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 Helsinki to London

Departs
July

Focus
Wolverine, Grey Wolf, Brown Bear and other mammals.

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.
- Enjoy fantastic Brown Bear views and a superb chance of Grey Wolf from specialist hides.
- Specific excursions for the rare Forest Reindeer and Siberian Flying Squirrel.
- Excellent photographic opportunities.
- Look for Black and Red-throated Diver, Osprey and White-tailed Eagle among other birds.
- Search for the endemic Saimaa Ringed Seal.
- Explore Finland's vast Taiga Forests.







Wolverine, Brown Bear and Grey Wolf

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Introduction

If you dream about seeing or photographing wild Brown Bears, Wolverines and Grey Wolves, then this is the tour for you; Finland is without doubt the place to be! Home to an estimated population of around 2500 bears, 500 wolverines and around 300 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. This tour also offers added value as we search for rare species whose occurrence in Finland is hardly known by many. The endemic Saima-ringed seal, the nocturnal Siberian Flying Squirrel and the shy Forest Reindeer. Given the increasing reliability of sightings, we are confident that an unforgettable experience waits 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 London to Helsinki

Today we will arrive in Helsinki and meet our leader before transferring to a lovely nearby hotel, just a short drive from the airport. We will enjoy dinner as a group together here before a late evening excursion targeting several species of ungulates, which are more common in this area of south Finland. We have an excellent chance to find Elk and Roe Deer, and we may also find such introduced species such as Fallow Deer and White-tailed Deer. Due to midsummer and the late twilight period, the return to the hotel will not commence until around midnight. After all, the twilight period is the best time to observe ungulates! There will be a slower start the following morning to catch up on some sleep.


Elk

Day 2 Oravi & Saimaa Ringed Seal Search

After a longer night's sleep and an extensive breakfast, we make the transfer north-east to the village of Oravi, located in the Greater Saimaa Lake Basin. This drive will take roughly 4 hours, and we will aim to stop for comfort breaks, snacks, and any wildlife along the way.

Upon arrival, we will check into our hotel, located right on the lake shore. We will then meet our local guide for a guided boat excursion in our search for the endemic freshwater Saimaa Ringed


Lake Saimaa

Seal, where less than 500 remain globally. With our local guide's unrivalled knowledge, we aim to find this unique, endangered pinniped. As we travel, Osprey, Red-necked Grebe and Black-throated Diver are likely to be seen, with Beaver also possible here. We will over dine and overnight at our hotel.

Day 3 Transfer to Lieska and First Night in Hide

After a hearty breakfast, will make the 3-hour journey further north to Lieska, where we will break for lunch, of course looking for wildlife as we travel. We will check our luggage into our hotel, and make the short trip to begin our first hide session of the trip. This stake out is undoubtedly one of the best places on earth to observe and photograph the Wolverine! The largest terrestrial member of the mustelid family, this hardy carnivore is almost constantly on the move, and so in order to see this elusive and secretive animal, it must 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.

This location that offers a view of a lake, with an adjacent hill with primeval forest on the other side. The set up offers photographers the opportunity to use hides at the bottom of the hill. Those not so dedicated to photography will be spoiled by the panoramic views that the windows of the log cabin offer. This is undoubtedly the most luxurious and exclusive hide in all of Scandinavia when it comes to observing large carnivores. In addition to Wolverines, Grey Wolf and Brown Bear often frequent the forest clearing, with Eurasian Lynx also being a rare possibility here.


Wolverine


Eurasian Lynx

Day 4 Lieska and Second Night in Hide

After what we hope will be a productive night and our large carnivore targets achieved, we will be collected from the hide at around 7.30am, where we will then head to the hotel for a freshen up and rest. We will have a local lunch, and we may have a light excursion in the afternoon around the local habitat, although the majority of the day will be resting. As evening approaches, we will again head back to the hide for our second night. Again, we will be hoping for Wolverines, and any of the other three large carnivores that also inhabit these boreal forests.


The View From The Hide

Day 5 Transfer to Kuhmo and Third Night in Hide


Brown Bear

On leaving the hide after the previous night's vigil, we will transfer to our nearby hotel where after breakfast, our en-suite rooms can be used to shower, refresh and rest before gathering again in the dining room. We will then begin the 1-hour drive to Kuhmo, arriving at our hotel in time for lunch. Similarly to the days previous, we will head to the hide in the afternoon, which will be around 45 minutes away. Arriving at the hide, we will settle in for a night on the look out for more of Europe's large carnivores. Here, Brown Bears and Grey Wolves are the most likely carnivore, and the open fields allow for wonderful views of both caniforms in the midsummer lighting.


Grey Wolf

On the border with Russia, Kuhmo is considered "no man's land", and is a region where nature takes over. Aside for the mammalian highlights, watching from the hide and observing resident White-tailed Eagles, Black Kites and Ravens near the baiting sites, a carnivore will show up seemingly out of nowhere!

Animals can come from all directions and at any time. No night is the same here in terms of what shows up and the time they show up during the session. Even though feeding takes place, it is the animals themselves who determine when and how often they come. With luck on our side, we might see both Bear and Wolf together here. It is also not unusual for Wolverine to also turn up!

Day 6 Explore Kuhmo and The Surrounding Areas

After our night in the hide, we will return to the hotel near Kuhmo and begin the standard recovery morning procedure. Following breakfast there will be the chance to rest into the afternoon or for those who want to explore from the hotel you can do of course! After lunch, there will be the opportunity for an excursion to explore the surrounding wilderness with a special focus on locating the rare and shy Forest Reindeer. The key to success is locating females with calves in the vast area. The guide's knowledge of the area is essential for locating this shy ungulate. We will then overnight in the hotel located near Kuhmo.


Forest Reindeer

Day 7 Transfer Vierumäki and Siberian Squirrel Search

After a longer night's sleep and an extensive breakfast, we will transfer south to the village of Vierumäki. During this scenic 5-hour drive, we will stop regularly for birding and any wildlife we may come across. There are many lakes and forests on the journey, home to various Scandinavian species we will only know from winter months or on migration here in the UK. Common Crane, Common Goldeneye, Osprey, Black-throated Diver, Red-necked Grebe, Redwing and Brambling are just some of the species we will hope to encounter.

After dinner, an evening excursion is planned for one of the most difficult to find mammals in Europe. The Siberian Flying Squirrel. Their nocturnal existence, but also the often-dense primeval forests where they occur, are the main reasons why their existence remains so unnoticed. A small patch of protected forest, consisting of Norway spruce and aspen, is our destination for the evening. The site is home to several nesting trees where the Siberian flying squirrel takes shelter. Hopefully, it will make an appearance at dusk!


Siberian Flying Squirrel

With the fact we are staying up late again, the program offers the opportunity to sleep longer the following morning before continuing the journey back to Helsinki.

Day 8 Transfer Helsinki and fly to the UK

Following breakfast and after packing, we will make a top back at Nuuksio, for a morning excursion to search for Red-throated Divers (the search being time permitting) and lunch at the local nature centre. Finally, we will make the drive to the airport in Helsinki. We will then take a late afternoon flight from Helsinki, landing back in the UK.

Tour Grading and Focus

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. This is a dedicated mammals finding tour. The focus will be on doing all we can to achieve sightings of the key target mammals and the other rare and unusual mammals we explain in this itinerary. At all times, due attention will be made to birds too and we will always be alert to find everything we can.

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 15ºC and 25ºC, dropping to 5 -10ºC at night.

Food & Accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price. A rental sleeping bag is also included for the three hide sessions.

Comfortable hotels with each room having private facilities are used throughout. To compensate for the nights in the hides, good rural hotels will be used. Here, after breakfast, all tour participants can recover and rest should they wish.

Extra Information on Hides

General Hide Information

Three nights will be spent in specially designed wildlife hides. Regardless of whether you are interested in photography, the hides are also excellent for wildlife viewing, with close encounters possible.

The hides are equipped with a long-drop eco-toilet and bunk beds for anyone who would like to lie down. Sleeping bags are provided, as well as a snack meal and hot drinks to help you get through the night.

We generally arrive at the hides at around 4:00 pm and remain there until approximately 7:00–7:30 am the following morning.

There are several different hides in different locations around Lieksa and Kuhmo, overlooking regular feeding areas used by the local wildlife. Inside the hides, slow movements and whispering are the standard rules in order to avoid disturbing the animals.

Specific Hide Information

The hide in Kuhmo offers enough space to move around without too many restrictions. It has been specially designed for photographers and is equipped with ball-head mounting screws and cloth sleeves through which camera lenses can be positioned.

Photographers using telephoto lenses should bring their own ball head if they wish to attach their camera to the mounting system in the hide. To avoid disturbing the animals, people using compact or bridge cameras, should take their pictures through the windows.

The general observation hide in Lieksa is located higher up the hill and overlooks the feeding station from above. The view through the windows is impressive, and there is plenty of space to move around without significant restrictions.

In addition to the baiting sites lower down near the lake and the grassy field, bait is also placed in the pine trees directly in front of the hide. Wildlife can appear in close proximity.

As there are no cloth sleeves for positioning camera lenses, photographers using compact or bridge cameras take their pictures through the windows.

The dedicated photography hides are located at the bottom of the hill. These smaller hides have been specially designed for photographers using telephoto lenses. They are equipped with ball-head mounting screws and cloth sleeves through which telephoto lenses can be positioned.

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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