Norway's Lofoten Islands – An Arctic Spring

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Bodø; ferry to Moskenes
Day 2 – 4	Wildlife exploration from Reine
Day 5 – 7	Wildlife exploration from Andøya
Day 8	Fly London

Departs

May

Focus

Mammals, birds, mountain scenery and other natural history

Grading

A. Easy to moderate day walks.

Dates and Prices

See current brochure or visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code NOR07)

Highlights

- Fresh Arctic air & breathtaking scenery
- Elk & Otter among mammal highlights
- Willow Ptarmigan, Snow Bunting, Ruff & Red-necked Phalarope, plus White-tailed Eagle, Merlin & Rough-legged Buzzard
- Visit seal & seabird colonies
- Migration of Long-tailed Duck, plus Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese possible
- Whale Watching from Andenes, with possibility of Sperm, Minke and Pilot Whale, plus Orca







Images: Elk & Short-eared Owl (Rob Campbell), Sperm Whale, Ruff

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Introduction

Norway is a country of many spectacular landscapes. From the gentle rolling green hills surrounding Oslo to the towering mountains and deep fjords of the west coast, it is a land of breathtaking contrasts and beauty. Even amongst such natural splendour, however, one region stands out. The Lofoten and Vesterålen Islands lie deep within the Arctic Circle and offer a wild beauty that can best be described as humbling; their majestic mountains rising vertically out of an inky blue sea, leaving room for only a thread-like shore. Lofoten sits as a place of dramatic landscapes; idyllic summers and abundant wildlife; a source of inspiration for many and the soul of northern Norway.

Reaching out from the mainland, the Lofoten and Vesterålen Islands extend westwards far out into the Atlantic Ocean and it is this unique location that attracts such a wealth of wildlife. The open sea, the influence of the Gulf Stream and the proximity of the continental shelf offer a rare opportunity to experience the atmosphere, and the excitement, of an Arctic whale-watching adventure with a difference. On this exciting tour we will witness the natural phenomenon of Sperm Whales gathering on the edge on the continental shelf, where the warmer Atlantic currents and cold Arctic waters merge to create rich feeding grounds for some of the largest creatures on the planet. On land we will explore the spectacular birdlife in one of the world's most beautiful and pristine archipelagos. We will be travelling on quiet roads that snake across beautiful fjords and through some dramatic countryside with breathtaking views around every corner.

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. It should also be noted that all whale-watching cruises are dependent on the weather and do not run in extreme conditions.

Day 1 Fly Bodø, ferry to Moskenes

We depart from London early in the morning on a flight to Oslo, the capital of Norway, where we transfer for the one-hour flight to Bodø, a small town beyond the Arctic Circle. On arrival we will collect our minibus ahead of boarding the ferry for a 3 hour crossing to Moskenes, and our accommodation on the southern-most island of Moskenesøya. We will be based in the small remote town of Reine, the administrative capital of the Lofoten Islands but with a tiny resident population of only 345 people. The scenery here is truly awe-inspiring! Here the roads snake around beautiful fjords and through some dramatic countryside, breath-taking views presenting themselves at every corner. Our accommodation for the first three nights is at 'Reine Rorbuer', a collection of comfortable cabins wonderfully positioned near the edge of the harbour with spectacular views over the surrounding mountains. This area is quite breath-taking, a landscape sculpted over the millennia by giant glaciers and other elemental forces to create one of the wildest and most fascinating places in all of Norway.

Days 2 & 3 Reine, Lofoten Islands


Mountain Hare (Rob Campbell)

After yesterday's long journey, today will be a leisurely affair. We'll begin with an optional pre-breakfast walk around the village of Reine, taking us past many of the stockfish drying racks, where Hooded Crow are often seen perched. Gulls are plentiful, and close views of Greater Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed, Herring and Common Gull can be enjoyed. Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail and Fieldfare are in abundance here, and on occasion, Mountain Hare have been seen in the pre-breakfast hours darting across the open meadows.

Over the course of the next two days, we will aim to cover much of landscape of the southern Lofoten Islands, drinking in the stunning scenery, enjoying the birdlife and taking in the ambience of this uniquely beautiful area.

One day, will drive a short distance south to the village of Å – the most southerly point on the island accessible by vehicle. The harbour – nestled between mountain and sea – offers some of the most picturesque scenery of the islands, and in early summer the grassy surroundings are coated with wildflowers in full bloom. The wooden structures of the town and the inhabiting wildlife are almost synonymous – seen by example with a colony of kittiwakes nesting and rearing chicks within the rafters of many of the buildings. Within the harbour, Eider, Goosander and Goldeneye are found and looking outward to the ocean, you may catch distant views of Fulmar, Gannet and Great Skua.


Reine, Lofoten Islands

We will also head northward on the main highway through Lofoten, crossing mountains, fjords and white-sand beaches, giving this arctic region an almost tropical feel (if you ignore the temperature!). We'll pass several freshwater lakes on this journey, where we will stop for Black and Red-throated Divers in their summer finery. Mergansers, Teal and Tufted Duck are common, and keeping an eye on the reedbeds, you may see the white necks of Whooper Swan peering out from the tops. We will also head to the nature reserve of Storeidvatnet, where Arctic and Common Tern, plus Slavonian Grebe, Shelduck and Pink-footed Goose to wrap up an excellent day's birding!

Day 4 Transfer Andøya

Today we have a 5 - 6 hour drive to our next base on the island of Andøya. It will take most of the day to weave our way up the Lofoten Archipelago, but we will stop to admire the stunning landscape and enjoy any birds and other wildlife we see along the way. The main highway weaves a scenic route as it hops from island to island via sweeping bridges. As we pass the many fjords and coastlines, it's worth keeping your eye out for the odd blow of a cetacean, or resting seal. The large dorsal of a patrolling pod of Orca may also be seen if lucky!


Orca

On the island of Andøya (Øya is Norwegian for island) we leave the main road and head north to the small guesthouse of Marmelkroken, our base for the next 3 nights. With long hours of daylight to enjoy at this time of the year you may like to take an evening stroll from the hotel, which overlooks a small wetland and wooded valley, to look for a few local birds or merely enjoy the wonderful scenery and Vesterålen charm.

Day 5 - 7 Andøya, Vesterålen Islands

Our three full days in the Vesterålen islands allows for a flexible programme of wildlife watching both by land and sea.

One morning we will drive from our accommodation to Andenes on the northern tip of Andøya. Here we join a comfortable whale watching vessel for a morning (3-5 hours) out at sea. On route to the deepwater canyons along the shelf edge, the whales favoured feeding ground, we will be looking out for a variety of pelagic birdlife including Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Common and Black Guillemots, Arctic Skua and lots of comical Puffins.


Atlantic Puffin

We must also keep a sharp eye open for the majestic White-tailed Eagle which are frequently seen soaring around this dramatic coastline. The Sperm Whale is the most frequently observed species of large whale seen in these waters and the largest of all the toothed whales. Interestingly, the whales that spend the summer off the Vesterålen Islands are all males and measure between 14 to 16 metres in length; the females and calves remain in more temperate Atlantic waters far to the south. These spectacular cetaceans feed on squids and deep-sea fish and it has been estimated

that an adult can eat one ton of food per day. They typically dive between 500-700 metres, although dives deeper than 3,000 metres have been recorded! The Sperm Whale is very easy to distinguish at sea as - unlike all other great whales - its blow is inclined 45º forward and to the left, due to the front left position of the blowhole.


Whale watching vessel, Andenes

In addition to the Sperm Whales, we should also look out for Minke, Humpback and Long-finned Pilot Whales, White-beaked Dolphins, and perhaps the distinctive tall dorsal fins of a patrolling pod of Orcas (Killer Whales). Whatever we see, however, the opportunity of spending the morning out at sea in search of cetaceans and seabirds and backed by the dramatic rugged coastline of the Vesterålen Islands is sure to be an undoubted highlight of the tour.

As we further explore the island of Andøya and enjoy its abundant birdlife and interesting flora, we shall see resident Eider, White-tailed Eagle and Willow Grouse, while Slavonian Grebe, Rough-legged Buzzard, Whimbrel, Red-necked Phalarope and Redpoll, Brambling and Snow Bunting enjoy the long days and abundant food of the brief Arctic summer months. Curlews are ubiquitous, and in mid-May we shall hope to see many chicks accompanied by their parents in the surrounding fields and wetlands. Our hotel overlooks a large tidal marsh, and it is well worth exploring the pools around here for signs of Otter, as well as the potential to observe lekking Ruff!

We will also take a second - 90 minute - boat trip, this time to visit a seabird colony on the nearby island of Bleikøya. This small island is home to thousands of nesting seabirds including 6,000 pairs of Kittiwakes and an amazing 60,000 pairs of Puffins. Both Common and Black Guillemots, Razorbills and Fulmars also crowd Bleikøya, whilst overhead fly White-tailed Eagles and Arctic Skua. In the surrounding waters we can look for Grey and Common Seals and perhaps Harbour Porpoise or even Orca for the fortunate few.

After our dinners at Marmelkroken, there shall be the option of a 'night drive', suggested by your tour leader should conditions allow. Whilst the 'Midnight Sun' is not to its full effect in May, we will use these long evening hours to go off in search of the more active, nocturnal wildlife. Short-eared Owl can be found feeding on the rodents which inhabit the surrounding fields, and in previous years guests have achieved numerous close sightings of grazing Elk!

Day 8 Fly London

We will have an early start this morning to drive to the small town of Evenes, a scenic journey of around 3 hours, in time to catch our mid-morning flight back to London (usually via either Oslo or Stavanger). Depending on the departure time, we should have time for a few stops to stretch our legs and soak up the scenery for a final time along the way.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included throughout the tour. For the first 3 nights of the tour we will be based at *Reine Rorbuer*, a collection of comfortable cabins wonderfully positioned near the edge of the harbour at Reine with spectacular views over the surrounding mountains. Cabins have two twin/double bedrooms sharing one bathroom. They also have a lounge and small kitchenette. For the latter 4 nights of the holiday, we will be based at the delightful Marmelkroken Guesthouse on the island of Andøya. Accommodation here is in comfortable, en-suite, apartments which overlook a small marshland. A limited number of single rooms are also available throughout at the supplement price outlined on our website and within our brochure.







Top: Cabins at Reine Robuer. Bottom: Marmelkroken.

Tour grading

Grade A/B: This is an easy tour with gentle short walks and sightseeing by minibus. Some of the walks will cover hilly terrain, however, so an average level of fitness is required to get the most out of this tour. As we make use of the long daylight hours, hours in the field may be long, however your tour leader will aim to keep the programme as flexible as possible should you wish for a shorter day.

Flights

We typically use flights with Norwegian Air Shuttle from Gatwick or SAS Scandinavian Airlines from Heathrow via a Scandinavian hub airport (usually Oslo, Stavanger or Copenhagen). Exact details will be confirmed by your Operations Team closer to departure. Regional connections are sometimes possible from Manchester and Edinburgh however additional nights may be required pre-or-post tour. Please email info@naturetrek.co.uk or call our office on 01962 733051 for further information.

Weather

Although the Lofoten and Vesterålen Islands are known more for their spectacular scenery than stable weather, the spring months of April and May generally enjoy mild conditions. Daytime temperatures are typically between 10 – 15 degrees Celsius. Although the true 'Midnight Sun' has not yet arrived in May, daylight hours are long: the sun sets after 11pm and rises again at 2am. Nights are cool, and conditions can be windy, with occasional wet days.

Please note that all boat trips are subject to weather conditions and can be cancelled without notice if conditions are rough.

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

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