

Iceland in Spring – Photography Special

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly to Reykjavik, Transfer Gullfoss.
Day 2	'Golden Circle', Snæfellsnes Peninsula
Day 3 & 4	Snæfellsnes Peninsula
Day 5	Laugarbakki
Days 6 – 8	Mývatn & surroundings
Day 9	Transfer Akureyri, fly London (via Reykjavik)

Departs

May / June

Focus

Wildlife & Landscape photography

Grading

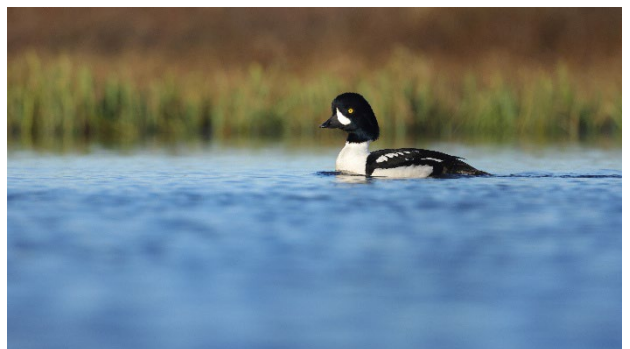
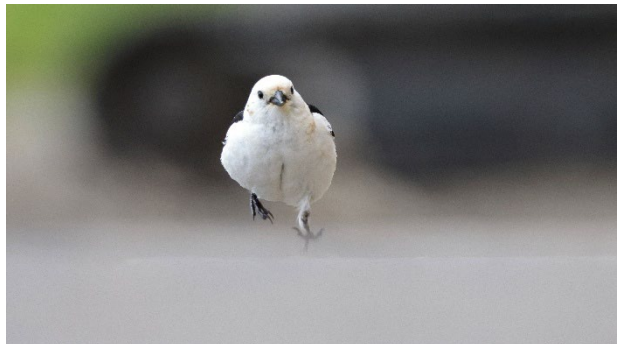
A traditional birding and photography tour, Grade A/B

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ISL07) or brochure

Highlights

- Long-tailed Duck & Barrow's Goldeneye on Mývatn
- Harlequin Duck on Laxá river
- White-tailed Eagle, Slavonian Grebe, Ptarmigan & possibly Gyrfalcon
- Great Northern & Red-throated Diver
- Near 24-hour daylight for excellent photographic lighting
- Seabird colonies include potentially 5 species of auk
- Minke Whale, Humpback Whale & Harbour Porpoise all possible from Húsavík
- Led by an expert naturalist photographic guide



From top: Red-necked Phalarope, Snow Bunting & Barrow's Goldeneye (Dave Jackson)

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Introduction

Iceland has long stood as a must-travel destination to the keen naturalist. Here lies the most westerly breeding grounds of both Eurasian Wigeon and White Wagtail, and the most easterly breeding populations of Great Northern Diver, Harlequin Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye. Whilst species diversity does not rival those of lower latitudes, the approachability of many of Iceland's species provides an excellent working canvas for the keen wildlife photographer. With almost 24-hour daylight allowing for an array of photographic conditions, coupled with Iceland's spectacular geography, there are few better places in Europe that provide such a varied subject matter for wildlife photography, accessible by just a three-hour flight from the UK!

Our tour leader for this holiday will be Wildlife Photographer, Dave Jackson:

'Dave has been a wildlife photographer for several decades and has led around 20 Naturetrek tours to Iceland, knowing where and when is best for photographing each species. His recent accolades include Bird Photographer of the Year 2024 - Highly Commended, BirdGuides Photo of the Year 2022 and judge for the Northamptonshire Bird Club Photographic Competition 2026.'

Itinerary

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.

Day 1

Fly Reykjavik, Overnight Gullfoss

We depart from London for our three-hour flight to Keflavík, Iceland's main international gateway. From here we will transfer to our hotel, situated just a short distance from Gullfoss, one of Iceland's most impressive waterfalls. Depending on our time of arrival, we may visit the falls that evening, drinking in the impressive scenery as the evening light falls or before breakfast the following day.

Day 2

Golden Circle, Transfer Snæfellsnes Peninsula

We'll spend our morning today visiting and photographing some of the most celebrated landscapes in southern Iceland, the so-called 'Golden Circle'. Our first stop will be Geysir Geothermal Area where we'll watch Strokkur erupt before continuing to Thingvellir, which is not only the site of the world's first parliament, the 'Althing', but is of great interest to the geologist for it sits astride the mid-Atlantic Ridge, the great cleft in the Earth's crust that separates the Eurasian tectonic plate from the North American plate. The junction is marked by two series of conspicuous parallel fault lines and shear basalt cliffs separated by a wide sunken valley a kilometre or two in width. This is one of those places in the world where the geology textbooks come alive and visitors can witness at first hand the amazing geological processes that have shaped the world we recognise today.

After visiting the 'Althing', we will take a stroll by Thingvallavatn, where pure glacial waters from the Langjökull Glacier travel some 40 kilometres, through bedrock, before emerging here to form Iceland's largest freshwater lake. The mournful calls of Great Northern and Red-throated Divers are usually heard echoing across the silvery water.

In the afternoon, we will head west to our base for the next three nights on the Snæfellsnes peninsula, a journey of around three hours. We will watch as the scenery becomes more dramatic, crossing tidal flats and marshland, framed by dramatic mountain peaks. Our hotel here is a charming, family-run stay, situated on the peninsula's southern shores.



Gullfoss (Dave Jackson)

Days 3 & 4

Snæfellsnes Peninsula

We have two full days to explore the spectacular Snæfellsnes Peninsula. Close to our hotel lies Ytri Tunga, a coastal inlet with rocky beaches. Grey and Common Seals frequent the outcrops here and visits in the early morning or late evening light will provide excellent photographic opportunities for Common Eider, Arctic Terns, gulls including Glaucous, Iceland, Great Black-backed and Kittiwake, and breeding-plumaged waders including Sanderling, Dunlin, Turnstone, Purple Sandpiper, Redshank and Knot. King Eider and Arctic Fox are seen on occasion here, so we shall keep our eyes peeled for a potential sighting!

We will visit the westernmost point of the peninsula to enjoy the sights and sounds of one of Iceland's larger seabird colonies. Our journey will take us along the southern coast road where we will visit Arnarstapi, and round the edge of the large shield volcano, Snæfellsjökull – the doorway into the planet's interior chosen by author Jules Verne for his book 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth'. En-route we should keep a careful eye open for White-tailed Eagle and Gyrfalcon, whilst roadside pools often hold Red-necked Phalaropes. The seabird cliffs, a short walk from the road, are home to Common Guillemot, Razorbill and, most sought after for UK birdwatchers, the high-arctic Brünnich's Guillemot. Kittiwakes and Fulmars add their notes to the cacophony of cliff-side sound. Offshore, Gannets and Arctic Skuas are frequently seen, and we will also take time to scan

the sea carefully as, for the fortunate, there is always the chance of seeing a passing pod of Orcas (Killer Whales).



Kittiwake (Dave Jackson)

During our stay on Snæfellsnes we will also arrange a boat trip out of Stykkishólmur, through the volcanic islands of Breiðafjörður, to the tiny island of Flatey. Here, as well as nesting Arctic Terns and smart Snow Buntings, we will search for the handsome Grey Phalarope, plus the more abundant, Red-necked Phalarope.

Day 5

Snæfellsnes to Laugarbakki

Today we must move on from our stay in Iceland's west and begin our journey northward. This will largely be a travel day to our overnight stop in Laugarbakki, drinking in the impressive scenery of Iceland's western inland region. Several stops for wildlife will be made en-route, as the open marsh habitat here is promising for Snipe and Dunlin. The coastal inlet of Miðfjörður (north of Laugarbakki) is also a good place to look for seals.

Day 6

Laugarbakki to Mývatn

Leaving Laugarbakki, we journey north towards Mývatn, enjoying craggy mountains, tumbling rivers and 'recent' lava flows en-route. During the drive we will be on the lookout for Pink-footed Geese as we pass through their breeding grounds in the high glacial valleys. Other birdlife to look out for during the day includes Red-throated Diver, Whimbrel, Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit and Short-eared Owl. We'll also be keeping our eyes peeled for



Arctic Fox (Dave Jackson)

lingering Sanderling and Knot in their summer plumage as we drive past estuaries and along the coast. Previous groups have even been lucky enough to spot the elusive Arctic Fox from the road, the only truly indigenous land mammal of Iceland. By mid-afternoon we will reach our comfortable hotel, overlooking the unique pseudo-craters of Skútustaðir and just a short walk from Mývatn.

Days 7 & 8



Long-tailed Duck (Dave Jackson)

Lake Mývatn & Surroundings

We now have two full days to explore Mývatn and the surrounding area, taking advantage of the spectacular early morning and late evening light. We will be looking especially for Barrow's Goldeneye, Harlequin Duck, Great Northern Diver and Red-necked Phalarope, whilst other species of waterfowl usually seen include Whooper Swan, Common Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Greater Scaup, Tufted Duck, Common Pochard,

Eurasian Wigeon and Red-breasted Merganser. We will also keep one eye in the air for Gyr Falcon, with several pairs nesting locally, whilst Merlin may also be seen. Redwing, Wheatear, White Wagtail and Raven are also likely - 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.

- Mývatn means "midge lake" -vatn is the Icelandic for lake. The "midges" are mostly non-biting chironomid flies. On this holiday they are rarely a problem. Their zone of activity does not extend far from the lake and, as far as possible, we make sure our day there is cool or windy, when the flies are not active.

We will spend time exploring the south side of the lake, characterised by the unique pseudo-craters of Skútustaðir. These craters, which on Earth are only found in Iceland, can also be found on the surface of Mars. Red-necked Phalarope and Slavonian Grebe are often seen here nesting close to the paths between the craters and the lake, while this is yet another good place to look for Gyr Falcon. We will also see the first of many sturdy Icelandic horses and the local sheep, the latter exhibiting an extraordinary degree of road sense compared with their cousins further south in Europe.

Mývatn's eastern shores are also very productive. One morning we will head to Höfði, where small patches of woodland meet some of Mývatn's striking geological features. Common Teal, Redwing and Redpoll are regularly seen here, whilst lakeshore clearings provide impressive views across the surrounding landscape. We will also visit the unique and unusual lava shapes of Dimmuborgir; if it has been an early spring this is an excellent area for wildflowers. Roughly translating to 'Black Fortress', the lava field was formed approximately 2,300 years ago when Mývatn was still underwater. Ptarmigan are regularly observed here and, if lucky, we may see a pair of duelling males!

On one of our days here, we shall head to the harbour town of Húsavík and board a whale-watching vessel for a three-hour trip to the west side of the bay. Humpback and Minke Whale are frequently seen here, as well as Harbour Porpoise and, if lucky, we may spot one of the larger rorquals, such

as Blue or Sei Whale. Seabirds are plentiful and include Puffin, Black Guillemot and Common Guillemot. If we have time we will return to Mývatn via Dettifoss, Europe's largest waterfall and the Jökulsá Canyon (Iceland's Grand Canyon). The sheer volume of water thundering over Dettifoss is breathtaking. Over 200 tons of water per second roars over the falls, meltwater from the ice caps far to the south. This is without doubt one of Europe's great natural wonders.

For those that wish, there will be the opportunity one evening to visit the Mývatn Nature Baths, and enjoy a soothing bathe in some of Iceland's beautifully warm thermal waters. The Nature Baths are smaller and much quieter than Iceland's more famous Blue Lagoon, but offer bathers a similarly relaxing experience! Please note that the entrance fee (approx. £40) is not included in the cost of the tour.

Day 9

Fly London

Sadly, we must make our way back to Akureyri for our return flight to Heathrow (with a short transfer between airports in Reykjavik). En route to Akureyri we will make a stop at Godafoss, to drink in Iceland's spectacular scenery for one final time. Godafoss translates to 'Waterfall of the Gods' and is considered to be one of Iceland's most beautiful waterfalls. Godafoss holds a significant place in the country's history – according to legend, it is here where the lawgiver, upon returning to his farm after pronouncing that Iceland should become a Christian country, threw idols of the Norse gods into the waterfall.



Humpback Whale (Dave Jackson)

Tour grading

This tour is graded A/B. 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 of Iceland is quite dry, Mývatn typically getting about 40cm of rain annually. However, the south-west does tend to be wetter.

Food & accommodation included in the price

Accommodation with breakfast and lunch are included throughout the trip, evening meals are not included. In the evening, in north Iceland, we usually enjoy our hosts' excellent food at the Sel-Hotel Mývatn. Iceland is an expensive country, however, and you should allow around £60 per day for a main evening meal and a drink (excluding starter and desert!).

Accommodation is in comfortable hotels throughout; all rooms have private facilities. All of the hotels have free Wi-Fi access. Sel-Hotel Mývatn and Hotel Gullfoss have tea and coffee making facilities in the rooms, whilst Hotel Langaholt on the Snaefellses Peninsula lets guests help themselves to unlimited tea and coffee (at any hour!) in the restaurant. All the hotels have hairdryers and telephones in the rooms.

Daily routine

This holiday will follow a working 'practical workshop' approach, with optional early mornings and evenings to make the most of the very best light conditions. In the event of extremely poor weather, Dave will focus his efforts looking at editing, composition control, plus other in-camera elements to ensure you get the most out of your photography.

Breakfasts are usually from a buffet: several sorts of bread, cold meats, cheese, wonderful pickled fish, cereal and fruit. Lunch usually takes the form of a picnic at a beautiful spot, nearly always by water. We aim to eat outdoors if it is mild, or under cover elsewhere should the weather dictate otherwise.

Equipment to Bring

This holiday is geared towards the keen armature wildlife photographer, and the following equipment list has been curated for you to consider in order to get the most out of your holiday experience.

- Digital single lens reflex (DSLR) or Mirrorless camera capable of photographing at high ISO for low-light shots early and late in the day
- Telephoto or zoom lenses (300mm - 500mm focal length) for bird and mammal photography
- Standard and wide angle zoom lenses for mountain and forest landscapes
- Multiple camera batteries and power bank
- Camera manual (physical or digital)

- Laptop with editing software
- Hard drive(s) to back up photos or several high-capacity memory cards
- Tripod and/or Monopod (optional)
- Neutral density and polarising filters (for landscapes)

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, 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.

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King Eider (Dave Jackson)