Latvia in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

| Day 1 | Fly Riga & transfer Cape Kolka. |
| Day 2 | Cape Kolka. |
| Day 3/5 | Liepāja. |
| Day 6/7 | Kemeri National Park. |
| Day 8 | Fly London. |

Departs
September.

Focus
Birds.

Grading
Grade A. Easy to moderate walks only.

Dates and Prices
See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code LVA02).

Highlights
- Enjoy the visible migration of warblers, finches, raptors & seaduck at Cape Kolka
- Explore the woodlands, meadows and wetlands around Liepāja and Lake Papa
- Look for migrating raptors such as Pallid Harrier, Rough-legged Buzzard & Red-footed Falcon
- Two nights at Kemeri National Park, home to woodpeckers and Pygmy Owl
- Migrating Common Cranes
- Extend your tour with time exploring Latvia’s capital, Riga
- Led by expert Naturetrek naturalist & local guide

From top: Pallid Harrier, Baltic coast near Liepāja & 'Northern' Long-tailed Tit (Shutterstock Ltd)
Introduction

As the boreal summer draws to a close, millions of birds journey south from their breeding grounds in the vast taiga forests and wetlands of Scandinavia and Russia to their wintering haunts in southern Europe and beyond. Many follow the coastline of the Baltic Sea – especially if the wind is from the east – moving through Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on their travels, stopping to rest and feed as they go, or being forced to take a longer break if the weather closes in. September lies at the very heart of this southward push, and this new tour is timed to enjoy the best of the region’s autumnal birdlife and complements our late-May holiday which focuses on Latvia’s spring migrants and abundant breeding species.

Although birds will be the primary focus of this 8-day holiday we will also enjoy the other wildlife we find along the way.

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 Fly Riga & transfer Cape Kolka

We depart London’s Gatwick Airport on a mid-morning Air Baltic flight to Riga, Latvia’s historic and attractive capital city. On arrival we meet our local guide and transfer north-west to the migration hotspot of Cape Kolka, a journey of around two hours. We will stop enroute, perhaps at Dundaga Manor Park which is an excellent site for woodpeckers, such as Grey-headed and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers or maybe at Lake Kaņieris, a wetland that offers a range of waterbirds. On arrival at Cape Kolka we will spend two nights in a comfortable hotel in the village of Kolka, located near the tip of the Cape.

Day 2 Cape Kolka

We have a full day to explore the migration hotspot that is Cape Kolka. Waders, passerines and raptors, having travelled south through Estonia, make first landfall here to rest and refuel following their crossing of the Gulf of Riga. Numerous flycatchers, warblers, pipits, wagtails and chats are all likely and, given the right weather conditions, the numbers of finches can be spectacular! Lines of scoter, Long-tailed Ducks, Common Eider, divers – including the occasional White-billed Diver – and geese track by, whilst overhead we will look out for Merlin, Hobby, Marsh Harrier and perhaps a Pallid Harrier or Red-footed Falcon. Flocks of Common Cranes are a regular sight (and sound) too.
We will make an early start this morning and head out on a pre-breakfast walk around the most northerly point of the Cape which juts out into the Gulf of Riga and is only a few minutes from our hotel. This is the first dry land that weary migrants see after they have made their nocturnal crossing of the gulf and the bushes here can be hopping with birds given the right conditions. Following breakfast we will then spend the rest of the day exploring Cape Kolka's mix of woodlands, scrub, gardens and coastline before returning to our comfortable hotel for a second night.

Day 3 – 5

Next, we will move south to the coastal town of Liepāja for a 3-night stay in a comfortable hotel near the coast, from where we will explore the surrounding forests, meadows, dunes and wetlands. The coast from here down to the ringing station at Papa is often touted as Latvia's key autumnal migration 'hotspot'. Birds heading south are funnelled into the narrow strips of land between the coast and Lakes Liepāja and Papa. The visible migration in the early mornings can be dramatic, with flock after flock of finches, wagtails and other passerines passing overhead, together with parties of Common Cranes, raptors – including Rough-legged Buzzard, Lesser Spotted Eagle, White-tailed Eagle and Short-eared Owl – and other species. During the day we will search a wide range of habitats for common migrants as chats, flycatchers and warblers, as well as a few more unusual species such as Bluethroat, Red-throated Pipit, Citrine Wagtail, Yellow-browed Warbler and Blyth's Reed Warbler. Steller’s Eider are occasionally seen from the town’s pier and Liepāja is the only place in the whole of Latvia where Crested Larks breed (they are resident). Other species to look out for include groups of roosting Long-eared Owls, Great Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, Wryneck, Nutcracker and parties of attractive 'Northern' Long-tailed Tits with their snowy-white heads.

During our time here we will also visit the Latvian Ornithological Centre’s ringing station at Papa where we can learn about the importance of the region for migrating birds and perhaps see a few species in the hand.

Day 6 – 7

Today we will transfer to Kemeri National Park, a journey of around three and a half hours, which sits on the Gulf of Riga west of the capital. En route we will stop at the Skrunda and Satini fishpond complex, a magnet for migrating waterfowl, waders and raptors in the autumn. White-tailed Eagles are common, whilst the fringing reedbeds hold Penduline and Bearded Tits and the muddy edges attract a variety of waders including Wood and Green Sandpipers, Ruff and Spotted Redshank. Parties of Bewick’s Swans are also regularly seen here, along with Garganey, Great Egret, Little Gull, Hobby and Marsh Harrier.
We will then complete our drive to Kemeri National Park for a 2-night stay. Here we will explore the reserve’s 380 square kilometres of forests, reedbeds and coastal wetlands. Kemeri is particularly good for woodpeckers and during our stay we will look for Black, Grey-headed, Middle Spotted, Lesser Spotted and White-backed Woodpeckers and, hopefully, the Three-toed Woodpeckers that favour the patches of rotten spruce. Kemeri is also an excellent reserve in which to look for Europe’s smallest owl, the diminutive Pygmy Owl.

We have two nights in the comfortable Hotel Valguma Pasaule.

Day 8

We should have time for some final local birdwatching before returning to Riga to catch our return Air Baltic flight back to London’s Gatwick Airport which is due to depart mid-afternoon and arrives back in the late afternoon.

Riga Extensions

Naturetrek would be delighted to arrange a pre- or post-tour extension to Latvia’s historic and attractive capital of Riga for those with extra time to spare. For additional details and prices please call 01962 733051 or email info@naturetrek.co.uk.

Tour grading

This tour is graded A, consisting of easy to moderate day walks only. We will travel to each site by minibus then take leisurely walks to explore the area, generally over easy terrain, although some paths can be rough and steep in places. The holiday is therefore suitable for anyone who enjoys walking in the countryside and is of an ‘average’ level of fitness.

Weather

Weather conditions in mid to late September are as changeable as they are in the UK. Although often sunny, there is the possibility of rain so waterproof clothing is recommended as is a jacket and fleece for cool mornings and evenings. It can also be windy at times along the coast. Daytime temperatures are usually in the low to mid-teens centigrade.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. We use comfortable hotels and guesthouses for this tour, all rooms having private facilities. Single occupancy can be secured for the supplement cost outlined on our website.

Please note that the accommodation outlined above may - very occasionally - need to be amended. Replacement hotels will always be of the same standard as the ones outlined in the itinerary and
will in no way affect your holiday. Should we have to implement any changes to the above we will notify you as soon as possible.

Your Safety & Security

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.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/latvia prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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