

Trip	: NEW! BEARS & ORCHIDS IN ESTONIA
Period	: Wed18Jun – Sun22Jun 2014
Group size	: 6/8 pax
Grading	: Day walks only, for all ages
Accommodation	: Comfortable hotel with private facilities
Food	: Restaurants and local farms
Leader	: Peeter Vissak
Extensions	: Cultural/sightseeing extensions available on request
Local organizer/Agent	: Estonian Nature Tours, e-mail: info@naturetours.ee

A 5-day fully-inclusive holiday in focusing on Brown Bear tracking and watching and wild flowers (especially orchids – 36 species of Orchids have been found in Estonia!)

Estonia is a small country with wonderful wildlife and a huge species list. Forests cover about 50% of the country and wetland habitats are well represented by over 1,400 lakes, numerous bogs and many rivers, which together comprise a wonderful mosaic of aquatic environments for a great diversity of wildlife. Many of the coastal areas were closed to the public during soviet occupation and remained untouched today. The 3,794 km of coastline is studded with over 1,500 islands and islets of varying sizes whilst the mainland is indented by numerous bays, straits, and inlets. This rich variety has drawn plants and animal species from both Siberia and also the warmer regions of southern Europe, with many species reaching their respective western or northern extremities of range within Estonia.

Estonia is in naturally a multiple border country. Placed between a continental and a marine climate we have a temperate climate while across the whole of Estonia is a border between limestone and poorer sandstone rocks. In addition we are located at the southern border of the coniferous forest zone, but broad-leaved forest is also here as well as coastal cliffs, dunes, sand and stone beaches. 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.

Estonia's flora is comprised of about 1440 species of vascular plants, 550 species of mosses, 800 species of lichens and 3000 species of algae. 36 species of Orchids have been found in Estonia.

Day 1 Arrive in Tallinn, to Haapsalu

Day 2 Hiiumaa island

Day 3 To North-East Estonia; Bear hide

Day 4 Alutaguse forests; alternative overnight in Bear hide

Day 8 To Tallinn, departure...

Highlights

Orchids: Common Spotted (*Dactylorhiza fuchii*), Early Marsh (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*), *Dactylorhiza incarnata ssp.cruenta*, *Dactylorhiza incarnata ssp.ochroleuca* (maybe), Heath Spotted (*Dactylorhiza maculata*), Southern Marsh (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa* -difficult!) Narrow-leaved Marsh (*Dactylorhiza russowii*), Pyramidal (*Anacamptis pyramidalis* – maybe), Narrow-leaved Helleborine (*Cephalanthera longifolia*), Red Helleborine (*Cephalanthera rubra*), Coral Root (*Corallorhiza trifida* – maybe), Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*), Creeping Lady's Tresses (*Goodyera repens*), Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), Musk Orchid (*Herminium*

monorchis), Bog Orchid (*Hammarbya paludosa* - difficult!), Fen Orchid (*Liparis loeselii*), Lesser Twayblade (*Listera cordata* – maybe), Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*), Birds Nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*), Fly Orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*) etc.

Butterflies: Lapland Ringlet, Frigga's Fritillary, Bog Fritillary, Cranberry Blue, Eastern Baton Blue, Clouded Apollo (probably), Poplar Admiral, Olive Skipper, Woodland Brown, Large Chequered Skipper etc.

Mammals: Brown Bear, Red Fox, Roe Deer, Raccoon Dog (probably), Elk & Wild Boar (probably), Red Deer (probably) etc.

Birds: Eurasian White Stork, Black Stork, White-tailed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Corncrake, White-backed Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Black Woodpecker, Black Grouse, Hazel Grouse etc.

Estonian Orchids

1 Wed (18th June) TALLINN, to Haapsalu

We will pick up you from Tallinn Airport and drive to the western region of Estonia. After check-in we have our first dinner together at the guesthouse (Altmõisa Guesthouse).

2 Thu (19th June) HIIUMAA ISLAND

After early breakfast we will drive to Rohuküla harbour (about 15 km) and take a ferry to Hiiumaa island. We will visit Kõpu peninsula. More than 20 km long Kõpu peninsula is located in the western part of Hiiumaa and is one of the oldest parts of the island. The topography of the area includes mainly coastal terraces, ridges and dunes that can be observed from the Rebastemäe nature trail. The Kõpu peninsula comprises mainly forested areas alternating with some small bogs, also including calcareous bogs with special vegetation communities. More than 80 rare species have been found in Kõpu, Lesser Twayblade, Narrow-leaved Marsh-orchid, Fen Orchid and Burnt Orchid, also the attractive Twinflower, being just few of them (not all of them will be in flower). We will also climb to the top of Kõpu Lighthouse, which stands 37 metres high and is the third oldest working lighthouse in the world. Later in the afternoon, we will continue our trip on Käina-Kassari Landscape. Kassari Island in the southeastern part of Hiiumaa has impressive semi-natural communities like alvars, juniper stands and wooded meadows. Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis coccinea*), Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*), Small Scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*), also rare Swamp Angelica (*Angelica palustris*) have been found here. Käina Bay is one of the most important areas of Hiiumaa in terms of bird species diversity. We will move back to the mainland later in the evening and eat our dinner at a restaurant (Altmõisa Guesthouse).

3 Fri (20th June) To North-East Estonia; BEAR HIDE

After the optional short visit Noarootsi peninsula, we will move to 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".

After check-in and a lunch we have a rest at the hotel. Later in the afternoon, we will take a walk through the forest (1 km) to the Bear Hide (packed dinner with us). 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 (Bear Hide/Art Hotel).

4 Sat (21st June) ALUTAGUSE FORESTS; BEAR HIDE (ALTERNATIVE)

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 late breakfast at the guesthouse and take a rest until to lunchtime. In the afternoon, we will visit Alutaguse lowland where forests alternate with mires and human settlements are sparsely located. The area is a good habitat for the species of deep forest like owls (even the Great Gray, Ural, Pygmy), woodpeckers (Three-toed, White-backed, Black), grouses (Capercaillie, Hazel Hen, Black Grouse) and Brown Bear and Wolf. Our destination is Selisoo bog, a medium-sized representative of local mires. In the surroundings of Selisoo bog, there are places of abandoned farms where people used to live in old times. In the small meadows, which cover the old farmlands we may see Shining Meadow-rue, Siberian Iris and other moist meadow plants (Art Hotel and/or Bear Hide).

5 Sun (22nd June) To Tallinn, departure...

After having a breakfast, we move to Kalvi on the northern coast of Estonia where we look around in alvars. Many species of meadow flowers (as well as butterflies) might be seen here. Harriers and eagles are common in the alvars and fields in Kalvi. We will return to Tallinn by early afternoon 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 cobblestone 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...

Price: **955 Euro per person**
Single suppl. 180 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.altmoisa.ee

www.artcafe.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

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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