

Autumn Iceland

Birds and the elements, with binoculars and a camera

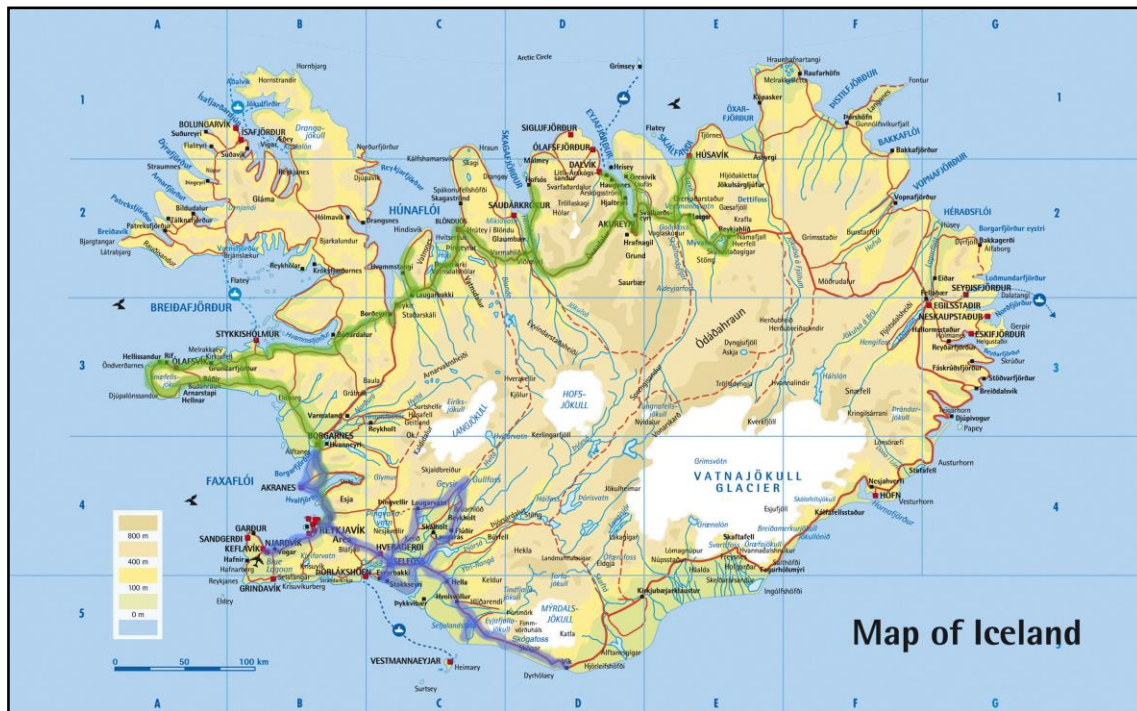


Geysir; Northern lights; Harlequin Ducks; Whale-watching

What's this tour about?

Because we at **Birding In Spain** are always thinking about how to offer something a little different we're planning a great tour to Iceland in the autumn. This is a time of year when the weather can be pleasant or quite harsh, but it is usually changeable, enabling us to sample a bit of both types! This is the time when the summer bonanza is visibly giving way to the early clutches of winter, when the breeding birds have all but departed and the wintering birds have started trickling in. When there are fewer tourists. When the snow-capped mountains can shine resplendently on a fine autumn's day. When we can feel closer to the naked elements which make Iceland such a special place.

This tour is ideal for individuals, couples or small groups of friends who can share a really memorable experience based on different degrees of interest in birds, natural landscapes and amateur nature photography. Of course we will be keen to see birds, but we won't let this interest overpower the innumerable opportunities we will have for photography of the landscape, and some of the birds themselves.



Iceland map with projected routes in green and blue

Iceland Tour prices

Touret 1: **1,150 euros**; Touret 2: **2,650 euros**

Complete Tour = Tourets 1 and 2 = **3,595 euros**

What's included*

Touret 1: 3 nights' accommodation in shared en-suite room in mid-range hotel or guesthouse near Hvollsvöllur, all meals (buffet breakfast, light "sandwich and drink" lunch, 2-course evening meal with one drink), all transfers from Reykjavik hotel to Reykjavik hotel or airport in private group vehicle, professional guiding services of Birding In Spain, parking fees and fuel costs.

Touret 2: 3 nights' accommodation in shared en-suite room in mid-range hotel or guesthouse at Akureyri, 1 night near Vantsnes Peninsula, 2 nights in Snaefellness Peninsula, all meals (as per touret 1), all transfers from Akureyri to Reykjavik hotel or airport in private group vehicle, domestic flight Reykjavik to Akureyri, one session whale-watching near Akureyri, professional guiding services of Birding In Spain, parking fees and fuel costs.

** Please note that en-suite rooms may not always be available.*

Meals

Breakfast buffet, light sandwich and drink lunch, 2-course evening meal.

What's not included

Drinks, items of a personal nature, travel insurance, international flights, money transfer fees.

Single room supplement available on request

Touret 1: 275 euros; Touret 2: 575 euros

Complete tour: **850 euros**

Dates 2018

Touret 1: 22nd September – 25th September 2018

Touret 2: 25th September – 1st October 2018

Touret 1(2): 2nd October – 5th October 2018

Touret 2 (2): 5th October – 11th October 2018

Payment

A deposit payment of 25 % of the total is required to confirm your booking. The remainder must be received no later than 30 days before the trip starts.

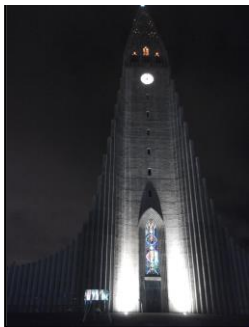
All international money transfer fees are to be paid by the client in full, unless otherwise stated.

Our cancellation policy

If you have to cancel your trip for whatever reason 30 days or more before the start of the tour we will return 50% of the deposit less the costs associated with transferring the money back to you. If the tour is cancelled within 30 days of the starting date we will keep the entire deposit and return any other payment you may have made to us less expenses for money transfer and any additional non-refundable expenses incurred by Birding In Spain on your behalf.

Our Itinerary

Day Z: Plan for arrival at Reykjavik international airport the day before the tour begins (or earlier), get assisted transfer to your hotel in Reykjavik, and enjoy some free time. We foresee that travelers will make their own arrangements for this evening's accommodation and meals (not included in tour price). We will be happy to help you with arranging the transfer from the airport to the hotel when we have all your travel details.



Reykjavik cathedral; soup in bread; downtown Reykjavik



Day 1: Tour begins (Touret 1). Morning pick-up on day 1 from your hotel in Reykjavik. We will enjoy some initial photographic opportunities around Reykjavik (Redwing, Whooper Swan, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup) before following the coastal road to Akranes, making stops en-route for waders, ducks and gulls. The rocky areas near the Akranes lighthouse are ideal for close-up encounters with waders such as Purple Sandpiper, Sanderling, Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone and Common Redshank, while the shore attracts many gulls, including Herring Gull, Greater Black-backed Gull, Glaucous Gull and Iceland Gull. Offshore are many duck such as Common Eider, Common Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, sea auks and good chances of a Black Guillemot or two bobbing up and down on the waves. What a fine introduction to the birds of the region! We will also scan the inlets in the hope of seeing a White-tailed Eagle before unhurriedly making our way to our accommodation to the southeast, in the vicinity of Hvollsvöllur.



Day 2: A day of stunning scenery awaits as we head for the Golden Circle, perhaps taking a quick look at the lakes Apavatn and Laugarvatn, and then our first “real” stop at Geysir to see, well, a geyser! The water bubbles up from below and spurts upwards in a huge column of water and spray every few minutes or so.

Catching just the right moment and frame is a captivating challenge for most photographers. Then we move on to admire one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Iceland (and there are so many!) – Gullfoss. Northern Ravens warily eye the human visitors to this deafening cascade of water and mist, and if the sun is out then a rainbow is rarely far away. After this we head back down towards Selfoss, via a crater lake, to check out the wetland areas along the coastline between the great glacial rivers of Ölfusá and Thórsá, the largest lava shoreline in Iceland. This area is one of the best areas for wetland birds in southern Iceland, and regularly holds a good selection of geese and ducks, Red Throated Diver and more.



Day 3: Today’s route is really spectacular in terms of scenery, and there are sure to be some good birds too. We come across two quite superb waterfalls shortly after leaving our accommodation - Seljalandsfoss and Skógafoss – quite different from each other but both well worthy of our attention. Then, as we continue towards Vik we make short detours from the main road to visit the Dyrhólaey and Reynishverfi headlands, with



cliffs, natural arches and the pounding waves breaking over black lava sand beaches, like that of Reynisfjara. Iceland's southernmost town of Vik is the ideal place to spend a little time before retracing our path back towards Hvollsvöllur. Before we finish the day however we should have time to make a detour or two to seek out birds such as the Pink-footed Goose and Brent Goose, Greater Scaup, Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser, and maybe try to photograph flocks of geese in flight against a superb mountain backdrop in the late afternoon light.



Day 4: We return to Reykjavik to take a morning or midday domestic flight to Akureyri (Touret 1 ends here in Reykjavik). Depending on the time available before our flight we may make a short visit to the coast near Reykjavik to look for auks and other seabirds. The flight from Reykjavik to Akureyri takes little more than half an hour, so we'll soon be on our way and keen to explore the local area, and there's plenty to look for! By heading towards Húsavik we come across another

spectacular waterfall, Godafoss, high on the list of the most picturesque of all waterfalls in Iceland. Then we follow in the general direction of Húsavik, exploring ponds, lakes and wetlands just off the road, as well as coastal cliffs and the shoreline. The birds we could see in this area are many: Northern Fulmar, Black-legged Kittiwake, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, Great Northern Diver, Slavonian Grebe, Goosander, Common Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, and with a little luck those Icelandic specialities the Barrow's Goldeneye and Harlequin Duck. Birds are more difficult to spot away from the water, but we'll bear in mind that there are reasonable possibilities of encountering Gyrfalcon, Rock Ptarmigan, and Snow Bunting. Night in Akureyri.



Day 5: Hold on tight because we're going out to look for whales today, and it's a gripping experience! We'll be sailing just after breakfast or in early afternoon from the village of Hauganes, with a well-established and reputable company who will take us out into the fjord to look for whales, especially Humpback Whales. In addition to the promise of their high success rate they will also invite us to do a spot of fishing, which will also serve to attract a curious gull or two, Iceland, Glaucous or Kittiwake among them.

The remainder of the day will be spent exploring the shores of the same fjord, perhaps around Grenivik and Akureyri itself to get more close encounters with the birds and scenery of this magnificent area. Night Akureyri.



Day 6: Today we dedicate the whole day to the mythical Myvatn Lake. Sitting squarely on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is speckled with about 50 islands and islets, Myvatn is probably the single most-famed birding location in Iceland. Craters, pseudocraters, lava formations, hot springs, boiling mud pools and volcanoes are all testimony to Myvatn's volcanic origins. Here the number and variety of wetland birds must be seen to be believed, and of special interest will be the local populations of Harlequin Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye, two species which occur only in Europe only in Iceland. Additionally, almost every other species of duck which occurs regularly in Iceland can be seen at some point around the lake. Furthermore, Gyrfalcons are often seen hunting near the lake's edge. Night Akureyri.

Day 7: With the unpredictable Icelandic weather we have the advantage of enjoying some flexibility with today's program, even repeating a whale-watching session (supplement payable), or doing it for the first time if the weather on previous days counseled against it. The alternative, or the rest of the day, will be spent en-route to the Vatnsnes Peninsula to the west, passing through striking glacial valleys and making short detours off the main road to survey suitable wetland and moorland habitats for anything that moves – maybe a Short-eared Owl, a Merlin, who knows! In this way we should have further close encounters with many of the duck and wader species that we have seen before, appreciating how every time is at least a little different.



Akureyri

Day 8: First off we will spend the morning driving along the western side of the Vatnsnes peninsula, checking out the birds along the shores of the Midfjörður and in particular with seals in mind. At key points along this peninsula it is possible to get close to grey seals and harbour (common) seals as they lie basking on the rocks or as they eye us from the safety of their watery home. Expect to see a variety of ducks, gulls and seabirds along this stretch of coastline too.

From here we coast along to our final destination in the Snaefellness Peninsula, hopefully arriving in time to reach the Kirkjufell mountain as the sun illuminates the western face of this cone-shaped mountain, giving us the chance to emulate all those “picture postcards” we might have already seen. Night in Snaefellness peninsula.



Day 9: The Snaefellness Peninsula has its very own brand of beauty and attraction, and so with most of the day at hand we will make a circuit to sample some of the more outstanding locations. Of course we will always have birds in mind, although by now we will have become familiar with most, perhaps affording us some time and peace of mind to really absorb and enjoy the unique scenery. At the western extreme of the peninsula, under the gaze of the Snaefellness glacier, lies the Djúpalónssandur beach, where the power of the waves crashing on to the black sand beach is bound to impress. But there's more... the short coastal walk between Hellnar and Arnarstapi leads us to breathtaking seaward views, natural arches, basalt columns, and sea caves. Find time, if you can, to photograph some of the Icelandic horses, or the Gerduberg volcanic area, or perhaps just one more waterfall? There's so much to see here that we will almost certainly leave wanting more. Night in the Snaefellness Peninsula.



Day 10: With heavy hearts we must now depart. A drive of some 3 hours separates us from Reykjavik international airport, where our supreme Iceland adventure sadly concludes.

Quick-look itinerary

Day Z: Arrival Reykjavik.

Day 1: Pick-up and birding around Reykjavik, Akranes coast. Evening Hvollsvöllur.

Day 2: Visit to Golden Circle and Selfoss coastal area. Evening Hvollsvöllur.

Day 3: Drive to Vik and back. Waterfalls, headlands, beaches and wetlands. Evening Hvollsvöllur.

Day 4: Return to Reykjavik (End Touret 1, beginning Touret 2). Domestic flight to Akureyri. Godafoss waterfall, Húsavik and evening Akureyri.

Day 5: Whale-watching from Hauganes. Exploring Eyjafjardur, and Grenivik. Evening Akureyri.

Day 6: Exploring around Myvatn Lake. Evening Akureyri.

Day 7: Exploring glacial valleys, coast and fjords en-route to the Vatnsnes Peninsula.

Day 8: Seals and birds on the Vatnsnes peninsula. Birding en-route to Kirkjufell and evening in the Snaefellness Peninsula.

Day 9: Exploring the coastline of the Snaefellness Peninsula.

Day 10: Return Reykjavik. Touret 2 ends.

Our Iceland Tour philosophy

Iceland is a place to enjoy, to marvel at the scenery as well as the wildlife, and not to rush. This experience really could be the highlight of the year for any participant, as was our first visit to Iceland for us. Nevertheless, we realize that Iceland is not a cheap country, and that most of us can't spend all our time on holiday! That has led us to structure the tour with these underlying principles:

- (i) We are keen to see the best selection of birds and wildlife possible in a reasonable length of time, but do not want to rush around trying to "list" everything possible. Beautiful Harlequin Ducks, snow-white Ptarmigans or breathtaking Humpback Whales for example, will deserve and command our respect and undivided attention if and when we encounter them.
- (ii) The tour is divided into "tourets" to allow for greater flexibility. Your available time, interest or budget may not extend to the whole 10 day tour, so you can take touret 1 or touret 2 separately, or stay with us for the whole tour. This allows couples or friends to go off and do their own thing, before or after the tour, perhaps to go to other places we don't visit, to take the photos they missed, or just relax at their own pace.
- (iii) Iceland's scenery is stunning, and worthy of a trip on its own, whether you are interested in wildlife or not. Volcanoes, lava, waterfalls, rocky headlands, black sand beaches, geysers...We will deliberately share time with the landscape as well as the birds and mammals so that everyone will have some poignant memories to take home and share, even with their non-birding friends or family! Also to bear in mind is that we can reasonably hope to encounter the Northern Lights at the time of our visit, and if such an encounter is can be foreseen we will make special arrangements to see and photograph this amazing spectacle.
- (iv) Cameras of any form (iphone, compact, bridge, DSLRs) are welcome, and indeed actively encouraged. Hence we work on the grounds that good opportunities for photography of landscape, birds and other wildlife will be given more time than is usual on a strictly "just birdwatching" tour, without letting a particular shot to become an obsession, however. The tour leader is the pacemaker, his is the final word, but he will also be doing his utmost to remain flexible and to work for the greatest possible degree of group

satisfaction. So in other words we will do our best to find the best relationship between what the tour is and what the tour could be, hoping that participants will take home fond memories in their minds and also “on film”.

- (v) Please note while we will not be undertaking long or strenuous walks we may wander some distance from the vehicle at some time. Most of the stops we make will be short sorties from the vehicle on level ground, but not necessarily all of them. To visit some waterfalls or geological features we may have to walk two or three kilometers, although this will rarely be over taxing terrain.

Photo credits: Andy Hawkins – Pink-footed Geese; Ann Hough – Barrow’s Goldeneye; Boaworm – Rock Ptarmigan; Florinda Vidal – Whale-watching, Geyser, Akureyri; Helgi Halldórsson – Downtown Reykjavik; Ian Kirk – Purple Sandpiper; Mahkeo – Myvatn mud pools, Gullfoss waterfall; Ólafur Larsen – Gry Falcon; Pascal Maurhofer – Harbour Seal; Paul Morris - Seljalandsfoss waterfall; Peter Massas – Harlequin Ducks; Pierre Bouillot – Black beach; Raul Popadine – Northern Lights; Steve West - Soup in bread, Reykjavik church, Snaefellness coast, Geyser bubble.



Birds, beasts and beauties you can see and perhaps photograph (*)

BIRDS: Red-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver*, Slavonian Grebe*, Northern Fulmar*, Northern Gannet, Whooper Swan*, White-fronted Goose, Pink-footed Goose*, Brent Goose, Greater Scaup*, Tufted Duck*, Common Eider*, Common Scoter, Long-tailed Duck*, Harlequin Duck*, Barrow’s Goldeneye*, Goosander, White-tailed Eagle, Merlin, Gyr Falcon, Rock Ptarmigan*, Eurasian Oystercatcher*, Dunlin*, Purple Sandpiper*, Great Skua, Herring Gull*, Glaucous Gull*, Iceland Gull*, Black-legged Kittiwake*, Atlantic Puffin, Black Guillemot*, Common Guillemot, Brünnich’s Guillemot, Razorbill, Short-eared Owl, Redwing*, Snow Bunting*.

MAMMALS: Common Seal*, Grey Seal*, Humpback Whale*, Iceland Horses*.

LANDSCAPE: Northern lights, Volcanoes, Craters and pseudocraters, Glaciers, Black sand beaches, Sea stacks and arches, Geysers, Waterfalls, Fjords, Islands (all*)

***We invite you to come and
enjoy Iceland – we know you
will!***