

Sweden's Bears

Naturetrek Tour itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Stockholm and transfer 'Bear Lodge'.
Day 2	Bear Hide.
Day 3	Bear Lodge (or Bear Hide).
Day 4	Transfer Stockholm and fly London.

Departs

July - September

Focus

Bears, birds and other natural history.

Grading

A/B. Optional walks may be taken around the lodge.

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code SWE04) or current brochure

Highlights:

- Maximum group size of only 8 people
- Idyllic surroundings of lakes, forests & hills
- Simple guesthouse & cabins in glorious lakeside setting
- Overnight in a comfortable bear hide
- Excellent chance of seeing European Brown Bear
- Elk and Red Squirrel also likely; Beaver possible
- Boreal birding during long daylight hours in summer
- Delicious food served by Eva Vargas
- Expertly guided by local bear expert Håkan Vargas



*From top: Brown Bear, bear cubs, European Elk
Images by Håkan Vargas*



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk



Lakeside lodges by Håkan Vargas

Introduction

This is an easy, stress-free 4-day holiday to an idyllic, rolling land of forests and lakes where you will look for Brown Bears from a comfortable purpose-built hide, and enjoy the natural history, beauty and extraordinary tranquillity of a magical place a short flight from London. It is the Brown Bears on which you will primarily focus on this holiday, in the expert company of our guide and friend, Håkan Vargas. Håkan has been studying and photographing the bears in these forests for many years and, with his father, has built a comfortable log-cabin hide at the edge of a clearing in the spruce forest, just a couple of kilometres from the lakeside lodge which he runs with his wife, Eva, a wonderful hostess who will keep you well fortified with delicious meals that feature many local, organic, forest ingredients. The lodge is small and homely, primarily consisting of a cosy dining-cum-sitting room that looks out over the lake and surrounding hills, and is warmed on cold evenings by a splendid log stove. Accommodation is in separate, small, semi-detached cabins, set on a wooded slope overlooking the lake, views of which can be enjoyed from individual terraces. Each room is small and simple; just a bed, a small log stove, and a wash basin and jug of water; for this is how the locals like to enjoy their wilderness. There are a couple of separate, Swedish-style, shared toilet blocks and a single shower and sauna built into a jetty and terrace that jut out over the lake. This will be your accommodation on your first and last night (unless a second night is needed in the Bear Hide, an option that will be offered only if you do not see a bear on your first night in the hide), and from it you will be able to enjoy time at leisure – walking through the forests, birdwatching, botanising, swimming in the lake, or enjoying a relaxing sauna.



Realistically, a Bear sighting is not guaranteed, although one Bear a night is averaged and the success rate hovers around 80%. With two possible nights in the hide, our chances are therefore high! But, for all Håkan's passion, the magic of this place to us – and we hope to you! – is not just in its wild Brown Bears. It is in the beauty of the scenery; the utter tranquillity; the rich natural history; the accessibility of this wild place; and the charm, hospitality and the vision of its English-speaking host and hostess.

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

Bear Lodge

We depart on an early morning flight to Stockholm (normally flying from London Heathrow, though other options are often available). Arriving around 1100 hours, your small group (maximum 8) will then continue northwards by train to the small town of Bollnäs. The journey through the beautiful Swedish countryside takes around two and a half hours, travelling either direct or with one change en-route, and makes for a relaxing and peaceful way in which to start your time in Sweden! Your hosts, Håkan and Eva, will meet you on arrival in Bollnäs and the last leg of your journey is a short drive deep into the forests to your final destination, a simple wilderness lodge that occupies an exquisite lakeside position amongst rolling, forested hills.

The views from the terrace of the lodge, looking across the large lake, are stunning. The silence and stillness experienced here is intoxicating, broken only by the eerie calls of the breeding Black-throated Divers that echo across the lake and the occasional croak of a passing Raven.



On your first afternoon you will be able to relax and enjoy some time at leisure, soaking in the atmosphere of the place. Tracks in the vicinity of the lodge will enable you to take walks into the forest in search of birds, butterflies and botany. The lake is wonderfully clear and warm enough to enjoying a refreshing swim in, especially after some time in the lake-side sauna! Alternatively you might prefer to row, canoe or fish on the lake, surrounded by Black-throated Divers, Goosanders and Goldeneyes, and keeping an eye skywards for a passing Golden Eagle, Goshawk or Honey Buzzard! The vicinity of the lodge is a particularly good spot for butterflies and moths. A variety of hawk-moths occur here, and the magnificent Camberwell Beauty butterfly, and a variety of woodland fritillaries and blues, may be seen around the lodge on sunny days. A three-course dinner will be taken in the lodge's cosy dining room overlooking the lake.

Day 2

Bear Hide

This morning you will have further time at leisure. Then, after one of Eva's delicious lunches, enjoyed outside (if the weather is fine) on the lodge's spacious wooden balcony that overlooks the lake, Håkan will guide you gently up through the forest to the Bear Hide. As you walk, you will need to be as quiet as you can, but listen to Håkan as he tells you a little about the bears and their habits, perhaps pointing out any footprints, or scratching on the trees, or raided anthills! The hide is cosy, with comfortable seats and viewing slots at the front, and comfortable beds at the back for those not prepared to sit up all through the night. At the far end is a separate toilet with wash basin.

The Brown Bears often appear between around 9pm and midnight, though they can appear at any time during the night and so it pays to remain awake, and watching, for as long as you are able (though any sleepers will, of course, be woken should a bear appear in the clearing at any stage). As you wait, whilst the sense of hope and anticipation mounts, Håkan will be happy to entertain you with stories of the forest (all conducted in whispers, of course!). With a little luck, we hope that you will find yourself taken by surprise as a Brown Bear suddenly appears, as if from nowhere, in this beautiful and atmospheric clearing, ambling through the forest in front of the hide before night falls.



A bear appears in the clearing

Days 3

Bear Lodge (or Bear Hide)

You will remain in the hide during the early morning. There may still be a chance of a passing bear, and it is fascinating to watch the forest come alive as the rays of the morning sun warm the clearing and the species in it. Jays and, particularly, Ravens may amuse you with their human-like squabbles, tussles and social interaction; birds of prey (perhaps a Sparrowhawk, or even a Goshawk or Honey Buzzard) slip quietly in and out of the clearing in search of prey; and forest tits, Spotted Flycatchers, Crossbills and other passerines are at their most active, restlessly flitting about in search of food. You will be able to enjoy an early breakfast snack in the hide as this scene unfolds. Then, as activity begins to diminish, you will pack up and leave the hide for the walk back down through the forest to your lakeside lodge, enjoying what wildlife you may encounter en route, and appreciating the enveloping stillness and beautiful scenery.

On your arrival at the lodge, Eva will have a delicious brunch awaiting you. If you have been lucky with a bear sighting during the overnight vigil from the hide, you will spend tonight at the lodge again, and enjoy an afternoon at leisure. Depending on recent wildlife sightings around the lodge, Håkan and Eva may offer to take you into the forests in search of the Moose (or European Elk), which often frequent the area, or perhaps to a nearby Beaver Lodge in the hope of spotting one of its busy inhabitants. If, however, you have not seen a bear, Håkan will take anyone who wishes back to the hide for a second night.

Days 4

Fly London

Following a morning at leisure, you must pack and drag yourself away from this peaceful spot in order to take the train back to Stockholm airport for the direct late afternoon or early evening flight back to London.

Tour grading

A/B. Optional walks may be taken around the lodge. The paths and tracks are generally good, and Håkan has placed wooden boards down across the boggiest parts of the walk to the bear hide to avoid would-be bear watchers getting wet feet! The walk to the hide ascends gently uphill throughout its course.

Focus

Primarily Bears. Birds, butterflies and other aspects of natural history may also be enjoyed.

Weather

The weather and temperatures are comparable with what you would expect in southern England at the same season, though more sunshine can generally be expected. If anything, summers can be a little warmer, and autumn nights a little colder, than in the UK.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday except for dinner during your journey home on the final evening. For two nights you will be staying in small and homely lakeside wilderness lodge. Accommodation here is in separate, twin-bedded semi-detached cabins, set on a wooded slope overlooking the lake. Each room is simple; just a bed, a small log stove, and a wash basin and jug of water. There is a separate, Swedish-style (composting!) toilet block shared between cabins, and a single shower and sauna built into a jetty over the lake. This will be your accommodation on your first and last night (unless a second night is needed in the Bear Hide, an option that will be offered only if you do not see a bear on your first night in the hide).



Cabins at the Bear Lodge

On your second (and possibly your third) night, you will stay in the Bear Hide. This is a well-constructed wooden cabin that is warm and cosy, with comfortable seats and viewing slots at the front, and comfortable beds (with pillow and sleeping bag) at the back for those not prepared to sit up all through the night. At the far end is a separate, shared toilet with wash basin.

Flights & extensions

We fly directly from London Heathrow to Stockholm Arlanda airport with British Airways. We are happy to organise regional flights wherever possible. Currently, indirect flights are available from Manchester (SAS), Birmingham (KLM), Newcastle (KLM), and direct flights are available from Edinburgh and London Gatwick with Norwegian Air Shuttle. As these flights do not always fit in perfectly with the tour dates or

group flight times, we would be happy to arrange additional night's accommodation in Sweden before and / or after the tour to enable you to travel from your preferred airport.

If you wish to extend your stay with a few days in Stockholm, we would be very happy to delay your flight home by a couple of days, and help book accommodation in the city for you.

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. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.