

Iceland Awakes!

An Awesome Iceland Spring Birding Tour

Dates

Sunday 16th to Monday 24th June - 9 days, 8 nights
(Best arrival date Reykjavik, 15th June)

Description

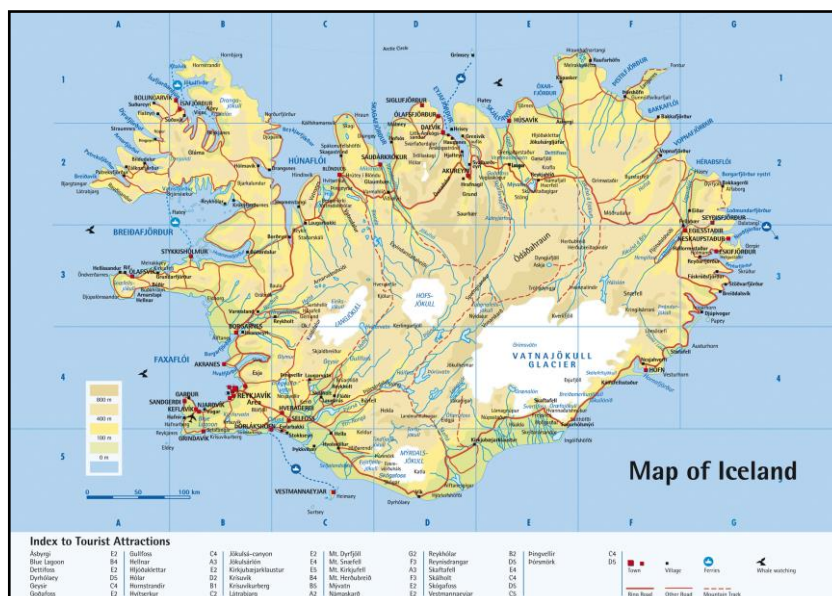
The winter is long and cold in Iceland, despite its wealth of geothermal springs, hot mud pools, fumaroles and general **volcanic activity**. By the end of May, however, the thaw is all but over and the island's **breeding birds** are engaged in frenetic activity, trying to make the most of the short summer to raise their young. We aim to be there to catch a glimpse of some of that activity, at one of the world's **classic birding destinations**, where the expression "it's quality, not quantity that counts" has never been truer.

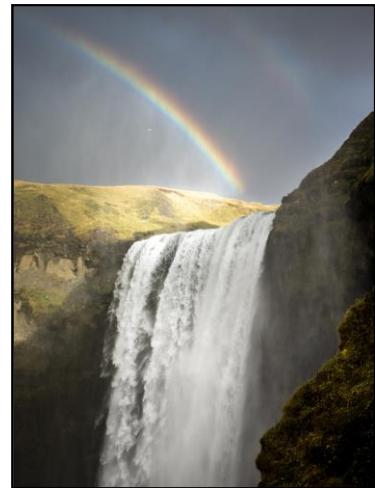


People visit Iceland hoping for an **awesome birding experience** set in a stunning volcanic landscape - moss-covered lava fields, volcano cones, snowcapped mountains, spectacular waterfalls, basalt sea cliffs - and that is what they get. Then they also appreciate Iceland for its friendly, relaxed people, and good food and hospitality.

In terms of birds some of the star attractions include Barrow's Goldeneye and Harlequin Duck at their only breeding grounds in Europe; majestic White-tailed Eagles and Gyrfalcons; seething seabird colonies with Atlantic Puffins, Thick-billed Murre (Brünnich's Guillemot), Black Guillemots and more; roadside Rock Ptarmigans, Common Loons (Great Northern Diver) and Horned (Slavonian) Grebes; spinning Red-necked Phalaropes and Grey Phalaropes; Snow Buntings; geese and swans. Then there are mammals too - whales and seals - as well as the very photogenic Icelandic horses.

Itinerary





Day 1, 16th June 2019

The tour starts with a morning transfer to Reykjavik domestic airport from Reykjavik centre for a 45-minute flight to Akureyri. Here we hit the ground running and head straight to the breathtaking Godafoss waterfall. En-route we'll become familiar with the idea of having birds such as Common Snipe, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Eurasian Whimbrel, European Golden Plover, and Common Redshank almost everywhere around us. And to watch out for aggressive Arctic Terns in case we get too near to them for their liking!

Near the waterfall itself it wouldn't be unusual to see our first Rock Ptarmigan, and marauding Parasitic Jaegers shouldn't be far away either. Then we head in the direction of Húsavík, searching out the greatest variety of birds we can in any suitable habitat we encounter en-route. In this way we can get a wonderful introduction to some of the more widespread breeding species such as Common Eider and Whooper Swan, and some of the less common or localized birds too, which may include Common Loon (Great Northern Diver), Goosander, Horned Grebe, Red Knot, and perhaps our first look at those two regional specialties: Barrow's Goldeneye and Harlequin Duck. At the end of the day we make our way back to our hotel in the vicinity of Akureyri.

Day 2, 17th June

We have reserved today for one of the great treats of the tour - a visit to the famed Myvatn Lake, a veritable duck and midge paradise! A large, shallow lake of volcanic

origin and full of tiny insects is just ideal for a huge variety and number of ducks, or so it seems. Here we can see most of the common European ducks such as Gadwall, Mallard, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Common Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Goosander, and Red-breasted Merganser, as well as the regional stars in the form of the Barrow's Goldeneye and the Harlequin Duck. Delightful Red-necked Phalaropes are common here too and we can watch them at close range swimming in tiny circles and picking insects off the surface of the water. Then there are also Red-throated and Common Loons (Red-throated and Great Northern Divers), Horned Grebes and Whooper Swans. We will also make special concerted efforts to spot the rare and localized Gyrfalcon, as the area around Myvatn is probably the best place in Iceland to find this iconic species, as well as to keep our eyes open for a passing Long-tailed Jaeger (Skua), which breed at a secret location in the vicinity.

We will surely spare a moment or two to look up from our binoculars and telescopes to appreciate the huge geological interest this area offers, such as pseudo-craters, volcanic cones and lava fields, and at Hverir, where we can admire and photograph steaming vents and bubbling mud pots. Night at Akureyri.

Day 3, 18th June

Setting out from Akureyri we will head northwards along the Eyjafjordur to explore the wildlife of its shores and the mountainous interior indented with glacial valleys



and rolling rivers. Momentarily taking our focus away from the wetlands and on to the fields and hillsides we can hope to encounter birds such as Merlin, Short-eared Owl and Rock Ptarmigan. However, as a Whale-watching excursion from a nearby village will be our main dish of the day we will adjust our land-based birding venture to ensure that we make the best timing for what we are hoping will be another tour highlight - Humpback Whales.

Skipper and first mate will take us out of the harbour and into the fjord, and if all goes to plan on to some close encounters with a number of Humpback Whales which will be swimming around in small groups, feeding in the

fjord. Getting close to these marvellous creatures is a unique experience that we can only heartily recommend. If we are lucky we may also see the more elusive Minke Whale, and the small and rather solitary Harbour Porpoise.

And there are birds too: Black Guillemots, Atlantic Puffins, Common Eiders, Northern Fulmars, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Glaucous Gulls, and more. Want to try your hand at a bit of fishing? Now's your chance. Night at Akureyri.



Day 4, 19th June

Taking leave of the friendly northern capital Akureyri we head westwards towards our next destination in the Snaefellness Peninsula. Most of the day will be spent on the road, but that does not mean the same as a wasted day! Far from it - en-route we have some very interesting possibilities to seek out in terms of birds: in particular the enormous White-tailed Eagle, but also species such as Pink-footed Goose, Merlin, Short-eared Owl, Long-tailed Duck and more.



Then there is the Vantsnes peninsula, famous for its seals - both Grey and Common Seals are typical here, and we will spend some time seeking them out and hopefully admiring them at close range. Then, after some more inevitable scenic stops - perhaps to admire some inland basalt cliffs and intriguing lava flows and forms - we will end the day at our accommodation on the Snaefellness Peninsula.

Day 5, 20th June

From the delightful harbour at Stykkisholmur, ferries depart from the shores of the Breiðafjörður inlet, which is dotted with skerries and islets. Weather permitting we may make use of the option of boarding a ferry to explore this fjord further. We should see plenty of Common Eiders (of course), and European Shags, but also the delightful Atlantic Puffins and Black Guillemots that inhabit these waters. However, one of the most sought-after birds in this particular area will be the magnificent White-tailed Eagle. Will we be lucky enough to see this bird? Well, we won't know if we don't try!

After returning to the mainland we will explore the shore as far as Kirkjufell, which must be one of the most emblematic "picture postcard" spots of all Iceland! Here we are likely to encounter a good selection of wetland and shore birds, as well as Grey and Common Seals. Night Snaefellness Peninsula.

Day 6, 21st June



Today we'll be exploring the Snaefellness Peninsula, driving as far westwards as we can go. With some luck a look at some spots on the northern shore should reveal a small number of Purple Sandpipers, and perhaps some passage geese, especially Pale-bellied Brent Goose and Barnacle Goose. Orcas are regular along the northern coast of this peninsula too, so that's another thing for us to bear in mind as we stare out to sea.

Under the indifferent gaze of the iconic snow-capped cone of Snæfellsjökull (1446m) at the western point of the peninsula we take a look at the nearby cliffs, where we come close to a seabird colony and the likes of Razorbill, Brünnich's Guillemot, and Common Guillemot. It was here that we saw an Arctic Fox in the autumn of 2018, so we'll certainly be keeping our eyes peeled for this beautiful creature! The southern side of the peninsula should not be ignored either, even if only for its superb scenery of rocky headlands, beaches, lakes and waterfalls. But of course that's not all - there are many discoveries to be made, not least of which are loafing seals and another chance at the sometimes elusive White-tailed Eagle. Night Snæfellness Peninsula.



Day 7, 22nd June

We depart from the Snæfellness Peninsula today, but slowly. First on our itinerary is a look around the Hvanneyri area, which could reward us with sightings of birds such as the White-tailed Eagle, White-fronted Goose, and Common Shelduck. In the infrequent pine woods we may even encounter a Goldcrest or two, not a common bird in Iceland! After a detour out to the point at Akranes for a look at more gulls, seabirds, and waders we then put on our tourist hats and head for the Golden Circle.

The Golden Circle is a major tourist attraction in Iceland and, somewhat unusually for a birding tour, one we feel we should not miss. That's because the active geyser at the original location of Geysir, and the thunderous Gullfoss waterfall are sights we believe no-one should miss, and that no-one will regret having taken some time to visit. From here we head to our accommodation near Hvollsvöllur.



Day 8, 23rd June

For our last full day on Iceland we will be taking in a lot of varied scenery and a good number and variety of birds, and although by now it may be difficult for us to find any new species every encounter will be different from the ones before. We'll look for wetland birds on coastal marshes and lagoons, and seabirds on headlands and impressive sea cliffs.

One of Iceland's trademarks is that it's hard to ignore the scenery, even if you should want to. On our route to Vik and back we'll have a full range of scenic delights ranging from great waterfalls, a glacial tongue, rocky headlands, and black sand beaches. Night near Hvollsvöllur.

Day 9, 24th June

Sadly we must depart Iceland today. Hopefully though our flight schedules will allow us enough time to do some last birding en-route to the airport, along coastal wetlands and in particular at the village of Gardur, where some patient seawatching and some luck may reveal Manx Shearwater, Northern Gannet and European Storm Petrel. Then it will be on to Reykjavik international airport and the end of the tour.

The quality of the experiences and the beauty of the encounters, together with the evocative landscapes and some superb whale-watching make this “Iceland Awakes!” an absolute winner of a tour.

Price: 3,295 euros

Single room supplement: 485 euros

Look at what the price includes:

- Whale-watching excursion from Hauganes
- Optional cruise from Stykkisholmur
- Domestic flight Reykjavik to Akureyri
- All ground transfers during tour dates in private vehicle, with fuel and tolls included
- 8 nights hotel/guesthouse accommodation in shared en-suite room, with breakfast*
- Picnic style lunches
- 1 or 2-course evening meals
- Drinking water and snacks available in the vehicle
- Services of professional guide(s) and all guide's expenses

* For the most part, although en-suite facilities may not always be available

Not included: Tips, private travel insurance, international flights to Reykjavik, drinks not included with meals, items of a personal nature.