

Norway - Alpine Flowers of the Gol Plateau

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Oslo and transfer to Kamben
Day 2/7	A daily programme of botanical and natural history walks from our base in Kamben
Day 8	Fly London

Departs

July

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code NOR02) or brochure

Grading

Grade B. Day walks only

Focus

Plants, birds and butterflies

Highlights

- Enjoy Norway's rich Arctic-alpine flora
- A wealth of birds and butterflies
- Impressive Nordic alpine scenery
- A single-centre base in a delightful hotel
- Wonderful walking
- Travel on the 'Flam Railway'
- Be guided by an expert Naturetrek botanist



Dactylorhiza incarnata subsp. *pulchella* courtesy of Paul Harmes



Rubus chamaemorus or Cloudberry courtesy of Paul Harmes



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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

Golsfjellet, (the Gol Plateau) is located just north of the town of Gol. Pronounced like the Yorkshire town of Goole, we will also be visiting an Oset, both names reminders of the Viking invasions of northern England. Gol is in Buskerud province and is a very pleasant and attractive town with a good range of high-quality shops for souvenirs and emergency supplies. Its old wooden "stave" church is now in an Oslo museum park but a replica stands on the old site.

Our hotel is on the Golsfjellet situated at about 800 metres and just below the tree-line, on the road between Gol and Fagernes. We will usually make lunch from the range of foods available at breakfast; breads, hams, cheeses, eggs etc and take our dinner at the hotel.

As this is an important cross-country skiing area in the winter months, their excellent tourist facilities are available to us in the less busy month of July. From the hotel way-marked paths lead us into the wild places, through birch and conifer woodlands, along rivers, around lakes and then over open moorland to the peaks around. Short bus rides take us further afield to larger lakes and higher mountains. We will usually be following way-marked trails but in Norway there is the right to wander freely around the countryside and woodlands as long as you act responsibly. Animal life, plants and trees are protected.

We have chosen this area of Norway not just for its convenience and facilities but for its northern birds and the rich arctic-alpine flora in its differing habitats. Some of these plants can be found in the north of Britain but not in the abundance to be seen here.

Day 1

Golsfjellet

We commence our holiday by flying from London to Oslo on a scheduled service flight. On arrival in Oslo we join our bus for the 4-hour scenic journey to Golsfjellet, travelling north-west alongside picturesque fjords and river valleys, and stopping to admire the view at a convenient break for refreshments along the way. From Fagernes we climb steeply up to the plateau and are soon at our hotel, where a warm welcome awaits us in our base for the tour. (depending upon convenience of timings we *may* travel to Golsfjellet by train)

Day 2

Golsfjellet

We begin our explorations by walking directly from our hotel along a way-marked route over the river and into mixed woodland. Possibly the most striking intimation that we are now in a very different climate is the vast variety of lichens covering the rocks and other surfaces and festooned in the trees, a sure sign of clean air. Cladonias are obvious with their coloured fruiting bodies, red in *floerkeana* and brown in *deformis*. Birch and Pine are the dominant trees, but Willows are the most diverse with some 30 species in

Scandinavia from tall trees to dwarf shrubs crawling over the ground. In the woodland we will start to find many of the special plants, the delicate Twinflower, *Linnaea borealis*, is particularly noteworthy - this was the favourite flower of the Swedish botanist, Linnaeus and so named for him. There will also be Wintergreens, especially the showy *Moneses uniflora*, and the unrelated Chickweed Wintergreen, together with the May Lily.

Fungi break down the dead vegetation and the yellow *Vibrissea truncorum* can be abundant. In a more open area butterflies, especially Fritillaries, including Niobe, Queen of Spain and Dark Green, fly in the sun. Plants we should see include Northern Wolfsbane and Cinnamon Rose. We now circle round through further woodland, open places and across streams back towards our hotel.

Resident birds in this area include Siberian Jay, Capercaillie, Crossbill and Siskin, and there is evidence all around of Eurasian Elk. If we are very lucky, we may even catch a glimpse of one in a clearing!

Day 3

Golsfjellet

To the east of Hallingen, along a private road and above the treeline, is a higher plateau with Nystolsvar den at 1296 metres as its highest peak. We have a pleasant walk up through the edge of the woodland to this area of small lakes and open hills, for a picnic on Nystolsvar den, before returning along a different route. Golden Plover are usually obvious as they call from their vantage points, on the look-out for raptors such as Merlin, Gyrfalcon and Rough-legged Buzzard. Willow Grouse and Ptarmigan are also found here.

The ground cover will again include the Vacciniums, together with dwarf Willows, Blue Heath (*Phyllodoce*), Alpine Cinquefoil and Alchemillas. The damper areas will be worth searching for for the tiny orchids such as Bog Orchid, Lesser Twayblade and Goodyera. The rocks are home to the endemic *Primula scandinavica* as well as *Saxifraga adscendens*, Fringed Pink and Alpine Toadflax; all providing different habitats, new plants and animals. Lemmings are also common in good years here.

Day 4

Golsfjellet

After our exertions of yesterday we now intend to take one of the tourist highlights of Norway – “Norway in a Nutshell”. This uses a range of transport and gives us an opportunity to visit the larger fjords and see very different aspects of the country. We take the train from Gol Station for a two-hour scenic mountain journey through Geilo and Finse to Myrdal, where we change to the famous Flåm Mountain Railway that drops us down to Aurlandsfjord, with a stop to see the high waterfall. We then take a boat out of the fjord and along Sognefjord to Sogndal.

This provides the opportunity to see a range of sea and water birds such as auks, terns and gulls and Harbour Porpoises are commonly seen from the boat. At Sogndal we transfer to a coach, which takes along mountain valleys to Voss where we pick up the train again back to Gol. Stunning scenery makes this a day not to miss!

Day 5

Golsfjellet

Today we explore the area immediately north of Sunday's walk. This is a more open area and so provides quite a different habitat. We start from Skutuset, go over the hill of Syningen and across damp moorland to the ski hotel under Storefjell, where we can stop for a cup of coffee. From here we ascend Storefjell itself at 1149 metres for the panoramic views and to see our route along the ridges and back to Hallingen. The delicate Snow Gentian, is found here.

Birds of these open places include raptors, Raven, Hooded Crow, White Wagtail, Twite, Ring Ouzel and Fieldfare. With the ever present, characterful Siberian Jays nearly always nearby.

In the lower open areas we should find plants such as Felwort, Alpine Sow-thistle, Grass-of-Parnassus and Marsh Cinquefoil, these last two can be abundant and far more showy than in Britain. The moorland will have clubmosses and ferns amongst the juniper, the small willow, *Salix myrsinifolia*, Dwarf Birch, Cloudberry and Vacciniums. Here it is worth searching for the tiny Bog Orchid, *Hammarbya paludosa*, as well as *Tofieldia pusilla*. The open hills will have Violas and *Saxifraga stellaris*, with *aizoides* and *rivularis* along streams. *Saxifraga hyperborea* could also occur here, while lichens will continue to be abundant. Butterflies also like this open woodland, and Arran Brown and Cranberry Blue are both possible.

Day 6

Golsfjellet

Today we head part way along the road to Gol, where the bus will drop us off at the little village of Solseter. From here we will walk along a waymarked path which crosses and re-crosses the road down towards Gol itself. The path takes us down through Pine forest and open meadows where plants and butterflies abound. Keeping a look out for Common Spotted Orchids, Creeping Ladies Tresses and Coralroot each section of the route brings new habitats and different species. Herb Paris grows in the damper areas and once again the amazing lichens are evident everywhere.

There is always a chance of spotting a Moose here, or perhaps a Camberwell Beauty butterfly, and birds are once again conspicuous. As we descend into more mature forest new species are found, such as Treecreeper, Goldcrest and Blackcap.

At the bottom of the path we come out into Gol, and can spend a little while here exploring the town, which has an interesting bookshop, souvenirs and other local shops with something to tempt everyone! We will meet our bus here and head back to the hotel.

Day 7

Golsfjellet

Today we head north, past the wooden stave-church of Oset (which we will stop briefly to visit), over the Tisleifjorden dam to the Tisleia district in the next province of Oppland. We follow a panorama road along fjords with a good chance of seeing Elk and Crane, before leaving our transport near Gronlii to walk around an area of gentle hills and lakes. These lakes are home to birds such as Red-throated Diver and Slavonian Grebe; Bluethroats, Twite and Wheatears abound on the moorland. Mountain Hares are also often seen here and we may hear the Cranes call near the lakes.

Plants include Snow Gentian and Alpine Bistort; Baneberry will be in fruit and the ground cover will be of Cowberry, Cranberry, Bilberry and Bog Bilberry; Bog Rosemary, Andromeda, should also be in flower. Our farthest point should be Valtjern Lake before we circle back towards the village where we can have a coffee and ice-cream next to the river before we meet our transport back to the hotel.

Day 8

London

After a leisurely breakfast, we must now return through the attractive Norwegian landscape to Oslo for our flight back to London.

Tour grading

This holiday is graded B. On this holiday we will be based in one hotel at Golsfjellet. We will explore the many different habitats of this part of Norway to search out the varied wildlife. Our pace will be gentle to allow us to take a close look at the plants, birds, insects and all other items of interest. We will generally be keeping to tracks and way-marked footpaths, however, will be on foot for most of the day, covering up to 5 miles in alpine terrain. Walking poles are recommended as well as an average level of outdoor fitness.

Weather

We have chosen this period as the best time for flowering plants and the peak of the bird breeding season. Butterflies will be active on the warm days. However, here in the northern heights, we should be prepared for some variable weather and the programme can be adjusted to cater for this. Warm and waterproof clothing and footwear should be packed and a trekking pole will be useful. On sunny days there can be few more beautiful or interesting destinations available to you.

Food and accommodation

All food, travel and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. Alcoholic drinks are not included, but are available at the hotel (although be aware that in Norway these can be expensive). Bring a picnic kit and water bottle.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Norway. 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 or telephone 0870 6060290 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, 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.