is an area of wetlands and marsh, rich in birdlife. We'll stop here for one night, and during our short stay we will look for the likes of Slavonian Grebe and Red-throated Diver. It is usually possible to enjoy fantastic views of Red-necked Phalarope here, providing us with some great photographic opportunities. With the lengthening days there will be plenty of daylight late into the evening, and we will make the most of it by enjoying a post-dinner stroll around the harbour.



Red-necked Phalarope (M Stott)

Day 6 – 8

Mývatn

Today, the next leg of our journey takes us past the many steep-sided fjords which characterise the coastline of eastern Iceland. We will find ourselves driving through long, deep valleys, where we will look for the island's only semi-wild herd of Reindeer. Then, we will turn westward, crossing desolate deserts of stone and sand, towards the internationally acclaimed wetland of Lake Mývatn. Although Mývatn means "midge lake", the "midges" are mostly non-biting chironomid flies, and on our spring tours they are rarely a problem! If the road is open (volcanic

eruptions permitting!) we will take a short diversion before reaching Mývatn to enjoy Dettifoss, Europe's largest waterfall, and the Jökulsá Canyon (Iceland's Grand Canyon). Here, the sheer volume of water thundering over



Barrow's Goldeneye (M Stott)

Dettifoss is breath-taking, with over 200 tons per second of melt-water from ice-caps far to the south cascading over the falls!

Mývatn is Iceland's top birding location in the spring, home to a wealth of breeding waterfowl and waders. Harlequin Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck, Whooper Swan and Red-necked Phalarope are amongst them! Other species of waterfowl we usually see here include Common Scoter, Scaup, Tufted Duck, Pochard, Wigeon and Red-breasted Merganser.

We will also look out for the magnificent Gyrfalcon and, in the surrounding birch woods, Ptarmigan. Redwing, Wheatear, White Wagtail and Raven may also be seen - these four species comprising nearly half of all the species of passerines found in Iceland! Waders of the area include Redshank, Whimbrel, Snipe, Dunlin and Golden Plover. We will also visit the weird lava shapes of Dimmuborgir; if it has been an early spring this is an excellent area for wild flowers.

On one of our days here we will also visit the coastal town of Húsavík. At the harbour we are sure to find Glaucous Gull, Fulmar and of course, plenty of Eider. During the afternoon, we will board a whale-watching vessel and enjoy a three-hour trip to the west side of the bay. Minke Whale are commonly seen, and we usually spot at least one species of dolphin on this trip. Humpback Whales have also been seen on occasion, and seabirds such as Puffin, Black Guillemot and Common Guillemot are plentiful.



Gyrfalcon (M Stott)

Day 9

London

With so much to see and so many places to explore, we will be reluctant to leave, but, after our stay on the shores of Lake Mývatn, this morning we must drive to the northern town of Akureyri for the short flight to Reykjavik. Depending on our flight timings, there is likely to be time for an hour or two available to explore this small European capital, before transferring onwards to Keflavik in time to check-in for our afternoon flight back to London.

Tour grading

This tour is graded A. We will travel to each site by minibus, then take leisurely (usually fairly short) walks to explore the area, generally over easy terrain, although the volcanic nature of Iceland does mean that some paths can be rough in places. The holiday is therefore suitable for anyone who enjoys gentle walks in the countryside and is of an 'average' level of fitness.

Weather

We have made many previous May/June trips to Iceland. In one, the locals were in shirt-sleeves; in the second, there was still a fair amount of snow cover on the hills in the north. So come prepared for a cool trip and hope that it may be mild and sunny! The north and east of Iceland is generally drier than the west, Mývatn typically getting about 40cm of rain annually, though it's best to come prepared for a bit of wet weather during the trip.



Svartifoss (K Porteous)

Clothing

As noted above, it may be cool. Come dressed as though for an English winter but take some lighter garments as well. Ankle boots are the best footwear though strong shoes will get you through the trip if you do not undertake any of the more ambitious walks. If you elect to dine in the hotels in the evening, dress is casual.

Daily routine

Pre-breakfast enthusiasts have plenty of daylight if they wish to be out early! Breakfasts are usually from a buffet: several sorts of bread, cold meats, cheese, wonderful pickled fish, and fruit. Lunch will take the form of a picnic at a beautiful spot, nearly always by water. We aim to eat outdoors if it is mild, in the coach should the weather dictate otherwise. Mid-morning and mid-afternoon we usually have brief stops at a roadhouse. These are a great Icelandic institution, reminiscent of the Australian roadhouses for those who may be familiar with the antipodean equivalent. They supply vehicle fuel, basic spares and groceries, plus café and restrooms.

Food & accommodation included in the price

Accommodation with breakfast and lunch are included throughout the trip, evening meals are not included. We tend to dine in the hotel's restaurants which are generally very good and offer a choice of menu, but will try to offer alternatives too wherever possible. At Skaftafell and Djúpivogur there are also roadhouses which offer good meals at a more reasonable price (and certainly better quality than your average UK service station!). Iceland is an expensive country, however, and you should allow around £30 – 40 per day for a main evening meal and a drink (excluding starter and desert!) in one of the hotels, or around £20 for a meal at a roadhouse or service station. Accommodation is in comfortable hotels throughout; all rooms have private facilities. All the hotels have tea and coffee making facilities, free Wi-Fi and hairdryers in the rooms.

Your safety & security

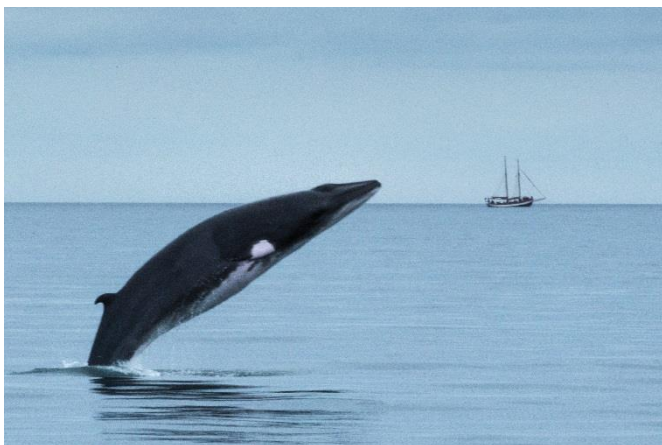
You have chosen to travel to Iceland. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iceland> 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, 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.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.



Left: Minke Whale. Right: Arctic Skua (both by M.Stott)