



Europe's Last Wilderness - Poland

Inclusions:

• Accommodation for ten nights on twin share basis in guesthouses, small hotels, homestays, cabins or tents (dependant on time of year and trip route) • All meals from evening of day 1, to breakfast on day 11 • Transfers to and from Warsaw • All land and river transportation • All nature and sightseeing excursions • Services of an English-speaking nature guide • Entrances, permissions, tickets and NP fees • Use of all necessary equipment, such as kayaks.

Exclusions:

• International flights and taxes • Lunch on day 1 and meals other than breakfast on day 11 • Personal spending money • Tips and gratuities • Travel insurance.

Unique holiday features

• Explore one of the last untouched European habitats • Travel through Europe's 'Amazon', by kayak, foot and horse drawn cart • Spot Bison, Birds, Boar and Beavers

Extensions available?

• Warsaw city break, with guided visits to the Old city, Royal castle tour and National Museum

Description

The Northeast of Poland contains one of the very last completely unspoilt European habitats. In this wild and relatively undiscovered corner of Europe, are located three magnificent National Parks that still contain a huge variety of endangered species living in their natural wetland habitat. This unusual and exciting wildlife encounter takes us deep into the marshes, river systems and swamp forests of Biebrza, Narew and Bialowieza National Parks. Here, amid the meandering lowland rivers, flooded wild meadows and the best-preserved fragment of ancient lowland forest anywhere in Europe, can be found European bison, wolves, lynx, elk, deer, wild boar, beavers and an incredible array of birds. Our guide is an English-speaking naturalist who has studied this area extensively and will provide a highly informed insight into the fauna and flora of the region. Using a variety of watercraft and travelling on foot will allow us to get incredibly close to the wildlife.

The journey begins with the short flight to Warsaw, where we are met and driven to Biebrza National Park for a briefing and short walk into the wetlands. We have four days to explore Biebrza, moving around by kayak, on foot and by horse-drawn cart to reach the best viewing places. We track wolves and elk, and go looking for beavers, as well as enjoying the panoply of wetland birds and birds of prey. We are likely to see storks, herons, swans, ducks, snipes, eagles, goshawk, buzzards and myriad other species.

The whole area has also long been a rich melting pot for a mixture of different peoples, cultures and religions, with Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Jews and Tartars all sharing their lives here. It is a country of small family farms and friendly people, living like their forefathers, sometimes by very traditional means. They still plough their fields using horses and simple, self-made machines. There will be opportunities to meet the local people and sample traditional Polish food and drinks such as bigos, pierogi, babka, and kielbasa.

After Biebrza, we visit the baroque pearl of Tykocin, with its exquisite seventeenth-century synagogue, before continuing to Narew National Park, often called Poland's Amazon. Here the Narew River meanders tortuously through the landscape, forming countless oxbows and water meadows. Travelling silently by punt through the reed beds of the Narew River is an experience not to be missed. We also make a hike through the wetlands, visiting the traditional wooden architecture of the region, as well as keeping a keen eye out for rare birds such as bittern and marsh harrier.

The final leg of the journey takes us past Tartar villages and orthodox churches en route to Bialowieza Primeval Forest. Bialowieza is one of the last surviving tracts of wild wood that once covered most of Europe in prehistoric times. The forest contains over 1,000 plant species, and the forest floor is carpeted with a rich array of plants that delight the eye and stimulate the senses. The fauna in the Bialowieza Forest is as diverse as the flora, with a wide variety of mammals, reptiles, amphibians and birds. The only remaining European bison roam freely here as well as the tarpan, an extremely rare species of wild horse. A thousand years ago, bison crossed Europe in thunderous herds. By the beginning of this century, however, over-hunting had reduced these herds to a few bison living in the Bialowieza Forest. Today, breeding programmes have swelled the numbers to over 300, and all bison are protected.

The attributes that make the Bialowieza Forest a biological wonder have also made it a magnet for archaeologists. Because much of the area has been largely undisturbed, artefacts and sites still remain from pre-Slavic civilizations. We have three days to explore this wonderland, tracking bison, visiting a mysterious and powerfully moving stone circle in the middle of the forest, and interpreting the rich flora and fauna, before sadly bidding farewell and returning to Warsaw for the flight home.

Min/Max passenger nos.:	2 to 8
Local departure dates and city of departure:	Warsaw - For up to date availability and fixed group departure dates, please email us. This tour can be carried out from May to late September; the route and inclusions will differ slightly according to time of year. This tour can be run with a min of 2 passengers so tailmade departure dates are possible.
Total local duration: (excl. Travel to/from destination)	11 Days
Climate Care supp. per person: (optional)	£6
Grade:	Gentle
Land Only Price per person from:	£1250





Day-by-Day Itinerary

- Day 1** Arrive Warsaw, where you will meet your local representative, and transfer to Gugny, located in the south of Biebrza National Park. Welcome dinner and introduction, before a short hike into Biebrza wetlands (Dinner) Overnight in Gugny village guesthouse on full board basis.
- Day 2** Hike into the heart of Lawki Fen from Gugny village to the Barwik observation tower and hopefully eye-to-eye with the elk. Lunch at King of Bierbrza local open-air museum, a small freshwater laboratory and visit to a Jewish inn. Chance to experience bow shooting. Overnight in Gugny village guesthouse on full board basis.
- Day 3** Kayak trip from Goniadz to Bialy Grad along the meanders of the Biebrza river. Black and white stork as well as grey heron, common snipe, swans and numerous ducks will be observed. Also a chance to see beavers. Overnight in Gugny village guesthouse on full board basis.
- Day 4** Hike and bike (total distance approx. 12 km to bike and 3 km to walk one way) into the Red Marsh, where you can watch elk and track wolves. There are also numerous birds of prey such as spotted eagles, goshawks and buzzards. There are diverse plant habitats, ranging from bog forest to sandy dunes, and from wetlands to ancient oak forest. The muddy trails are fun, and offer spectacular viewpoints and beautiful marshland panoramas and the chance to view elk. Dinner served by the camp fire. Overnight in Gugny village guesthouse on full board basis.
- Day 5** Transfer to Tykocin, a beautiful baroque city with a seventeenth-century synagogue. On the way XIXth century villages, scenic view points, bird spots, walk along small naturally meandering river Neresl and the castle. Dinner is served in Jewish restaurant. Overnight in a Tykocin guesthouse - House under the Black Stork on full board basis.
- Day 6** Visit to European White Stork Village Pentowo with 24 white stork nests, stork gallery, watching tower and XIX century Polish Manor house. Hiking and kayaking in Narew national Park to explore the wetlands and traditional wooden architecture. Overnight in a Tykocin guesthouse - House under the Black Stork on full board basis.
- Day 7** Transfer to Bialowieza Forest visiting the Tatar village in Knyszyn Landscape Park, with its many wooden houses dating back to the eighteenth century, and observe orthodox churches en route to Bialowieza. In the forest, spot bison, wolves and lynxes. Overnight in Bialowieza village in House under the White Stork on full board basis.

- Day 8** An extensive visit to Bialowieza National Park introduces you to the last primeval lowland forest in Central Europe, with more than 250 species of bird, together with most European mammals and amphibians that have been recorded here. In particular, there are over 300 free roaming bison, as well as wolves and lynxes. Short evening hike for owls and bats observation. Overnight in Bialowieza village in House under the White Stork on full board basis.
- Day 9** Sunrise walk to go bison watching. After breakfast, walk to a bog forest created by beavers, before exploring a megalithic monument in the heart of the forest and the interesting wooden architecture of the local houses. Overnight in Bialowieza village in House under the White Stork on full board basis.
- Day 10** Relaxing day, with a visit to an Open Door Museum. Leisurely 3 hour hike across different types of forest; Pitbog, linden-oak hornbeam, and pine-spruce, with lunch in the Palace Park. Visit to an Orthodox church. Farewell dinner is served by the campfire next to the guesthouse. Overnight in guesthouse in Bialowieza village in House under the White stork on full board basis.
- Day 11** After breakfast, transfer back to Warsaw for your onward travel or optional extensions.

Extra notes:

Itinerary notes: Please note that the itineraries may differ slightly according to the time of year and wildlife prevalent in certain areas. Each day is easy paced and leaves plenty of time for extra activities. Suitable for families.

Spring to Early Summer: May to early/mid-June is good for migrating birds in voice.

Later June - birds are still abundant, but slightly less active and quieter. The flowers and plant life start to bloom, with numerous butterflies and amphibians.

Late summer to autumn: Early September - still good for water based activities such as kayaking, as it tends to remain warmer and the bird migration can start; particularly good for water fowl, ducks, and storks. During September departures in Bialowieza, you also the chance to experience the deer rut, the haunting call of the tawny owls, and prevalent birdlife. Water activities can start to be colder later in September, but the forests are full of Autumnal colours.





Key information

Trip Comments and Style:

This is a varied journey, with a definite accent on the amazing wildlife of the region. The local culture and food are real highlights, however, and complement the nature activities. Distances covered each day are small, allowing you an in-depth experience of many contrasts. Escorted throughout by an English-speaking nature guide. The itinerary can differ slightly according to the time of year to make the most of local climatic conditions and wildlife (please refer to remarks at the end of the day by day itinerary). Accommodation is mainly in local village guesthouses and village homestays; some facilities may be shared by a maximum of 2 rooms, but in the majority of guesthouses, rooms have private bathrooms. Larger groups may stay in several houses in the villages.

Food:

Mainly local dishes and packed lunches. Strict vegetarians and people who require variety in their diet are advised to supplement their food with snacks brought along.

Joining Details:

Your final instructions and any relevant tickets will be sent to you approximately 4 weeks before date of travel, after full payment has been received.

International Flights:

We can help you organise and book your flights if departing from the UK, if you have not already done so. Please contact us for information and a quote.

Maximum Elevation:

All at low levels.

Insurance:

Travel and medical insurance is compulsory for this trip, and it is highly recommended to include emergency air evacuation as standard. Travelling without insurance can result in extremely high medical or repatriation charges in the event of an accident; check your policy inclusions and exclusions carefully.

We will require proof of insurance before you travel. It is also very useful to keep this information on our files in the unlikely case of an emergency during your trip, where we may be required to provide administrative assistance.

Passport and Visa information:

It is your responsibility to ensure that your passport has a minimum of 6 months validity at the date of your return from travel and that your visa requirements are met. If you would like some advice on where to find up to date information for each country's entry requirements and how to organise your visas, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Immunisation:

Required vaccinations and health risks can vary greatly from country to country and region to region. It is strongly recommended that you arrange a visit to your GP, or ideally a specialist travel clinic, prior to your trip. Although our staff may point you in the right direction for your inoculations, we are unfortunately not qualified to advise you on specific medical requirements. Taking along a copy of your itinerary can be helpful for doctors to identify the areas you may visit.

Kit List:

A kit list relevant to each trip can be sent to you upon payment of your deposit at your request, otherwise a copy will be sent with your final documents approximately 4 weeks before date of travel.

