

# Kamchatka & Chukotka - Russia's Ring of Fire

Tour Itinerary

26th June – 11th July 2022

## Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Moscow & overnight.
- Day 2** Fly Petropavlovsk.
- Day 3** Arrive Petropavlovsk and board Spirit of Enderby.
- Day 4** Zhupanova River.
- Day 5/6** Commander Islands.
- Day 7/15** Kamchatka Peninsula & Chukotka coastline, including Meinypil'gnyo.
- Day 16** Disembark at Anadyr and fly London.

## Dates

Sunday 26th June – Monday 11th July 2022

## Cost

From £9,895 (London/London); cruise-only: £8,795  
(based on sharing a twin cabin with shared facilities).

## Cabin upgrades

Superior (2 bunks): Extra £595 per person  
Superior Plus (2 lower berths): Extra £1,095 per person  
Mini Suite: Extra £1,595 per person  
Heritage Suite: Extra £1,995 per person

## Grading

Grade B. See Page 8 for additional information.

## Focus

Birds, mammals and landscapes.



From the top: Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Kamchatka scenery & Brown Bear courtesy of C Collins, R Russ & Shutterstock Ltd



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## Introduction

Few destinations can offer such an awe-inspiring combination of wildlife and breathtaking scenery as the Russian Far East. The spectacular volcanic landscapes of Kamchatka and Chukotka have largely escaped the ravages of mankind and to this day remain one of the few true wildernesses left on Earth. Here a wide range of exciting birds and animals, towering snow-capped volcanoes, virgin forest, pristine tundra and a rich indigenous culture await the wildlife enthusiast, and what better way to explore this land of fire and ice than by spending 13 nights aboard the 'Spirit of Enderby'. This vessel is an expedition ship that carries a maximum of just 50 passengers and is fully equipped with inflatable zodiacs and a highly skilled crew. From this comfortable base we can expect to see a wonderful range of birds and mammals, such as hundreds of thousands of breeding seabirds (including a dozen species of Pacific auks), the mighty Steller's Sea Eagle, Sea Otter, Brown Bear, Pacific Walrus, cetaceans such as Orca and Baird's Beaked Whale and, hopefully, one of the world's most critically endangered waders, the enigmatic Spoon-billed Sandpiper!



Even today, much of the Russian Far East is still inaccessible and out of bounds for foreign visitors and there are few vessels permitted to explore this remote region. The 'Spirit of Enderby', a comfortable, but simple, expedition vessel, is staffed by western leaders and naturalists, but is crewed by a team of enthusiastic Russian sailors and is Russian owned and registered. This, and the fact that the expedition operates entirely within Russia's political borders, means the 'Enderby' is permitted to explore areas other vessels are not and is free from many of the rules and regulations that restrict foreign registered ships.



## Itinerary

Please note that the following itinerary should be treated as a guide only, not an exact program. Flexibility is the key to all voyages in Russian waters and our exact route and program will depend on weather conditions, wildlife encounters, the experience of the expedition leader and the advice of the ship's captain and crew.

### Day 1

### Fly Moscow

We depart from London's Heathrow Airport on an early-afternoon Aeroflot scheduled flight to Moscow, arriving mid-evening. On arrival we will clear immigration, collect our bags and transfer to a comfortable airport hotel for the night (bed and breakfast).

### Day 2

### Fly Petropavlovsk

The morning is at leisure. In the early afternoon we will return to the airport to check-in for our onward overnight flight to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky which is due to depart around 1700 hours (we must allow plenty of time as check-in for Russian flights can be quite time consuming and a little chaotic at times!).

### Day 3

### Arrive Petropavlovsk & board Spirit of Enderby

Our flight is due to arrive into Petropavlovsk around 1000 hours. Depending on the time we board the Spirit of Enderby we may have a little time to explore the city or birdwatch nearby. Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, to give the city its full name, is a remote outpost of the Russian Federation which is backed by some of the most breathtaking scenery in the world. First settled in the year 1740, the city now has a population of about 250,000, most directly or indirectly involved with the fishing industry. It lies on the edge of Avacha Bay, the second largest natural harbour in the world and overlooked by the towering brooding volcanic cone of Koryaksky.

The Spirit of Enderby, our home for the next 13 nights is likely to depart late afternoon. Heading into the deep waters of Avacha Bay, we will sail past the three rock pinnacles of Tri Brata (the 'Three Brothers') that guard the entrance to the bay and then north along the spectacular volcano-dotted coastline of the Kamchatka Peninsula towards the Zhupanova River, our first main stop on the cruise.



Tufted Puffin

It will not be long before we spot our first Pacific alcids (auks), most probably the wonderful Tufted Puffin. Although the 'Tufties' will be a common sight throughout the cruise, it is impossible to become bored of these beautiful and comical-looking birds. The smaller Ancient Murrelet is also likely as we cruise out of the bay, along with Brünnich's Guillemot, Pigeon Guillemot of the all black Kuril race, Red-faced Cormorant, Slaty-backed Gull and perhaps the rare Spectacled Guillemot. Once free from the constraints of Avacha Bay, we may see our first Brünnich's Guillemots, plus deeper water species such as Fork-tailed Storm Petrel, Laysan Albatross and Dall's Porpoise.

We will no doubt end the first afternoon of our cruise marvelling at the spectacular scenery that abounds and, if the weather is clear, watching the sunset over the rugged mountains and line of snow-capped volcanoes that stretch to the horizon both north and south.

## Day 4

## Zhupanova River



Steller's Sea Eagle

We awake today near the mouth of the Zhupanova River and spend the morning exploring this wide river on a zodiac cruise. The Zhupanova River heads deep into the wilderness and is lined by vast tracts of birch forest and backed by several spectacular snow-capped active volcanoes including Zhupanoesky (2,923 metres) and Karimsky (1,468 metres). There are plenty of ornithological gems to look for in this marshy extremity of the Kronoki State Nature Reserve, including Aleutian Tern, Long-tailed Skua, Harlequin Duck, Pacific Diver, Black Scoter, Far-eastern Curlew, White-tailed Eagle, Olive-backed and Pechora Pipits, Rustic Bunting, Siberian Rubythroat and Arctic Warbler. Our main goal here, however, will be the magnificent Steller's Sea Eagle which usually nest along the banks of the Zhupanova River. These are huge birds – one of the largest raptors in the world with a wingspan of up to 2.5 metres – even dwarfing their large White-tailed Eagle cousins! Their enormous nests are very obvious and we are likely to have

wonderful views of this impressive species both perched and flying overhead. This stretch of coastline also offers our best opportunity of finding two of the region's rarest auks, the Spectacled Guillemot and diminutive Long-billed Murrelet.

We will end the excursion with a brief stop at a seasonal fishing camp at the mouth of the river where we may be able to sample the day's catch and spend a little time onshore in search of some of the smaller landbirds mentioned above.



Zhupanova River

Around mid-afternoon we must leave the Kamchatka coastline and head east towards the Commander Islands. Our route will take us over the Kuril-Kamchatka Trench, one of the deepest stretches of ocean anywhere in the world. The seafloor plunges down to a staggering 10,000 metres (ie 10 kilometres) ... indeed, if Mount Everest were to be lowered into the seas here there would still be over 1,000 metres of water above its summit! The waters

between Kamchatka and the Commander Islands are not only deep, but very rich in nutrients and wildlife. The ghostly grey flickering shapes of Fork-tailed Storm Petrels are sure to become common once again as we head east along with graceful Laysan Albatross and Mottled Petrels, their smaller cousin. Long-tailed, Arctic and Pomarine Skuas are all possible along with Grey Phalarope, the rare Red-legged Kittiwake, the beautiful Whiskered Auklet and lots more of the now familiar alcids. The shelf edges are particularly good areas for birds and the best spot to look for cetaceans which may include Sperm Whale, Fin Whale, Humpback Whale, Orca, Baird's beaked Whale and perhaps even the mighty Blue Whale, the largest animal thought to have ever inhabited the Earth.

## Days 5 & 6

## Commander Islands

We are likely to arrive at the Commander Islands mid-afternoon on Day 5. We then have the rest of the day and the following day to explore this remote group of small islands named after the early explorer Commander Vitus Bering who was shipwrecked and died here in 1741; his grave is marked by a simple tombstone on Beringa Island. The 'Commanders' are home to a small Aleut population, who are very welcoming to visitors, and a huge population of nesting seabirds. Here we will have our first opportunity to experience the



sights and sounds of a North Pacific auk colony and enjoy the Tufted and Horned Puffins, Parakeet Auklets, Crested Auklets and Brünnich's Guillemots, plus Pigeon Guillemot, Red-faced Cormorant and Red-legged Kittiwake. Other avian delights to look out for include Rock Sandpiper, Lesser Sandplover, Aleutian Tern, Lapland and Snow Buntings, plus mammals such as Harbour Seal, Northern Fur Seal and Steller's Sea Lions. Steller lent his name to another marine mammal, one that was not as fortunate as the sea lion, the now extinct Steller's Sea Cow. Nikolskoje, the small capital of the Commanders is home to one of the few remaining skeletons of Steller's Sea Cow, an impressive beast that grew up to 30 feet in length and weighed an estimated 10 tons! Steller was the naturalist and physician on Bering's expedition and was shipwrecked on these islands in 1741. His survival was in no small part due to the easy meat provided by this slow and trusting animal; indeed only 27 years later Steller's Sea Cow was extinct!



Sea Otters very nearly went the same way as the Sea Cow, but fortunately numbers of this endearing mammal have bounced back after years of hunting and they are now common around the rocky coastline of the Commanders and frequently seen wrapped up in the sea kelp beds or bobbing on their backs with their pups. Minke Whales and patrolling pods of Orcas are seen from time to time offshore, whilst on land Arctic Foxes wander along the beaches and can be amazingly confiding. Around mid-afternoon on Day 6 we will begin our journey back to the Kamchatka coastline.

NB: Please note that it is often not possible to get within the seabird/auk colonies as one can in Shetland and the Farne Islands for example. Colonies in Kamchatka are mostly on steep inaccessible cliffs and slopes and are mostly viewed from the water.

## Day 7

## At Sea & Karaginskiy Island

We will awake this morning to a 360 degree view of the open ocean as we complete our crossing back to the mainland and our next stop at Karaginskiy Island. The ship's crew will offer a series of lectures for those who would like a break from the seabirds, but we must still keep a careful eye open for cetaceans as we once more cross over the shelf edge. Depending on the weather conditions we aim to reach Karaginskiy Island by early afternoon where we will make a landing for several hours to explore the tundra, pools and patches of birch woodland. Karaginskiy Island is a Ramsar Site lying approximately 40 kilometres off the Kamchatka coast and measuring 101 kilometres long by 27 kilometres wide.

This is a particularly rewarding spot for birds and we should be on the look out for such species as Long-tailed Skua, Long-toed and Red-necked Stints, Red-necked Phalarope, Pacific Diver, Harlequin Duck, Red-necked Phalarope, Lapland Bunting, Pechora and Red-throated Pipits, Bluethroat and Arctic Warbler. Largha Seals are common offshore and we also need to keep a careful eye open for the characteristic 'rooster-tail' spray kicked up by a passing pod of speedy Dall's Porpoise, or perhaps a patrolling pod of their arch nemesis, the Killer Whale.



Largha Seals

## Day 8

## Verkhoturova Island & Govena Peninsula

One of the many highlights of this cruise will be the opportunity to visit Verkhoturova Island. Rafts of Crested, Parakeet and Whiskered Auklets bob on the sea offshore with a few diminutive Least Auklets mixed in. If the sea conditions permit we will land on the island and climb up a steep grassy slope for 80 metres or so to get a view over this spectacular place and enjoy the spectacle of numerous Tufted Puffins, Brünnich's Guillemots and other alcids wheeling overhead and nesting on the steep cliffs below.



Crested Auklet

In the afternoon we will move north to the Governna Peninsula and Cape Conspicuous. Here we will enjoy a zodiac cruise along the coastline looking in particular for Brown Bears. We are now well within the 'Realm of the Russian Bear' and this stretch of coastline is a favoured haunt of this powerful mammal. The Kamchatka Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos beringianus*), also known as the Far Eastern Brown Bear, is a subspecies of the 'generic' Brown Bear

that occurs from the Kuril Islands north to Anadyr. It is the largest subspecies in Eurasia and is widespread along the Kamchatka and Chukotka coast.

## Day 9

## Tintikin Lagoon & Olyutorskiy Bay

This morning we will explore Tintikin Lagoon, one of the most scenic places in the Russian Far East. We will take the zodiacs ashore and explore this beautiful area on foot and by boat. The lagoon is surrounded by a wonderful landscape of jagged mountains, glaciers, tundra and forested slopes covered in dwarf birch and pine. This is another great spot for Brown Bears as well as an interesting variety of birdlife including White-winged Scoter, Black-throated Diver, Red-necked Stint, Long-tailed Skua, Arctic and Dusky Warblers, Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler, Siberian Rubythroat, Dusky Thrush and perhaps the elusive Siberian Accentor. Larga Seals are often seen along the coastline, whilst offshore we should keep our eyes open for Kittlitz's Murrelet, Short-tailed Shearwater and pods of Orca.

## Days 10 – 12

## Chukotka Coastline

We spend the next three days slowly cruising north along the spectacular Chukotka Coastline stopping each day to explore secluded bays, walk onshore and enjoy the wealth of wildlife that abounds in this remote and little visited region. We will keep the itinerary flexible to take account of the weather conditions, the advice of our Expedition Leader and the sightings we have already enjoyed over the past few days. There are many equally wonderful areas to explore including Pavla Bay around which Brown Bears patrol and Steller's Sea Eagle soar,



and the dramatic Bogoslova Island. Onshore we will explore a mix of tundra, coastal marshes, birch and pine forest and freshwater lagoons home to a wide variety of birdlife including many of the species already outlined above, plus White-billed Diver, Taiga and Tundra Bean Geese, Emperor Goose, King Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Sandhill



Crane, Rough-legged Buzzard, Gyr Falcon, Temminck's Stint, Red-necked Phalarope, Arctic Warbler, Red-flanked Bluetail, Bluethroat, Little Bunting, Asian Rosy Finch and Common Rosefinch. Flowers such as Kamchatka Rhododendron and Alpine Bearberry carpet the landscape, whilst land mammals to look out for, in addition to the Brown Bears (which are frequently recorded here), include Red Fox, Arctic Ground Squirrel, Northern Pika, Mountain Hare and even the rare Snow Sheep which was seen on one lucky occasion!

As we track north we must also keep our eyes open for more seabirds which may include the diminutive Kittlitz's Murrelet and tiny Least Auklet, as well as the more common Horned and Tufted Puffins, Crested Auklet, Short-tailed Shearwaters and skuas.

Past cruises have also helped to look for other populations of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and so we must will keep our eyes open for this rare species and may checkout a few likely looking areas.

## Day 13 – 14

## Meinypil'gyno

We hope that today will be the ornithological highlight of our cruise, the opportunity to view of one the world's rarest and most beautiful waders on their remote nesting grounds! The enigmatic Spoon-billed Sandpiper is critically endangered. Over the past few decades their population has nose-dived from an estimated 2,000 to 2,800 pairs in the 1970s to around 200 in 2014. They only breed on the remote tundra of Kamchatka and Chukotka and then migrate over 8,000 kilometres to their wintering grounds in South-East Asia. The threats to this attractive little wader are many and varied so we will learn more of their plight during the cruise.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Over the past few years the company who operate the Spirit of Enderby have built up a close relationship with the staff at the 'Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Taskforce' in the remote settlement of Meinypil'gyno. This is the most important breeding site in the world for the 'Spoonies' and we hope the researchers will take our group out to view this amazing wader.....a rare and privileged experience! The Spoon-billed Sandpiper's home is also home to a wide variety of other birds including Emperor Geese, White-billed Diver and Black Scoter whilst offshore we should keep our eyes open for ghostly white pods of Beluga Whales.

## Day 15

## Cape Navarin



Pacific Walrus

Our final full day of the cruise will be spent exploring the coastline of Cape Navarin, an area rich in marine mammals. In addition to possible sightings of Beluga Whales and Grey Whales we will be particularly hoping to find a haul out of Pacific Walrus which at times congregate here in their thousands. The exact location of these rookeries change from year to year, but assuming we are in luck we will hop into the zodiacs and head closer to enjoy one of the most impressive sights of the Arctic realm. Naturally, there will be plenty of birds to enjoy here too along with

inquisitive groups of Larcha Seals. Finally, as the sun sets on our final day in the Russian Far East we must 'up anchor' and head east to complete our journey to Anadyr.

## Day 16

## Disembark Anadyr & Fly London

This morning we will berth at the port of Anadyr, the most easterly town in Russia. After saying our goodbyes to the crew and staff of the Spirit of Enderby we transfer to the airport for our early afternoon UTAir flight to Moscow connecting with an Aeroflot flight to London Heathrow. Thanks to a 12-hour time difference we are due to arrive into London Heathrow during the evening of the same day!

**Please note that the itinerary outlined above is subject to final approval by the relevant Russian authorities.**

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## Tour grading

**Grade B** - Moderate day walks of 3 to 4 hours at a time. Entering and leaving the zodiac craft can present a few difficulties on occasion (the sea can be choppy and beaches rocky/slippery), but there are always plenty of crew to lend a hand if necessary. Longer walks are occasionally offered for those who wish to stretch their legs. Please be aware that there are no footpaths in this region and the terrain is often steep, rocky and rough; for example the walk to the viewpoint over the seabird colony on Verkhoturova Island is up a steep grassy bank. As such an average, or above, level of fitness and love of walking is required to get the most out of this tour.

It is also important that you are able to get up and down the steep gangway from the ship to the water level to board the zodiac craft. Should you require additional information on the above please give the Naturetrek office a call on 01962 733051.

Please remember that you are travelling in remote areas without access to sophisticated medical facilities, so we would ask you not to join the tour if you have a life-threatening condition, need daily medical treatment or have difficulty walking over rough terrain.

## Weather

The Russian Far East is cool with maximum temperatures usually around 10-15°C. It will get progressively cooler as we head north and although it can be pleasantly warm in Petropavlovsk (with temperatures in the mid 20s degrees C) it is likely to be cool/cold in the Commander Islands and further north. The occasional wet day is to be expected, and the whole region can be prone to patchy fog and mist. The Spirit of Enderby is air-conditioned and heated throughout with individual controls in each cabin.

## Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the cost except for any evening meals and lunches in Moscow, Petropavlovsk and Anadyr. For any necessary nights in these towns/cities we use comfortable hotels with private facilities.



**Main Deck Cabin (shared facilities)**



**Superior Cabin (private facilities)**



**Superior Plus Cabin (private facilities)**



**Heritage Suite (private facilities)**



## Extra expenses

All meals are included in the cost of this holiday with exception of any necessary lunches and dinners in Moscow, Petropavlovsk and Anadyr. The cost of the Russian Visa (approximately £120) is also excluded from the holiday cost as are tips (approx US\$15 per day), drinks, locally payable airport taxes, any additional excursions whilst in Moscow, Petropavlovsk and Anadyr and all items of a personal nature.

NB - Please note that due to the volatile nature of fuel prices at the moment Naturetrek reserves the right to impose a surcharge on this cruise should fuel prices increase significantly and the boat operators request an additional payment. As always, however, we will do our very best to avoid such increases in costs.

## Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to the Russian Far East. 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/russia](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/russia) or telephone 0870 6060290 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](http://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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