

# Norway & Finland - An Arctic Spring

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Oulu
Day 2/3	Oulu
Day 4/5	Kuusamo
Day 6	Ivalo
Day 7/9	Varanger Fjord and vicinity
Day 10	Ivalo
Day 11	Fly London



**Departs**  
May

**Dates and Prices**  
See website (tour code NOR03) or brochure

**Grading**  
Grade A. Easy birdwatching walks only

**Focus**  
Breeding birds of the taiga forests, fjords and Arctic uplands.

- Highlights**
- Sample a superb variety of Arctic birdlife during peak season
  - Seabird spectacles include Brünnich's Guillemots in north Norway
  - Reindeer, Elk & other mammals
  - Stunning scenery
  - Long hours of daylight
  - Be guided by our expert local ornithologist

*Tengmalm's Owl, Red-flanked Bluetail and Pine Grosbeak  
courtesy of Jari Peltomaki*



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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

The extremely popular Naturetrek Easter tour to Northern Finland visits this beautiful country at a time when the frozen Arctic wilderness is waking from a long winter slumber and greeting the beginning of a new spring. Five weeks later, the transition into summer has precipitated one of the great European natural history spectacles as a myriad of plants, insects, birds and mammals seek to take advantage of the lengthening days and milder weather to raise their progeny. With an urgency engendered by the shortness of the Arctic summer, newly arrived migrant birds waste no time in establishing territories and laying eggs whilst each day new plants burst into flower to add colour to the northern spring. It is with great pleasure therefore that we return to savour the sights and sounds of this vibrant season with an exciting tour which embraces the very best birdwatching locations of Arctic Finland and Norway.

Our holiday begins with a flight from London to Helsinki then on to Oulu, a town on the north-east shore of the Gulf of Bothnia. The town is surrounded by extensive boreal forest in which live many of the high Arctic birds most sought after by British birdwatchers, in particular the owls. Whilst owl numbers fluctuate from year to year, the breeding species here include Eagle, Ural, Great Grey, Tengmalm's, Short-eared and Pygmy offering plenty of scope for our 'owling' activities. Black Grouse, Capercaillie, Three-toed and Black Woodpeckers feature among the other residents of the Oulu area and we will also visit Liminka Bay, Finland's most important wetland area where a host of waders and waterbirds may provide a few surprise migrants whilst local attractions include Common Crane, Terek Sandpiper and Citrine Wagtail.

We drive eastwards from Oulu, through a picturesque landscape blanketed with forests and studded with lakes, to the small town of Kuusamo close to the Russian border where we stay for two nights. There is some superlative birdwatching to enjoy in the wild forests surrounding Kuusamo with eastern specialities to look for including Siberian Jay, Siberian Tit, Pine Grosbeak, Two-barred Crossbill and Rustic Bunting. With luck we may also find a Red-flanked Bluetail, a veritable gem of a bird well worth the effort entailed to reach the hillside forests where the electric blue males proclaim their arrival with bursts of melodious song. Not far from the town is the magnificent wilderness of Oulanka National Park. Lying close to the Arctic Circle, Oulanka contains a wonderfully diverse range of habitats that includes vast expanses of ancient taiga forest, deep valleys, bogs and meadows extending over 270sqkm of land along the Oulankajoki River. A day spent in this pristine National Park will be filled with many exciting bird observations and we hope to also glimpse some of the Reserve's mammals which include Reindeer, Elk, Beaver, Red Squirrel and Pine Marten.

From here we drive north to Ivalo where we stay for one night before continuing to Varanger Fjord; leaving forests behind as we enter the great Fell country of Arctic Norway, an undulating terrain of bare hills overlooking bogs and lakes populated by Black-throated Divers and Smew. Fringed by thickets of Mountain Birch, the blue waters of Varanger Fjord and the surrounding tundra represent one of the most accessible examples of Arctic habitat on the mainland of Europe. This is the haunt of divers, eiders, White-tailed Eagle, Rough-legged Buzzard, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, Bluethroat, Red-throated Pipit, Shorelark and Snow Bunting whilst exploration of the

surrounding tundra and the salmon-rich Teno River should produce colonies of Arctic Terns, various breeding waders and maybe a glimpse of the local pair of Gyr Falcons. Weather permitting we shall take a boat trip to visit one of the offshore seabird islands which contain great colonies of Kittiwakes, Shags and auks including numbers of Brunich's Guillemots and Puffins. The spectacle of these noisy, bustling seabird islets is matched the following day by the wildness of the scenery as we follow the peninsula from Vardo to Hamninberg, the furthest point of the European mainland where pristine beaches and sheltered bays contrast with stretches of dark bogs and tundra, populated by song-fighting waders.

The frenetic pace of the Arctic summer will continue for several more months but after drinking our fill of this annual spectacle it will sadly be time to retrace our steps to Ivalo where we catch a return flight to London.

## Day 1

### Oulu

We fly from London to Oulu in Finland where our local tour leader and minibus will be waiting at the airport. It is a five minute drive to our hotel and after checking-in if time allows, we will make an excursion to look for the first of the local specialities

## Days 2-3

### Oulu

The Oulu area is best known for its breeding owls, which include Eagle, Ural, Great Grey, Tengmalm's, Short-eared and Pygmy Owl, augmented most years by Hawk and Long-eared Owls. We shall spend some of these days in the forests and have an excellent chance of seeing some of these, at close range. It is well known that owl numbers fluctuate in response to cyclic peaks and troughs of their prey species but even in poor years our Finnish leader will know the most productive areas to find them. Other possible forest species to look out for include Black Grouse, Capercaillie, Black, and Three-toed Woodpeckers.

We will also visit in Finland's most important wetland, Liminka Bay, which is good site for waterfowl and shorebirds such as Curlew, Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Ruff, Little Ringed Plover, Caspian Tern, Black-tailed Godwit, Shoveler and Garganey. Bitterns can be heard booming, and a few pairs of Red-backed Shrike breed. Numerous migratory birds come to rest and young Cranes and Whooper Swans spend their summers here. Terek Sandpiper and Citrine Wagtail are among the rare breeding birds in the area and we will hope to find both. Seven observation towers provide ideal vantage points over the wetlands.

## Day 4

### Kuusamo

Today we drive eastwards through the beautiful northern landscape blanketed with forests and boglands, lakes and rivers to Kuusamo, a small city by the Russian border. Birding stops en route will enliven the journey with a mixture of typical northern species

## Day 5

### Kuusamo

In Kuusamo we can expect to encounter a veritable feast of eastern specialities in the expansive taiga forests. Red-flanked Bluetail, Rustic Bunting, Two-barred Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak, Siberian Jay, Siberian Tit, Black and Three-toed Woodpecker, Black Grouse, Willow Grouse, Hazel Hen, Capercaillie, Red-necked Grebe and Little Gull, all breed here and will form our principal targets during a long but exciting Arctic day.

The climb up Valtavaara Hill to look for Red-flanked Bluetail is steep and the birds are never guaranteed to be singing, although the views are magnificent from the summit. The terrain is mostly easy but will involve one or two steep uphill climbs, so a reasonable level of fitness is required for this excursion.

There is an opportunity to explore the untouched Siberian taiga forest in Oulanka National Park. Oulanka was established in the Kuusamo and Salla region in 1956 and expanded in 1982 and 1989, the park now extends over 270 sq. km (104 sq. mi.).

A natural preserve adjoining the Paanajärvi National Park across the Russian border, Oulanka is the westernmost extreme of the taiga or boreal coniferous zone. In addition to beard-lichened, thick-mossed spruce forests, lichen-clad upland pine forests, wild river valleys and miry aapa bogs, Oulanka also preserves wild flora and fauna including innumerable rarities. Its river-valley plant and animal life is a distinctive mix of northern, southern and eastern species. North and south join hands in Oulanka. Narrow shouldered Siberian spruce forests, home of Brown Bears, Siberian Jays, Otters and Dippers create a strong sense of boreal riverine wilds.

## Day 6

### Ivalo

After breakfast and some final birding in the Kuusamo region we travel northwards to Ivalo. Time allowing, on the way we might visit some of the famous boglands of the area.

## Day 7

### Varanger Fjord

We will continue towards North through the vast open arctic landscape, characterized by numerous fells. These are not actually mountains, but gently rising cones of earth providing spectacular vistas. The bogs and lakesides provide excellent birding with great likelihood of seeing Black-throated Diver, Smew, and Lapland Bunting. The sparse landscape offers an ideal open field of vision for birding among the dwarf birch and pygmy willow.

The Teno-river is one of the most important salmon rivers in Europe and it is a border between Finland and Norway. It has deposited enormous amounts of sand, reminding one of the great Siberian rivers. We will drive along the riverside and we will visit a delta area in Norway, which is famous for its moulting Goosanders, breeding waders and colony of Arctic Terns. There we also have fair chances to see seals.

From the delta we will return along Teno river delta and continue to the Varanger Fjord itself. En route, as well as during next few days, we will be searching for waders, Red and Black-throated Divers, Steller's and King Eiders, Velvet Scoter, Rough-legged Buzzard, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, Bluethroat, Arctic Redpoll, Red-throated Pipit,

Shore Lark and Snow Bunting. King and Steller's Eiders over-winter in the Varanger area and in recent years have started moving away from the area earlier in the year making them increasingly difficult to find in May.

## Days 8-9

### Varanger Fjord

Weather permitting, we will undertake a half a day excursion by boat to the large seabird colonies on the islets of Reinoya and Hornoya, a nesting site for thousands of northern birds. The Hornoya Nature Reserve is the easternmost of the protected bird colonies in Norway, home of about 25 000 pairs of Kittiwakes and 150 pairs of Shags. Northern alcid breeds here; Brünnich's Guillemots, Guillemots, Razorbills and several thousand pairs of Puffins! There are great opportunities for photographing birds and a chance to walk all the way up to the top of the island where there is a lighthouse. From there we will get an excellent view over the Arctic Ocean. The arctic waters are also home to seals, which we may see from the boat to the island.

We will also take an excursion to Hamninberg - the end of Europe - connected by road from Vardö. The road to Hamninberg is something special. The expression "the end of world" comes in mind when you travel here. The landscape is wild and calm - with a lot of variations. Sometimes it looks like you are in the moon, the next minute you mistake the beaches for ones at the Mediterranean!

We could make some short excursion by foot to the Tundra and to the boglands, teeming with birdlife including breeding Red-throated Diver and arctic waders. We will also seawatch from the Hamningberg, hoping to see Gannets, Fulmars, Skuas or even whales!

## Day 10

### Ivalo

After breakfast we start the long drive back to Finland. We will punctuate the journey with stops for birdwatching and for a picnic lunch.

## Day 11

### London

After some final birding, we say farewell to this extraordinary country and drive to the airport for the onward flight home.

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## Food and Accommodation

During the tour, all meals are included.

We will be using four hotels on this tour. All rooms have private facilities.

## Transport

We will use a minibus throughout, driven by our local guides.

## Local guides

Our local guide for this tour will be a member of the Finnature team of ornithologist leaders. All have unrivalled knowledge and experience of the birdlife in both Finland and Norway.

## Mammal, bird & plant lists

Where available these will be provided with your Final Joining Instructions, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

## Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Finland and 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](http://www.fco.gov.uk/travel) or telephone 0870 6060290 regularly prior to travel.

## How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure and complete and return the enclosed booking form together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us now on 01962 733051. Alternatively you are welcome to book on the internet by visiting [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk).