

ALVARO'S ADVENTURES
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FINLAND AND ARCTIC NORWAY



June 3 – 14, 2025

Can be combined with Svalbard 2025

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Finland is often classed with the Scandinavian countries, but it is in fact not one of them. A Nordic country yes, but not Scandinavian. The Finnish people speak a language allied to Estonian, and Hungarian of all things! They have a different history than the Scandinavians who we associate with the Vikings. Neighboring Norway, which we will also visit in its far northern reaches is indeed a Scandinavian country. We will visit to countries with wildly different languages, cultures and overall demeanor and outlook. Fascinating! Diversity not only in the birds and wildlife we will see, but the wonderful people we will meet. But don't try to take an online course in Finnish and feel that you may learn enough to get by, unless you want a real challenge, as Finnish is considered one of the most difficult languages to understand! Both Finland and Norway are countries with highly educated populations, with a high standard of living, a social safety net that is the envy of most nations, as well as high levels of prosperity and a large middle class. They have high levels of infrastructure, great local hotels, and a population generally interested in and who value nature. As such, a huge proportion of the land here is forest or great habitat, with strict environmental protections. While we think of Europe as densely populated and woodlots fragmented and small, here we find some of the wildest and most wonderful large extensions of forests, wetlands, and lakes in all of Europe. Picture northern Canada, but in Europe!

The tour starts and ends in Finland and is co-guided by a Finnish guide. So the focus is indeed Finland, but at the northern extreme of where we travel we will be in Arctic Norway enjoying the top of Europe and its birds. In the spring and early summer life is teeming here, migrant birds are arriving en masse, setting up places to nest, singing up a storm and sometimes displaying and generally lighting the forests up with life. We will have multiple different groups we will focus on, owls, grouse, shorebirds, and the northern European species which are hard to see elsewhere. What is special about Finland is the great extent of native habitats present. But also, as it borders Russia, some Siberian and largely Russian breeders reach their westernmost breeding range here. Species like the Rustic Bunting, Red-flanked Bluetail, Terek and Broad-billed sandpipers, Jack Snipe, Siberian Tit (we know it as Grey-headed Chickadee), Siberian Jay, and others.

We will be looking for owls, and there are many here. The Great Grey Owl could show up, as well as the Eurasian Pygmy-Owl, Northern Hawk-Owl, Ural Owl, and perhaps the difficult to find Eurasian Eagle-Owl. The Tengmalm's Owl is one we will be looking for, currently lumped with the Boreal Owl, there is some good evidence that suggests the two should be separate species. A total of 10 species of owl are possible, however their density varies from year to year and depends on the number of voles which are present.

Grouse are tougher, but we will try hard to find some of these amazing northern specialties. Perhaps most likely is the Black Grouse, while the sneaky Hazel Grouse (like

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a finessed Ruffed Grouse) may show up for us out of the blue. The biggest of them all, the Capercaillie will be our toughest one, but boy are we going to give it a good go. While we look for these grouse, perhaps Black Woodpecker, the largest of the northern Eurasian woodpeckers will show up, or the Parrot Crossbill, or perhaps the Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker. The list of northern forest and wetland birds is long.

Perhaps you have longed to go to Alaska to see shorebirds in their gorgeous breeding plumage, and perhaps you secretly have hoped that a trip up there may find you some of those great shorebird vagrants. But here in Finland and Norway, some of those very species that make you dream of Alaska's vagrants are common. The most amazing of them all, the most interesting bird in the world, the Ruff will be displaying at the Lek. A word coined to describe the display arenas of the Ruff, which now is applied to birds and other species worldwide. Bright pumpkin colored Bar-tailed Godwits will grace us with their presence, while the gorgeous, absolutely stunning Eurasian Dotterel makes an entrance. A relative of the yellowlegs which has red legs and dons a black robe like Dracula will be here, the stunning and spooky looking Spotted Redshank. Normal shorebird in winter, Darth Vader of the shanks in the summer. Black-tailed Godwits, Temminck's Stints, Dunlin, and so much more to see in the far north. Maybe even a breeding plumaged Little Gull, the Arctic Loon, or the varied number of leaf warblers, and marsh warblers found here.

The tundra may allow us to see Long-tailed Jaegers, Rough-legged Hawks, Little Stint and the gorgeous Lapland Longspur. As we hit the coast in the far north, the colonies of breeding alcids are stunning, along with attendant Great Skuas. Here nesting cliffs house masses of Thick-billed and Common Murre along with Black-legged Kittiwakes and Atlantic Puffins. The waters nearby may allow us to see Yellow-billed Loons, Pomarine Jaegers, Common Eider and the gem that is the Steller's Eider which we now know is the closest living relative of the extinct Labrador Duck. It really is not an eider.

We could go on with the possibilities of birds, also of the mammals we can see. Ranging from Ringed Seal and Harbor Porpoise to Wolf and Raccoon Dog. You never know. This is a land of possibilities and just great birding and nature watching, in a safe, organized, and comfortable set of neighboring countries. We will be trying the local food, and maybe even trying a bit of the local vodka. As you know, our trips are not only about the birds, but the food and culture. We look forward to our first visit to Finland and Arctic Norway.

Note that we will finish in time for you to opt to take our Svalbard tour, to see the depth of the Arctic where Polar Bears roam and the Ivory Gull may be found.



Itinerary

Day 1. June 3, 2025: Arrival in Oulu. This tour begins in the city of Oulu in northern Finland where we will meet at a local hotel. Time allowing, we enjoy some local birding in the afternoon. Three nights in Oulu.

Day 2 - 3. June 4 – 5, 2025: Birding in Oulu. We spend two full days birding the forests and coastal areas around Oulu. The region is best known for its northern owls. Note that breeding numbers fluctuate from year to year, the breeding species include Great Grey, Ural, Boreal (Tengmalm's), Pygmy and Short-eared Owl. In most years also the nomadic Hawk and Long-eared Owl. Eagle Owl is a shy resident. Depending on the vole numbers, some owl species might also be encountered further north in the Kuusamo and Ivalo regions, Hawk Owl even up in Norway. In the forests surrounding Oulu, we also look for Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker and Black Woodpecker, Capercaillie, Black Grouse or even Hazel Grouse. The Crested Tit, Wood Warbler, and Red-backed Shrike all breed in the

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area. Just south of Oulu, we visit Liminganlahti - a large internationally important wetland reserve that is home to a multitude of shorebirds and ducks. Hundreds of young Whooper Swan and Common Crane spend their summers here, and breeding species include Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Caspian Tern, Shoveler and Garganey. Among the numerous migrants that rest here we should see Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Spotted Redshank and Ruff in stunning breeding plumages, and Broad-billed Sandpipers also often stop here. The coastal meadows around Oulu are good for raptors, and White-tailed Eagles and Marsh Harriers patrol the shores and meadows. Less common are the Pallid and Montagu's Harrier, both seen regularly during migration and the former becoming more and more regular breeder up here. The rarest is the Terek Sandpiper, with only a few breeding pairs left in Finland. Oulu is their last breeding area and we will look for them during these days. Despite the northern location, some "night singers" are also found in Oulu area in most years, and Thrush Nightingale, Blyth's Reed Warbler, and perhaps even Corn Crake might give us hearings and sightings.

Day 4. June 6, 2025: Oulu – Kuusamo. After superb birding days around Oulu, we drive eastwards to Kuusamo. We make stops along the way at beautiful forests, bogs and lakes, with good chances to see the fantastic Little Gull and the stunning Smew before arriving in the town of Kuusamo near the Russian border. Three nights in Kuusamo.

Day 5 - 6. June 7 – 8, 2025: Kuusamo. Kuusamo is an exciting birding destination and known for its natural beauty. An exciting number of eastern and northern species breed here. We will look for Grey-headed Chickadee (Siberian Tit), Siberian Jay, Black and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker in the extensive taiga forests surrounding Kuusamo. Red-flanked Bluetail occurs here at the extreme western edge of its range, and although the terrain is mostly easy to walk in, it will involve one or two steep uphill climbs particularly for Red-flanked Bluetail. The vast forests are excellent grouse habitat, and an early morning grouse drive will be taken searching for Willow and Black Grouse, Capercaillie and the elusive Hazel Grouse. We will look for the eastern specialities, the Rustic and Little Buntings, and the nearby lakes and bogs are home to species such as Red-necked Grebe, Common Goldeneye, Smew, Wood Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Jack Snipe. Other species might include Brambling and Common Rosefinch in their fine summer plumages, as well as Bullfinch, Bohemian Waxwing and the delightful Eurasian Dipper. Golden Eagle and Rough-legged Hawks breed here and are well worth scanning for as they soar in the skies. In most years, Northern Hawk Owl and Boreal (Tengmalm's) Owl also breed in Kuusamo area. Time allowing, a visit to Oulanka National Park might be possible. The untouched forests of the park are home to many of the target bird species. Oulanka also

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preserves wild flora including the Calypso and Lady's Slipper orchids - they can be seen depending on blooming timing.

Day 7. June 9, 2025: Kuusamo – Ivalo. Today we start to head north. We cross the Arctic Circle and make some birding stops along the way. This far north the short nights do not get dark and the landscape starts to change as the coniferous forests give room for Mountain Birch dominated forests and bogs. One night in Ivalo.

Day 8. June 10, 2025: Ivalo – Båtsfjord. After breakfast we continue our route towards the northernmost part of mainland Europe. Our sightings in the morning might include Grey-headed Chickadee (Siberian Tit), Siberian Jay, Pine Grosbeak and Brambling in summer plumage as well as Whimbrel and Ruff as we explore the Lappish forests and bogs as we go. After lunch at the Finnish-Norwegian border we follow the famous salmon river of Teno to the fjords. We stop at Teno delta for shorebirds and the first Eiders of the tour. Soon we start climbing uphill and leave the tree line behind. The highlands in Varanger Peninsula offer some absolutely wonderful birding and the species list is truly appreciable: Bluethroat, Hoary (Arctic) Redpoll and Willow Ptarmigan occupy the river valleys while Lapland Longspur, Horned Lark and Long-tailed Jaeger are found on the hillsides. The most specialized are the Rock Ptarmigan, Snow Bunting and Eurasian Dotterel which choose to stay on the barren hilltops. The roadside lakes provide excellent birding with Red-throated and Arctic (Black-throated) Loon, Greater Scaup and Long-tailed Duck while Temminck's Stint show off their butterfly display flight along the roads. The arctic is truly amazing! After birding the highlands we descent to the lovely small fishing town of Båtsfjord. One night in Båtsfjord.

Days 9 -10. June 11 - 12, 2025: Båtsfjord – Vardö. After breakfast, we head back to the highlands and enjoy those special birds again for the morning but soon it is time to drive to the Varanger Fjord itself. The Fjord holds some impressive birds, and during the next two days, we look for shorebirds such as Bar-tailed Godwit, Red-necked Phalarope, Red Knot, Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstone and Whimbrel. In the waters we will especially search for King and Steller's Eider while other birds might include Arctic and Red-throated Loon, Common (Goosander) Merganser, as well as Velvet and Common Scoter. Numerous White-tailed Eagles patrol the coastline for easy prey and scanning the skies might produce Rough-legged Hawk. Weather permitting, we will make a half-day excursion by boat to the large seabird colonies on Hornøya island. The Hornøya nature reserve is home to thousands and thousands of Common and Thick-billed Murres, Razorbill and Atlantic Puffin as well as Shag and some 25 000 pairs of Black-legged Kittiwake. At times, Gyrfalcon patrols over the island in hopes for an easy snack and causes panic among the breeding seabirds. The air is filled with the cacophony of

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thousands of birds and there are excellent opportunities here for photographing seabirds at close range. A nice walk all the way up to the top of the island to a lighthouse gives wonderful views over the Barents Sea. We will also make an excursion to Hamningberg which is often referred to as the very end of Europe. The road follows the unique rocky coastline and there are excellent vantage points for seawatching from the road. Here we look for Yellow-billed and Common Loon, Northern Gannet, Northern Fulmar, and King and Steller's Eider. Seawatching from Hamningberg might give us Pomarine Jaeger and Great Skua and even Whales! Two nights in Vardö.

Days 11. June 13, 2025: Vardö – Ivalo. The tour draws to a close and we depart towards south to Finland after breakfast. We drive along the Varanger Fjord making regular birding stops in small harbours along the way to break up the journey. We enjoy further sightings of the many birds we shall already have seen. Dinner and accommodation in Hotel Ivalo, Ivalo.

Day 12. June 14, 2025: Departure. Time allowing, a morning excursion to a nearby birding area is possible with hopes to add a few more species on our lists. However, today it is time to say goodbye and catch the homeward flight. Or perhaps you will continue to our Svalbard Tour which begins on June 16.





About the Physical Requirements & Pace

When you look at the map of the area we will cover, it becomes apparent that we will be moving through a great deal of latitude from the Taiga forests to the Tundra, as such we will have some longer driving days. There will be days when we are driving for at least 5 hours of the day, yet on the majority of days we will be in multiple night stays and taking morning and afternoon excursions from the hotel. On the other hand, seeing these northern lands like this, on great roads, is a privilege. Travel on the whole is comfortable, we will be divided into two passenger vans, and as mentioned the roads here are of great quality and have been well maintained. Some of the longer days may require picnic lunches as there may not be any spots to stop to eat. As we get farther and farther north, the landscapes become more dramatic. We require that people cycle through different seats in the vans, so you may at times be in the back of the van. If you are prone to motion sickness, do take the appropriate medicines as you will have to spend some time in the rear seats.

To find some species it may require early morning wake ups with 6 am breakfasts or so. Keep in mind that day length is quite long at this time of year. We will pace ourselves as much as possible, but some species are certainly much more findable in the morning. Some days we will walk trails or roads, up to 3 miles per day. Most are on level ground, although one hike requires a moderate climb. If it has been wet, trails could be muddy. On days when we are not moving to a new hotel, you may opt out of some of the day's activities if you are wanting a bit more down time. Weather is variable and fickle, typical northern spring. It may be cold and in the low 40s on some mornings, and climb to nearly 80 in the afternoon, or it may remain cool all day. It could be sunny, cloudy or rainy. Spring in the north is variable, unpredictable and requires multiple layers. Wind can make it feel colder. In the far north we may encounter snow. If there is a warm spell while we are there, we may encounter mosquitoes. We will all have to have plenty of mosquito repellent, and some people may choose to have a mosquito head net in case we are unlucky and hit some areas with higher densities of mosquitos. If it has been cold and cloudy, there may be much fewer mosquitoes. Their abundance will depend on the weather.



Your Guides

Alvaro Jaramillo was born in Chile but began birding in Toronto, where he lived as a youth. He was trained in ecology and evolution with a particular interest in bird behavior. Research forays and backpacking trips introduced Alvaro to the riches of the Neotropics, where he has traveled extensively. He is the author of the *Birds of Chile*, an authoritative yet portable field guide to Chile's birds. In 2016 he published the *ABA Field Guide to the birds of California*. Alvaro writes the *Identify Yourself* column in *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Alvaro recently wrote a large part of the sparrow chapter for the *Handbook of Birds of the World* and is writing a photo guide to the birds and wildlife of Patagonia. He was recently granted the Eisenmann Medal by the Linnaean Society of New York, it is awarded occasionally for excellence in ornithology and encouragement of the amateur. Alvaro lives with his family in Half Moon Bay, California.

We will be led by a Finnish Birding expert, from Finnature, the premiere birding and nature tour organization in Finland.



Financial Information

FEE: \$6350 from Oulu, Finland. Ending in Ivalo, Finland. Can be combined with the Svalbard Tour.

DEPOSIT: \$500 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: Feb 3, 2025

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$650

LIMIT: 12





Additional Information

DOCUMENTS: A current passport valid six months beyond the date of your return is necessary for US citizens to enter Finland and Norway. You do not need a visa for entry under 90 days. If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Finnish or Norwegian consulates nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or phone or e-mail. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey, Norway requires two blank pages.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Please plan to arrive in Oulu, Finland by June 3, 2025. If your arrival is earlier in the day, we can do some local afternoon birding near the hotel. Flights back home at the end of the tour can be booked from mid-day on June 14, from Ivalo, Finland. You can leave early in the morning on June 14 if you wish, but we will return the vans to the airport near noon time. If you would like to arrive early or remain

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later than the tour we can arrange for extra nights at the hotel. Be sure to check with Alvaro's Adventures to confirm that the flights you have chosen will work with our itinerary and to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. We are not responsible for these fees.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is \$6350 for one person in double occupancy from Oulu, Finland. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through the night of Day 11. All meals from lunch on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 12 are included. Beer, wine and cocktails are not included in the price of the tour. Otherwise also included are all ground transportation, entrance fees, tips for hotel and restaurant staff, and the guide services of the tour leaders. Items of a personal nature are not included. The above fees do not include your airfare to and from Finland, airport taxes, visa fees, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for the tour is \$500. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$500** per person. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by Feb 3, 2025. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by Alvaro's Adventures.

SMOKING: This is a non-smoking tour.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Alvaro's Adventures for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

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The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute another guide for the original one. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members, and they will have the right to cancel their participation and receive a full refund.

Alvaro's Adventures's is a Registered Seller of Travel in the State of California (CST # 2105497). Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California. This ensures your right to a prompt refund: Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where the passenger is not at fault and has not canceled in violation of any terms and conditions previously clearly and conspicuously disclosed and agreed to by the passenger, all sums paid to the seller of travel for services not provided will be promptly paid to the passenger, unless the passenger advises the seller of travel in writing, after cancellation. This provision does not apply where the seller of travel has remitted the payment to another registered wholesale seller of travel or a carrier, without obtaining a refund, and where the wholesaler or provider defaults in providing the agreed-upon transportation or service. In this situation, the seller of travel must provide the passenger with a written statement accompanied by bank records establishing the disbursement of the payment, and if disbursed to a wholesale seller of travel, proof of current registration of that wholesaler.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

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RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Alvaro's Adventures, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Alvaro's Adventures acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Alvaro's Adventures accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Alvaro's Adventures reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Alvaro's Adventures reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, and other pertinent matter provided by Alvaro's Adventures. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION. 1/24 AJ

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