



Estonian Nature Tours

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| Trip | : MAMMALS IN ESTONIA |
| Period | : Sat11May – Sat18May 2013 Fully booked! : Sat25May – Sat01Jun 2013 |
| Group size | : 4/6 pax |
| Grading | : Walking is mainly on good level tracks but we may also enter the forest in search of tracks and signs and this terrain can be a little more difficult |
| Accommodation | : Comfortable hotel and/or guesthouse with private facilities |
| Food | : Restaurants and local farms |
| Leader | : Tarvo Valker & local specialists |
| Extensions | : Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request |
| Agent/Organizer | : Estonian Nature Tours, e-mail: info@naturetours.ee |

An 8-day fully-inclusive holiday amongst unique, untouched nature with winding rivers, vast floodplains, mires, bogs and primeval forests, where we will search for mammals including Raccoon Dog, Red Fox, European Beaver, Wild Boar, Elk, Roe Deer, Flying Squirrel and Brown Bears and enjoy birdwatching as well. You have a slim chance of seeing one of the more elusive residents such as Wolf and Lynx! Even if you don't see these animals, you will have plenty of fun deciphering the many mammal tracks we find along the way!

Estonian forests are renowned in Europe for their healthy populations of mammals with around 700-800 Lynx, over 150 Wolves, 500-600 Brown Bears and almost 20 000 Beavers – tremendous numbers for such a small country. In all, sixty-four species of mammals have been recorded in Estonia including several European rarities, the most endangered examples being the European Mink, several species of dormouse and the Flying Squirrel.

- Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to Rakvere
- Day 2 Flying Squirrel tracking (and watching)
- Day 3 Brown Bear tracking; Bear Hide
- Day 4 Wolf and Lynx tracking; alternative overnight in Bear Hide
- Day 5 Transfer to Tartu, Great Snipe
- Day 6 Alam-Pedja Nature reserve
- Day 7 Beaver watching
- Day 8 Departure

Highlights

Mammals: Raccoon Dog, Red Fox, Elk, Roe Deer, Flying Squirrel (in darkness 70% guaranteed), Wild Boar (90%), Brown Bear (90%), European Beaver (95%), tracks and droppings of Lynx and Wolves (100%, or even the animals themselves if you are lucky!)

Birds: Black Stork, Golden Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Black Grouse, Capercaillie, Corncrake, Great Snipe, Whimbrel, White-backed Woodpecker, Three-toed

Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Citrine Wagtail, Savi's Warbler, Penduline Tit, Golden Oriole etc.

1 Sat (25th May) TALLINN, transfer to Alutaguse

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport and drive to the north-east region of Estonia called Alutaguse. After check-in at the guesthouse we will go for an optional excursion to listen to the night sounds of the wetlands and western taiga forests before we have our evening meal at the guesthouse (Matsu Guesthouse or Art Hotel).

2 Sun (26th May) FLYING SQUIRREL TRACKING & WATCHING

Today we will reach the species-rich Western Taiga forest environment and enjoy Flying Squirrel tracking led by zoologist-ecologist Uudo Timm for a whole day. Uudo has had a particular interest in Flying Squirrels for the last 20 years and has been researching their ecology and protection plus monitoring their spread and distribution. The Flying Squirrel is a bit smaller than the ordinary squirrel and a pride of Estonian forests – in Europe they can only be found in Estonia and Finland. It has received its name from hairy folds of skin between its fore and hind legs which help it to make jumps up to 35 metres from one tree to another. Right now there are 80 known sites for Flying Squirrels in the north-east region of Estonia. We also hope to be entertained by other attractions in this area including Black Grouse, Capercaillie, Hazel Grouse, Wryneck and some interesting woodpeckers. After a very nice picnic-lunch at Oonurme village house we will take a rest. In the late evening, after dinner, we will go for a Flying Squirrel night session. If we are fortunate we may even see them jumping from one tree to another. Radio receivers and night watching instruments are used to observe animals at night (Matsu Guesthouse or Art Hotel).

3 Mon (27th May) BROWN BEAR TRACKING / BEAR HIDE

Early morning takes us to the one of the most densely forested corners of Estonia - it is similar in appearance to taiga and is called Alutaguse. A large storm in 2001, and forest cuttings after that, have changed the look of this landscape a lot. New forest is the best place to find Roe Deer and Elk who in turn are targets for carnivores. Alutaguse is situated near the Russian border and forms a solid natural landscape through to St.Peterburg Oblast's forests and bogs. That's why Alutaguse is an area with huge number of Bears and now – after hundreds of years – is also the heart of Estonian "bear culture". There are numerous real-life stories of young bears in human villages but local people still manage to take it with humor and live side by side with bears. We will spend the rest of today exploring on foot and by vehicle in one of the Estonian's best known Brown Bear regions looking for signs, droppings, scratching on the trees as well as tracks of Wolf packs with our local specialist. As you walk, you will need to be as quiet as you can. You have a slim chance of seeing one of the more elusive residents such as Wolf, Lynx and Wild Boar! Even if you don't see any of these animals, you will have plenty of fun deciphering the many mammal tracks we find along the way! After lunch we have a rest at the guesthouse. At the late afternoon, the local specialist will guide us through the forest (1 km) to the Bear Hide. The wooden hide is cozy, with comfortable seats and viewing slots at the front and beds at the back so you can sleep in the very darkest part of the night or catch a nap. At the far end is a separate dry toilet (wet napkins/tissues provided). Brown Bear can appear at any time during the night (sometimes even before). Raccoon Dogs and sometimes even Wolves occasionally visit the feeding place. The delicious „hide-dinner“ will be prepared by local ladies (Bear Hide/Matsu Guesthouse or Art Hotel).

4 Tue (28th May) WOLF & LYNX TRACKING

You will remain in the hide during the early morning. Whether or not you are in luck, it is fantastic to watch (and hear) the forest come alive with the first rays of the morning sun. Forest tits, Spotted Flycatchers, Crossbills and other passerines are at their most active, restlessly flitting about in search of food. Sometimes single Golden Eagles and Buzzards also appear. If we are fortunate we may hear Capercaillie, Black Grouse or even see several species of woodpeckers from the hide. You will enjoy your breakfast at the guesthouse and take a rest until lunchtime. In the afternoon, a local specialist will share with you his knowledge of tracking of Wolves, Lynx and Elk and demonstrate the various ways of communicating with them, some of which have been used by the region's hunters for hundred of years. In 2002-2003 the population of both for wolf and bear was at its lowest but now the species have recovered. Last autumn 32 wolf families and 128 lynx families were recorded in Estonia. The Elk population has also stabilized and the population number is estimated at 11 000 animals. (Matsu Guesthouse or Art Hotel and/or Bear Hide).

5 Wed (29th May) Transfer to Tartu, GREAT SNIPE

We will enjoy our breakfast and move to Tartu region by late morning. After lunch and a short rest in the hotel we will drive to the vast expanse of wetlands near Aardla. This area with lakes and ponds usually holds a good selection of water birds and we will be hoping for a few surprises such as Citrine Wagtail and Spotted Eagles. After dinner we offer an optional excursion to an area where we can watch displaying Great Snipe at one of their best lekking sites in the Baltic (Hansahotell).

6 Thu (30th May) ALAM-PEDJA NATURE RESERVE

Early morning takes us to Alam-Pedja, an area of marsh with adjacent forest. This is a truly remote and wild region of undisturbed floodplains and winding rivers where it is claimed there are only 20 human residents on 260 square miles of wilderness! We will hope to find a wonderful diversity of species including Black Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Black Stork, both Great Spotted and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Penduline Tit, and Great Reed, Icterine, Marsh and Barred Warblers. Returning to the guesthouse (or hotel) for lunch, you will have the opportunity to have a rest, visit marshy areas nearby or enjoy cultural sightseeings in Tartu town (Hansahotell).

7 Fri (31st May) JÄRVSELJA FOREST & BEAVER WATCHING

Today we will travel out in the early morning and enjoy birdwatching in one of the oldest protected areas in Estonia, Järvselja forest. Although the size of the primeval forest area of Järvselja is not remarkable it still has significant value. In 1924 it was decided to maintain a part of the intact forest area as a sample of virgin forest. Within a small area the diversity of the woodland is very high. In the southeastern part the most impressive trees grow. They include up to 40 m-high and over 200 years-old giant spruces. Also some huge birches, aspens, lindens, ashes and maples can be seen here. In some places moving around is complicated due to the debris and old tree trunks lying on the ground, therefore a special wooden track has been constructed in the primeval forest quarter.

In the evening (2-3 hours before sunset), we will take a boat ride through Emajõgi river to listen to the night sounds of the wetlands. Dusk is the time that Beavers leave their lodges to spend an industrious night felling riverside trees and saplings. A little quiet patience is required here, but

with luck you are likely to see several individuals going about their nightly construction work and swimming about. ([Hansahotell](#)).

8 Sat (1st June) To Tallinn, departure...

We will return to Tallinn by late morning and have a pleasant guided tour of Tallinn Old Town. Tallinn was made a UNESCO World heritage Site in 1997 due to the medieval city centre, the finest in northern Europe, with cobble stoned streets & buildings that date back to the 15th century. We have some free time for shopping before we will drive to the Airport to catch your homeward flight at ...

PRICE: **1495 Euro per person**
Single suppl. 205 Euro

Includes:

English-Estonian speaking guide and local specialist(s) throughout the journey. All meals and all local transport. Bear Hide costs (1-2 nights). Entrance fees to protected areas. All overnights in shared double:

www.matsutalu.eu

www.artcafe.ee

www.hansahotell.ee

etc. VAT.

Excludes:

Beverages and sauna. International tickets. Insurance.

Booking and deposits can be made if you click on our Tour calendar. **BOOK HERE** will guide you to our booking system, where it is possible to insert data and also instantly pay by credit card (coming next week). Another possibility is to pay through bank transfer. Automatic invoice and confirmation will be sent to your email address.

CANCELLATIONS

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| More than 70 days | deposit (20%) only |
| 70-15 days before departure | 50% of total tour cost |
| 15 days or less before departure | 100% of total tour cost |

INSURANCE

It is a condition of joining one of our holidays that you must be fully insured against medical and personal accident risks. Please send to us the name of your insurance provider, the contact telephone number, your policy number, expire date and details of the medical and repatriation cover provided.

Terms and Conditions Instruction: <http://www.naturetours.ee/terms-and-conditions/>

NB! There are many amazing holidays you can't afford to miss... When you would like to travel with your friends we would be happy to give you more information or offer an extra tour with special price whenever you find a suitable time.

Legal contacts:

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