

Lapland

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 - 7

Abisko National Park and Njolta Mountain

Tornetrask Lake mirrors blue tundra that cloaks the high mountains of Abisko National Park. Famed as a stunning example of Arctic landscapes, Abisko also gets the vote from botanists and birders as one of the very best sites in Lapland. In fact what seems to be the entire northern Swedish flora jostles for space on Njolta Mountain rising above our hotel. It looks a long way to the top so it's a fine thing to have a working ski lift whisk us to 900m above sea level. Mats of white-flowered Windflower and pink domes of Moss Campion greet us with a spectacular show. Both species of White Arctic Bell Heathers adorn slopes where Willow Grouse and Lapland Bunting breed. *Cassiope hypnoides* is much the commoner of the two but Njolta has a significant population of *Cassiope tetragona* too. In fact the heather family forms a major component of these montane Arctic tundras with mats of pink Creeping Azalea and Alpine Bearberry on dry heaths at the top, and in boggy areas Bog Whortleberry and Small Cranberry are abundant. Lapland Rhododendron will have finished flowering now but not the beautiful lilac-pink Mountain Heath which flowers prolifically amongst Crowberries and Bilberries. Pink Alpine Catchfly and mats of lovely *Diapensia lapponica* adorns high dry ridges over which hunt Merlin and Rough-legged Buzzard. The highest areas will still have some snow and near these we find the beautiful *Ranunculus nivalis* and on rocks both *Saxifraga cespitosa* and *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, the grand purple show from the latter now going over.

In the hills above Abisko itself we'll walk through meadows abloom with Wood Cranesbill and Globeflower and above these we'll find rarer plants such as the delicate moss-loving *Pinguicula villosa*, lovely *Campanula uniflora* and the tiny Snow Gentian. There's two beautiful milk-vetches, violet-tinged white *Astragalus alpinus* and fine yellow *Astragalus frigidus*. We'll see the local version of the Small White Orchid, though *Gymnadenia straminea* is now considered a separate more northern species also found in Canada and Greenland. We'll also seek the tiny green *Platanthera oligantha* which is known to flower in just a few spots in the Abisko area and nowhere else on mainland Europe.

Back down at lake level there's plenty to enjoy. By the hotel are wet flushes with massed displays of pink Fragrant Orchids and the lovely yellow *Saxifraga aizoides*. Globeflowers shine in the evening sunlight which illuminates white and yellow Alpine Butterwort with an unearthly glow. Fieldfares and Redwings are common, and several pairs of lovely Bluethroats rear their young here. Lesser Redpolls and the less common Arctic Redpolls are both breeding species and we'll see Bramblings in their lovely summer attire. Along the valley towards Norway there's a fabulous mosaic of habitats from birchwoods to marshes and from bogs to lakes. Black-throated Divers in their immaculate breeding plumage are a stylish sight and

the improbably bright plumes of Slavonian Grebes will attract the attention of photographers on the tour. Red-necked Phalaropes spin on rush-fringed waters and Wood Sandpipers and Goldeneyes inhabit birchwood ponds. Under the trees is a glorious show of that most beautiful of boreal flowers, the Twinflower. The tiny leaves and little bells are joined by Chickweed Wintergreen, wonderful little Dwarf Cornel, Heath Spotted Orchids, and the beautiful yellow *Viola biflora*. The diminutive Lesser Twayblade is difficult to spot amongst the mosses and clubmosses but once your eye is 'in' you'll find them to be locally common.

On one day we'll take a walk (there will be the option to walk quite a distance today if you wish) into the magnificent glaciated valley of Trollsjön where we'll see all sorts of evidence of glaciation such as various moraine types, erratics and a truly spectacular u-shaped valley which ends in a deep blue corrie lake. Along the way we'll see Frog Orchids, Yellow Wood Violets and wet areas have lots of *Saxifraga stellaris*. Pale Arctic Clouded Yellow, Cranberry Blue and Bog Fritillary inhabit areas of boggy pools where we'll also encounter some fine dragonflies such as Azure Hawker, the lovely Alpine Emerald and both Ruby Whiteface and Small Whiteface. We'll walk through the territories of several pairs of Long-tailed Skuas and Rough-legged Buzzards will be a frequent sight. On the surrounding crags are Snow Buntings and we'll hope to see some Reindeer here.

Day 8

Return to the UK

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