

Itinerary

Day 1 – Sunday, May 22

Arrive in Iceland after your overnight flight from North America and transfer to our hotel. Relax in your room, experience the wonders of Blue Lagoon (admission on your own, transportation provided), or begin to familiarize yourself with Iceland's breeding birds. Coastal lagoons and rocky shorelines of the Reykjanes Peninsula host European Golden Plover, Purple Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Common Redshank, Red-necked Phalarope, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Graylag Goose, Northern Fulmar, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Redwing, and more. After dinner we will enjoy an evening orientation session and social hour. Overnight in Keflavik.

Day 2 – Monday, May 23

Our exploration of Iceland begins! Starting from lava fields marking the volcanically active Mid-Atlantic Ridge, we travel along the coast, past Fagradalsfjall, location of the 2021 eruption, to Vik, Iceland's southernmost mainland town. Along the way we will visit Krísuvíkurborg Cliffs. Here, on sheer sea cliffs, thousands of seabirds nest. Marvel at clouds of fulmars, kittiwakes and alcids as they attend nests on rocky ledges and burrows. Atlantic Puffin, Black Guillemot, Common and Thick-billed Murre and Razorbill may be found here. Nearby, a short visit to a geothermal site affords the opportunity to enjoy bubbling paint pots, hissing fumaroles, and warm hot springs.

Continuing along the South Coast, we will search for shorebirds including Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank and European Golden Plover, waterfowl including Whooper Swan, Graylag Goose, Tufted Duck, "Common" Teal, and Eurasian Wigeon, and aerialists including fulmar, various gulls, and Arctic Tern.

Natural beauty abounds on the South Coast. Ancient sea cliffs now well inland create the perfect "habitat" for waterfalls. We will stop at Seljalandsfoss, where you can walk behind the falls for an amazing perspective of falling water, and Skógafoss, a major waterfall featured on guidebooks and postcards. Fulmars nest adjacent to the falls, and downstream from the plunge pools is habitat for White Wagtail, Harlequin Duck, and more. Near Vik, where we will spend the night, additional opportunities to viewing nesting seabirds abound on the scenic promontory of Dyrhólaey. This is our best chance for close looks at Atlantic Puffin. While crashing waves, black sand beaches, sea stacks, and sea arches compete for attention, Arctic Tern and Common Eider nest nearby, oystercatchers forage alongside roads, and Meadow Pipits sing from fields.

We will end the day at Reynisdrangar Cliffs where, at this scenic overlook used as a filming location for Game of Thrones, we can examine the geological wonders of hexagonal basalt columns, black sand beaches, and the Reynisdrangar sea stacks. Overnight in Vík í Mýrdal.

Day 3 – Tuesday, May 24

Today we travel from Vik to Höfn on Iceland's East Coast. Along the way we will explore an amazing area, the sandur beneath mighty Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier. Meltwater from the glacier, and from volcanic eruptions beneath the glacier, create an otherworldly landscape of gravel plains, braided rivers, and scattered wetlands. This is the realm of the Great Skua, and home to the largest breeding

colony in the world of this powerful seabird. Compare and contrast the flight of Great Skua and Parasitic Jaeger as both species quarter open plains. Roadside ponds may hold nesting Red-throated Loon, shorebirds, and waterfowl.

We will stop at Skaftafell National Park where an optional walk leads to Svartifoss, or Black Falls. This photogenic waterfall plunges into an amazing amphitheater of columnar basalt. Common Snipe, Meadow Pipit, Redwing, and Common Redpoll may be found in the dwarf birch forest.

Approaching the crown jewel of Iceland's East Coast, Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon, begin to look for Barnacle Geese, which have recently begun nesting here. At the lagoon, our attention will be divided between birdlife and natural splendor. Arctic Terns, skuas and jaegers feed at the mouth of Iceland's shortest river (less than a mile in length) while on nearby Diamond Beach, jewel-like remnants of icebergs shine on the black sand. Just inland, mighty bergs float in azure water behind a backdrop of Breidhamerkurjökull glacier. Look for loafing Harbor Seals and don't forget to pack a fresh memory card! Overnight in Höfn.

Day 4 – Wednesday, May 25

Today we continue our counterclockwise circumnavigation of Iceland, journeying from Höfn to Lake Mývatn. This is a day where scenery may rival birds. We'll wind along deep fjords backed by knife-edged mountain ranges, pass through colorful fishing villages, and experience the power of Europe's largest waterfall, Dettifoss.

Along the way keep an eye out for smartly plumaged summer Snow Bunting, Northern Wheatear, Gyrfalcon, and Rock Ptarmigan. As we leave the seacoast behind and climb into the wilds of Iceland's interior, we enter the land of breeding waterfowl. We'll watch for Pink-footed Goose, Northern Pintail, Greater Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, Harlequin Duck, and Common and Red-breasted Merganser. Dunlin and Whimbrel nest here, as does Red-throated and Common Loon, the only nesting area in Europe for the "Great Northern Diver". Overnight near Lake Mývatn.

Day 5 – Thursday, May 26

Today we explore Lake Mývatn, an incredible landscape with an amazing natural history that is home to Europe's largest diversity of breeding waterfowl, with approximately fifteen species using the shallow water (average depth is just 7') and surrounding wetlands for nesting. Add passerine nesters, and this area is among the very best birding locations in Iceland.

Nearly the entire country's population of Barrow's Goldeneye nest here, and while we are used to this duck nesting in tree holes in North America, what do they do in a country with few trees? Why nest in lava holes of course! We will enjoy the extravaganza that is Lake Mývatn in spring, lingering to ensure that we spend quality time at this magical place. Again birds vie with other natural wonders for attention. The lake is very young by geological standards, just 2,300 years old, and the Earth-changing forces just underground still power hot springs, steaming vents, and thermal wonders. We'll explore a landscape of lava pillars and rootless vents, cinder cones and distant volcanos. For those who did not choose to experience Blue Lagoon, Mývatn Nature Baths (admission on your own) offers another chance to recharge in thermal water surrounded by volcanic rock. Overnight near Lake Mývatn.

Day 6 – Friday, May 27

From Harlequin Ducks in roaring whitewater to cave-dwelling goldeneyes, we'll continue to enjoy the spectacle of nesting waterfowl as we explore Iceland's north. Nearly continuous daylight assures long hours of birding as we gradually make our way to and through Iceland's "second city" of Akureyri. Situated at the head of a 40-mile long fjord, Eyjafjörður, Akureyri offers pleasant strolls along the waterfront, shopping, and an expansive botanical garden. Might we find nesting Goldcrest?

Overnight in Varmahlíð

Day 7 – Saturday, May 28

We've almost completed our circumnavigation. But wonders remain! We'll travel through the land of sagas, where Iceland's famous literary history took place on farms here and in surrounding areas, before ending in cosmopolitan Reykjavik. Keep an eye out for smartly plumaged Black-tailed Godwit and European Golden Plover who, along with Whooper Swans, nest on farms in this area.

Our path south provides opportunities to connect with species potentially missed earlier, snap that cover-worthy photograph of a Snow Bunting, or simply enjoy the riot of scenery. Have you ever wanted to inspect a volcano up-close? Pint-sized Grábrók lets you do just that. Marvel at nature's symmetry as you circle this cinder cone's petite crater. It's just a short walk and gentle climb, with steps and handrails to help you along. Overnight near Reykjavik.

Day 8 – Sunday, May 29

Most flights for North America leave in the afternoon. We'll have the morning to finish last minute souvenir shopping, visit the Pond in Reykjavik for up-close looks at some of the species we became acquainted with over the week, and marvel at the energy of this tiny Nordic capital. Gardens and ornamental plantings around Reykjavik also afford the opportunity to seek out species with more restricted breeding ranges, especially Eurasian Blackbird. Transfer to Keflavik airport.