

Wild Sweden: Realm of the Wolf

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Stockholm and transfer Bergslagen.

Days 2/4 Wildlife excursions around Bergslagen

Day 5 Transfer Stockholm and fly London.

Departs

May to August

Focus

Mammals (particularly Grey Wolf, Elk and Eurasian Beaver)

Grading

A/B. As well as gentle walks, this holiday also includes longer walks on rough forest trails, so an enjoyment of walking is required

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code SWE06) or brochure

Highlights:

- Immersion in Swedish wilderness
- Track wolves inside their territory
- An excellent chance to hear wolves howling
- Elk in 'royal forests'
- Journey by boat at dusk to look for beavers
- Enjoy the forest at night, sitting around a campfire in wolf territory
- Mountain Hare, Red Squirrel, Red Fox expected and even Lynx have been seen!
- Black Woodpecker, Black-throated Diver, Capercaillie and Black Grouse possible.



From top: Grey Wolf howling (Skogens Konung), Swedish Wilderness, Elk (Simon Green).



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Introduction

It is just a short international flight from London to Stockholm and a drive of less than two hours to the tranquil and beautiful forests of central Sweden, home to such mammals as Elk, Grey Wolf and Eurasian Lynx, species all long extinct in the British Isles. It is these sought-after animals on which we will focus during this fascinating 5-day holiday amongst the scenic lakes and dense forests of Sweden's Bergslagen region, in which these larger mammals far outnumber the local human population.

Our guides live in these forests and spend much of their time tracking and watching its four-legged inhabitants, to which they are deeply devoted. We will spend three full days exploring the forests of the region, enjoying their birdlife and such mammals as Red Squirrel and perhaps Stoat or Pine Marten by day. On one evening, we will take to one of the nearby lakes where Eurasian Beaver is common, travelling silently by electric boat. We are likely to pass several beaver lodges along the way and, as dusk falls, we will search for the inhabitants of these lodges as they commence their busy evening activities. On another day we will explore the territory of a local Grey Wolf pack, walking in the forests of the region looking for signs and tracks of the pack. A sighting of these wolves in such dense terrain is a rarity but, returning to the forest as dusk falls, we will enjoy dinner over the campfire in the heart of the forest and our guide will call to the pack and endeavour to attract a response — for the howling of wolves at night is one of the most memorable experiences that the natural world has to offer!

We will spend much of our time travelling on foot through the forests using only the animal trails, and our guides will share with us their knowledge of tracking both Elk and Grey Wolves and demonstrate various ways of communicating with them. As many of the species that we will be searching for are easier to see at dusk – and we will need to stay out late to try and hear the howls of the local wolves – we can expect some late nights during the tour, but no compulsory early mornings!

We will also spend the final night of the holiday actually camping in comfortable tents out in the wilderness within wolf territory. We shall enjoy a delicious dinner around the campfire and hopefully listen to the local wolf pack howling nearby. In the morning we shall have access to the hotel to freshen up after such a special and unique night.



Elk

There will be time to relax during the day too, appreciating the stillness and the stunning scenery. As we explore our beautiful surroundings, we hope to find a number of special birds including Whooper Swan, Black-throated Diver, Common Crane, Crested Tit, Black Woodpecker and Ural Owl, while butterflies may include the impressive Camberwell Beauty. Everything will be enjoyed to the full.



Black-throated Diver

At Färna Manor we shall be staying in beautiful accommodation with very tranquil and relaxing surroundings with excellent habitat on our doorstep. There is a spa and award-winning food here, adding a real element of luxury to our stay.

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 Stockholm, transfer Bergslagen

We depart London Heathrow this morning on a direct flight to Stockholm, where our small group (maximum 7) will be met by our English-speaking tour leader. From here, we will drive north-west for around two hours along the open and remarkably traffic-free roads that make Sweden such a relaxing and peaceful country in which to travel. Our base for the next three nights is Färna Manor, an extremely comfortable country hotel surrounded by both varied wildlife and a rich local history.

After dinner on our first evening, we will search the forests by vehicle and perhaps take a short walk, looking for Elk (or Moose, as they are known in north America), the 'king of the forest' and the mightiest of all Nordic animals. With a population of over 300,000, Sweden boasts more Elk per square kilometre than any other country in the world, and in these 'royal forests' it is possible to see 10 or more of these magnificent animals on an evening's drive as they emerge from the forests at dusk to feed. We will scan the area as we travel with a powerful spotlight and try to find other mammals of the area, too. Other species to look out for include Roe Deer, Mountain Hare, European Hare, European Badger, Red Fox and – if we're really lucky – Eurasian Lynx!

Day 2

Excursions around Bergslagen

Today we shall enjoy a relaxed start before heading out into the surrounding wilderness to nearby Lake Norrsjön. Here we will enjoy some gentle birding and an exploration of the lake and surrounding forests. We will hope to find Black-throated Diver, Common Sandpiper, Black Woodpecker, Osprey and, with luck, White-tailed Eagle. There are also beaver lodges here, too. We will also have the special experience of getting out onto the water ourselves in canoes, an extremely peaceful activity, providing the opportunity to appreciate our beautiful surroundings from a different perspective. We will paddle calmly across the water looking out for any wildlife as we go. Maybe an Osprey will be fishing overhead or a Black-throated Diver will be with us on the water. You don't need to have any previous canoeing experience as your guide will be doing the paddling, leaving you free to watch and enjoy. You may paddle if you wish and you may also stay on land if you wish and relax at the lakeside watching out for wildlife.

After an exciting morning on and around the lake, we will return to our spa hotel for some free time and a chance to relax this afternoon. You may wish to use the spa facilities, go for a swim, or maybe take a walk around the surrounding habitat. There are some late evenings on this holiday but there will also be time to relax and enjoy our excellent base. This evening we will enjoy a campfire dinner in the forest at one of the guide's favorite locations. We really have the opportunity on this holiday to immerse ourselves in the fantastic habitat that surrounds us.

After dinner, we will head out again, searching for Elk in particular in the surrounding habitat and the other possible mammals of the area that we could find, using the spotlight. It's sure to be an exciting day.

Day 3

Excursions around Bergslagen

After our nighttime explorations the evening before, there will be a relaxed start again today. For early risers, however, there will certainly be plenty of areas to explore, should you wish.

It will soon be time to head out together once more and today we will take a picnic from Färna Manor to enjoy out in the field. We will then enjoy a lovely afternoon walk in a nearby nature reserve, exploring beautiful, old growth forest. This will likely be at either Utterdalen, Lappland or Ormdalsleden Nature Reserves and it will depend on where our guides feel there is the best chance to see species we may not have already encountered. We will be staying out on foot and will likely be walking for around two hours with breaks and stopping and starting as we find wildlife.



Camp Fire Dinner

Birds such as Osprey and Eurasian Goshawk may be seen, as well as many woodland birds such as woodpeckers, flycatchers, tits and finches. A swimming beaver is also always a possibility! Mammals such as Red Squirrel, Elk and perhaps Pine Marten, may be seen during our walks and we will enjoy everything we encounter.

The theme of this holiday will be to really immerse ourselves in Swedish wilderness. If the weather is kind to us, we will enjoy a delicious dinner out in the field around a crackling campfire this evening, overlooking a beautiful lake and providing a meal never to be forgotten.

We will then head out in search of beavers, which leave their lodges at dusk to spend an industrious night felling lakeside trees and saplings. We will travel silently by electric boat, passing several beaver lodges as we float along the lake and its interconnected rivers. A little quiet patience is required here, but with luck we are likely to see several individuals swimming about and going about their nightly feeding. As the light summer sky eventually darkens, we will leave the beavers and return to the guesthouse for a good night's rest. We often also see Tawny Owl during this outing and plenty of Northern and Daubenton's Bats.



Eurasian Beaver

Day 4

A night spent in Wolf territory!

Another relaxed start this morning, with an opportunity to enjoy the pool and spa facilities at the hotel or to explore the grounds. We will have lunch at Färna Manor.

The rest of the day will be dedicated to the mighty Grey Wolf. We will immerse ourselves in a territory of these magnificent creatures and actually end the day sleeping in comfortable tents in the forest in an attempt to listen to them howling. It is set to be a magical and unique experience to end our time in Sweden.

Not long ago, wolves were virtually extinct in Sweden, but today, their numbers are increasing, along with those of the other large predators (Brown Bear, Eurasian Lynx and Wolverine), and the country accommodates a population of around 300 individuals, with their stronghold being central Sweden. They still remain a threatened species (sadly the Grey Wolf was recently declared critically endangered in Sweden), with legal and illegal hunting being the most common cause of death. Over the last 20 years, however, several pairs of wolves have established territories in the vicinity and there are now wolves across the whole of this region.

With the aid of data from recent fieldwork, our tour leader will choose the area(s) within the wolf territory with the most potential, and we will spend time walking and tracking in the forests and swamps of the region looking for signs of the family group. Although a sighting of these wolves is difficult and must be seen as a bonus rather than an expectation, hearing a wolf pack howling is an incredibly special experience and something that stays with you forever. We have a very good chance to achieve this today.

In the late afternoon and as darkness approaches, we will set up our comfortable camp near a lakeside in a perfect, strategic position to have the best chance of hearing the magnificent wolf pack that we shall share the forest with tonight. We will listen for their howls whilst enjoying dinner around a campfire and we may need to walk after dinner to get closer to their location. It is likely to be late by the time we hear any calls and our guide may also call to the pack and endeavour to attract a response. The howling of wolves at night is one of the most memorable experiences that the natural world has to offer! As we walk through this fantastic habitat, we will of course have the chance to see a range of species including Crested Tit, Common Crossbills and both Black and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, while it is not uncommon to hear and possibly see European Nightjar as the light fades. There is also a chance to see Capercaillie and Black Grouse on any day or night throughout the tour either while walking or driving through the forest.

At our camping area in perfect wilderness, we will sleep in comfortable tents tonight, to immerse ourselves in the environment in a way that very few have done. Please see below for more information on the camping and tents.



Wild Camping

Day 5

Transfer Stockholm, Fly London

Waking today in the heart of Grey Wolf territory, we will enjoy a hot drink and a final opportunity to soak up the beauty of our surroundings. Crested Tits and Black Woodpeckers may be heard and seen in the woodland while Black-throated Divers may be out on the water. Making our way back to Färna Manor for a hot shower and a freshen up, we will then have a leisurely journey back to the airport, stopping for any wildlife along the way and to stretch our legs. Reaching Stockholm, we will say our farewells to Sweden and our leader after a very special few days packed with memorable experiences.

Grading

A/B. A reasonable level of fitness is necessary to enjoy the walking offered on this holiday. We will spend much of the day, as well as at night after dark, taking walks through wild forest, sometimes on animal, rather than man-made, tracks. The paths and trails are generally good (though sometimes bushy/rocky and uneven in places). Depending on the location of the wildlife, however, we sometimes choose to walk OFF the trails for around a kilometre to get into a better position to see or hear the local wildlife.

Please note that as most mammals generally appear around dusk and wolf-howling is carried out after dark, there will be some late nights on this tour. We often stay out until after midnight as it stays light very late here, but we will enjoy a late breakfast the next day and our mornings will be taken at a much more leisurely pace.



Beaver excursion at dusk (Jan Nordstrom)

Focus

Mammals, particularly Elk, Eurasian Beaver and Grey Wolf. Birds, butterflies and other aspects of natural history will also be enjoyed. NB - Most European mammals are generally shy and retiring in their habits and most active at dawn and dusk. Sightings of the species outlined above, therefore, cannot be guaranteed, and certainly we hope to hear, rather than see, the local wolves.

Food & Accommodation



Färna Manor

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. We stay for the first three nights at the fabulous Färna Manor, where all rooms are en-suite and have free wifi. All rooms also have hairdryers. The hotel has an outdoor pool and spa which you may use as a hotel guest, and provides excellent meals with locally-sourced ingredients. Weather permitting, we will aim to eat

two or three dinners out in the field around a campfire. Excellent meals will be provided for us in beautifully scenic locations.

The final night of the holiday will be spent wild camping within a Grey Wolf territory. We provide the following top-quality outdoor equipment for a very comfortable night in the wild including:

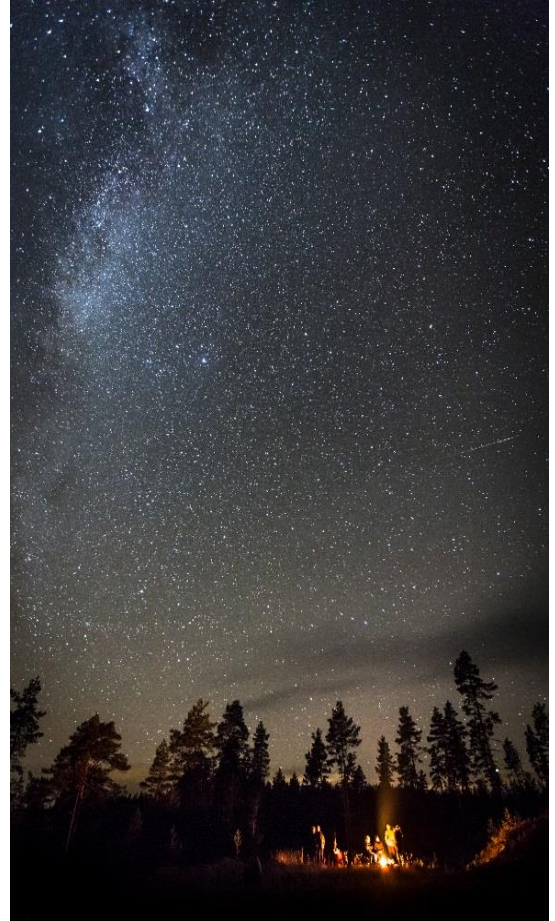
- Tent (choose single or double)
- Warm sleeping bag with pillow and fresh inner sheet
- Sleeping-mat (inflatable 50mm)
- Toilet: There will be a dry toilet in a small booth.

Weather

The weather and temperatures are comparable with what you would expect in the UK at the same season, though more sunshine can generally be expected. If anything, summers can be a little warmer, and nights a little colder, than in the UK. The days are much longer at this time of year, being further north!

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.



Campfire under the stars in Wolf territory (Marcus Westberg)

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Enjoying Swedish Wilderness around a campfire