

Finland's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Helsinki

Day 2/7 Activities and hide sessions with key mammals as the main targets.

Day 8 Fly Kajaani on to Helsinki and London

Departs

July

Focus

Wolverine, Wolf, Brown Bear and other mammals and birds.

Grading

Grade A. Easy walks only.

Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code FIN04).

Highlights:

- Watch for Wolverines from a log-cabin hide deep in the Finnish forests.
- Excellent chance of Wolf and Brown Bear from specialist hides.
- The rare Forest Reindeer and Siberian Flying Squirrel both possible.
- Excellent photographic opportunities.
- Look for Black-throated Diver, Black Grouse and White-tailed Eagle among other birds.
- Search for the endemic Saimaa Ringed Seal.
- Explore Finland's vast Taiga Forests.
- Expertly led by Naturetrek naturalist.



Wolverine, Brown Bear and Wolf



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Introduction

If you dream about seeing or photographing wild Brown Bears, Wolverines and even Grey Wolves then this is the tour for you; Finland is without doubt the place to be! Home to an estimated population of around 1500 bears, 130-200 wolverines and around 150 wolves, Finland offers exceptional opportunities to view these three large carnivores at close range. We will guide you to places where you can watch or photograph these predators from hides located near carefully positioned carrion. Regardless of whether you are a photographer or just happy watching the animals, the hides give you some fabulous views of what are usually particularly difficult mammals to see in the wild. Given the increasing reliability of sightings, we are confident that an unforgettable experience awaits for those taking part in this exciting tour!

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly UK to Helsinki

Today we will arrive in Helsinki and transfer to a nearby hotel just 15 minutes from the airport. Dinner can be taken in your own time, providing an opportunity to relax and rest before the tour really begins.

Day 2

Helsinki & Saimaa Lake

Following breakfast you will be met by your leader and after checking out will then make the 3-4 hour journey to Rantasalmi where we will break for lunch. The afternoon will then be spent explore the vicinity; visiting the birding tower will give us the opportunity to get familiar with some common Scandinavian bird species such as Common Cranes, Whooper Swans, Goldeneyes and perhaps White-tailed Eagle.

In the evening we shall embark a vessel from the jetty just opposite the hotel to head out for a boat ride through the spectacular Linnansaari National Park, providing our introduction to this strikingly scenic country. Lake Saimaa, the largest lake in Finland, is regarded in the top 5 most beautiful lakes in the world and with the captain's unrivalled knowledge we aim to find the endemic Saimaa Seal. As we travel Osprey, Red-necked Grebe and Black-throated Diver may be seen with Beaver also possible here.



Lake Saimaa

After dinner we will make our first attempt at seeing the tiny and beautiful Siberian Flying Squirrel and a known local stake out.

Day 3

Transfer to Lieska (first night in hide)

After breakfast we will begin our 3 hours journey on moving to Eastern Karelia taking lunch in the rural town of Vuonislathi. We then continue towards the vicinity of Lieska where the first large carnivore base camp is situated. This stake out is undoubtedly one of the best places to observe and photograph wolverines, the largest terrestrial member of the mustelid family.

Wolverines are forever on the move and cover great distances each day. They are elusive and secretive animals that need to be 'persuaded' to stop for a while. With that in mind, our host baits the immediate surroundings of the hide with carefully concealed pieces of meat. The local Wolverines are now aware of this regular food supply and so although they do not visit the hide every night, they are seen on a regular basis throughout the summer months with a peak in sightings from late-June through to mid-July.

After a short briefing we will head towards the hide and our first exciting night time vigil! After what we hope will be a productive night and our first big mammal target achieved, we will be collected from the hide at around 7.30am.

Day 4

Lieska (second night in hide)

On leaving the hide after the first night, we will transfer to a nearby hotel where after breakfast, en suite rooms can be used to shower, refresh and rest before gathering again in the dining room. After lunch we shall return to Keljänpuro Lodge where we use the same luxury hide for another night.



Wolverine

Day 5

Lieska and the surrounding area

We shall be leaving the hide again at around 7.30am and as yesterday we will follow the same procedure, transferring to the hotel where after breakfast, en suite rooms can be used to refresh and rest before gathering again in the dining room. After lunch a short visit is planned to the nearby

Patvinsuo National Park. Should the weather be favourable, here we shall enjoy a short walk through a primeval forest or take an easy walk on a wooden trail through a pine bog habitat.

After a picnic we shall turn our attentions again to the Siberian Flying Squirrel and another stake out for this secretive species will be visited. Having maximised our time in the field, we will be arriving back at the hotel at around midnight.



Siberian Flying Squirrel

Day 6

Transfer to Kuhmo (third night in hide)

After breakfast we will make a visit to the nearby Petola visitor centre. This centre offers information about the Brown Bear, Wolf, Lynx and Wolverine as well as the wild Forest Reindeer roaming in this vast and truly wild area of Kuhmo. Unique souvenirs and postcards are available here too for those who wish.

Making sure we have all retrieved everything from our hotel will then head towards the next large carnivore base camp, exploring the vicinity near here for wildlife en route. After stopping for lunch we shall continue towards the observation hide for our final night of mammal watching. Besides good number of bears, this site is especially famous for being a core area of a local wolf pack notorious for stealing carrion of bears. It is therefore not unusual to see both of these iconic species together.



Grey Wolf and Brown Bear



More about Kuhmo:

On the border with Russia, we will overnight in hides in two different locations with both being situated in the middle of Brown Bear, Wolf and Wolverine territories. This "no man's land" is a region nature really is impressive here. When watching from the hide observing the White-tailed Eagles and Ravens present near the baiting sites, a carnivore will show up seemingly out of nowhere! Another memorable unique experience providing a worthwhile addition to this tour.

Day 7

Explore Kuhmo and the surrounding areas

After a night in the hide, we will be return to the hotel near Kuhmo and begin our normal morning procedure. Following breakfast, we will rest into the afternoon. For those who wish, in the later afternoon there will be the opportunity for an excursion to explore the surrounding wilderness for those who wish to explore the area. During the twilight period we will search from the van for ungulates, predators and birds resident in the area. Moose, Forest Reindeer, Mountain Hare and Pine Marten may be encountered whilst birds may include Black Grouse and Capercaillie. Great-Grey Owl have also been spotted in the area, and we of course hope to be able to locate one on this twilight drive.



Forest Reindeer

Day 8

Fly Kajaani to the UK

After a night in the hide we return to the hotel for breakfast. After packing we will head to Kajaani airport to board a domestic flight to Helsinki at around midday. We will then take a late afternoon flight from Helsinki, landing back in the UK.

Tour Grading

Grade A (easy). This is a straightforward wildlife tour that makes no great physical demands and should be within the capabilities of anyone who is of a reasonable/average level of fitness. Walks will be along undulating forest trails and well beaten tracks.

Weather

Although this tour take place during Finland's summer, the weather can be vary variable. Temperatures are similar to those you might expect in Scotland and rain is possible. Daytime temperatures are likely to be between 15°C and 25°C, dropping to 5 -10°C at night.

Food & Accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price (apart from lunch and dinner on day 1 and lunch on day 8). For the first night we will stay in the comfortable Hotel Haaga near the airport with each room having private facilities.

To compensate the nights in the hides, good rural hotels will be used. Here, after breakfast, all tour participants can recover and rest until noon should they wish.

Three nights will be spent in specially designed hides. We generally arrive in these hides from around 4pm and remain there until around 7-7.30am the following morning. There are a number of different hides based in different areas (near Lieska and Kuhmo) which overlook regular feeding areas for the resident predators. We shall use two in Lieska for 2 nights focusing on Wolverine, and one near Kuhmo for one night favoured by Wolf and Bear. Although slow motion and whispering is standard hide behaviour, these hides offer enough space to move without too much limitation. Moreover, they are specially designed for photographers complete with tripod head mount screws and cloth sleeves to push your camera lens through. Regardless of whether you are interested in photography, the hides are also superb for viewing with very close views possible. The hides cater for small groups and all have long-drop eco toilets, and bunk beds should anyone want to lie down. Sleeping bags will be provided along with a snack meal and hot drinks to get through the night.

During Finland's mid-summer, there is a degree of light present nearly 24 hours a day. The darkest hours of the night between 11pm and 3am is the prime time for mammal watching, though of course you are welcome to rest when you wish during your time in the hides. After leaving the hides in the morning you will be taken to a nearby hotel to have breakfast where you will also have use of a shared room with en suite bathrooms. Should you wish to have a single room at the hotel, these are subject to availability at the additional supplement specified on our website.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.

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