

Poland in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	<u>Fly Warsaw and drive Kruklanki.</u>
Day 2	<u>Morning Puszcza Borecka. Overnight Puszcza Romincka.</u>
Day 3/5	<u>Puszcza Romincka.</u>
Day 6	<u>Biebrza Marshes.</u>
Day 7	<u>Fly London.</u>

Departs

January and February

Focus

Mammals and birds

Grading

Grade A/B

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code POL04) or see the current Naturetrek brochure

Highlights:

- Spectacular snowy landscapes.
- Watch European Bison in Puszcza Borecka.
- Spend a night in a 'high seat' looking for Wolves.
- Red Deer, Roe Deer & Wild Boar all possible.
- Track mammals & other wildlife with local foresters.
- Winter birdlife including Waxwing, Nutcracker & White-tailed Eagle.
- Explore the Biebrza Marshes in search of Elk.
- Expert guidance by a Naturetrek naturalist & local guides



Bison, Puszcza Romincka & Wild Boar. Images courtesy of Peter Price, Karen Meier & Shutterstock Images (E Grigorov)



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NB. 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

Krukłanki

We depart from London Heathrow early-morning on a British Airways scheduled flight to Warsaw. Arriving at Warsaw's Okęcie Airport late morning, we will be met by our guides and coach and begin the drive to the ancient forests of north-eastern Poland. We will overnight in a comfortable lodge, near the town of Krukłanki.

Day 2

Puszcza Romincka

This morning we will drive to the forests of Puszcza Borecka in search of Wisent, or European Bison. This is a most reliable site for Wisent and, to date, we have never failed to find them here! Borecka is also a good spot for the elusive White-backed Woodpecker, plus Roe Deer, Raven and White-tailed Eagle. We return to the lodge for lunch and then head east to the forests of Puszcza Romincka (favourite hunting area of Kaiser Wilhelm II) for a 4-night stay in a forest lodge.

Days 3 – 5

Puszcza Romincka

During the next three full days we will explore the snow-clad forests and meadows of Puszcza Romincka. Our programme is typically as follows, though subject to local conditions and may be amended.

Monday: We will spend the morning driving and walking in the forest in the company of the local forester who will give us some background on the ecology, wildlife and management of the area. We return to the forest lodge for lunch. In the afternoon we have a choice of activities. The more energetic may choose to take a walk in the forest others may opt for their first taste of 'high-seating' (see below). Sitting in a high-seat from mid-afternoon to dusk (and beyond) gives the best chance of seeing more wildlife. Wild Boar and deer are the animals most frequently seen this way, but Wolf are seen on occasion and even Lynx for the very fortunate few!

Tuesday: This morning we will head out just before dawn (fortunately not very early at this time of year!) and cruise the forest roads seeking in particular the large ungulates of the forest, Wild Boar, Red and Roe Deer and Elk. After breakfast we will explore the forest further by vehicle and on foot, maybe visiting a Beaver lodge and dam. Lunch will be taken back at the lodge and the afternoon's activities will be as per Monday.

Wednesday: We will keep today's plans flexible and use the time to look for those animals and birds we have missed earlier in the week. We usually, however, head out into the forests for part of the day by horse-drawn sledge. It may not add much to our wildlife list, but it is a wonderful way to see the forest, normally backed by Christmas-card scenery at this time of year! En route we will stop at trees with curious herring-bone markings, which are taps to drain turpentine (a practice little-known now in western Europe) and at the half-buried sheds loosely described as "tree refrigerators", used to keep seedlings in suspended animation. Lunch and afternoon as for Monday.

Each year since 1999 our local guide in Romincka has finished off our trip with an evening barbecue by a frozen lake in the forest. All being well, this tradition will continue this year. It is a wonderful way to finish this trip, an evening of roast meats, bigos - Polish sauerkraut - warm spiced vodka and Polish folk songs.

Mammals observed during past visits to Romincka and Borecka include Wisent, Wild Boar, Stoat, Red Fox, Wolf, Beaver, Red and Roe Deer, and Elk; on three occasions, even Lynx. Birds of the area include White-tailed Eagle, Sparrowhawk, Goshawk, Hazelhen, Black Grouse; Black, Middle-spotted and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Waxwing, Great Grey Shrike, Crested, Marsh and Willow Tits, Nuthatch, Crossbill, and Nutcracker. In past years the bird feeders by the lodge were particularly good for Middle-spotted and Grey-headed Woodpeckers.

Day 6

Biebrza Marshes

Today we will drive south, along the western margins of the Biebrza Basin, in part following the path of Napoleon's armies almost two centuries before. If time permits we may make one or two stops en route. In a normal winter, most of our journey is snow-covered and rather beautiful.

Eventually we turn east and then south again along the Czar's Road. We pass through swamp forest, then dry forest dominated by Scots Pine and juniper before arriving at Dwór Dobarz, our accommodation for the night. After lunch we retrace our route along the Czar's Road in search of Elk, the largest cervid in Europe and the same species as the Moose of North America. Other mammals observed during previous visits include Red Squirrel and Red Fox whilst birds to look out for include White-tailed Eagle, Black Grouse and the beautiful Waxwing.

Incidentally, 'Dwór' means manor house and our accommodation at Dobarz is a modern, comfortable, lodge built in the style of a traditional Polish manor.

Day 7

London

Following breakfast, we will drive back to Warsaw (a journey of around 4 or so hours), stopping en route for lunch, before returning to Warsaw Airport for our mid to late afternoon flight to London Heathrow.

A few notes on Wolf

In Puszcza Romincka we always see plenty of spoor and other signs of Wolf. Urine-marking is usually seen on snow-banks along the forest trails; tracks in the sand and snow are obvious but our local guides help us to differentiate them from those of large dogs. We regularly find a wolf-kill, typically the remains of a deer, and our Polish stalker interprets the events leading up to the kill and the disposition of the wolves in their post-prandial rest. On one astonishing occasion our guide showed us a pellet of an Eagle Owl which she knew had consumed a wolf-cub!

Our most reliable technique for observing the animal itself is from a high-seat (an elevated hide as shown in the photograph) in an area known to be frequented by the



predator. Typically, this means entering at least an hour before darkness and waiting till at least midnight or, preferably, till dawn. Clearly this technique works best during clear moonlit nights but an image intensifier is available at a small charge for darker nights. It will be very cold in the high-seat, so these vigils are only recommended for the hardy and dedicated. If you are keen to do this then a few hours in the high-seat on the afternoon of arrival into Puszcza Romincka will be a taster and help you decide whether to go for an 'all-nighter'!

Grading

No special degree of fitness is required for this trip; good walks are available for those who want them, but most of the wildlife can be observed from the mini-coach or from the high seats. It is assumed that people booking this trip do not find cold weather intrinsically unpleasant - see note on weather, below.

Weather

Typical temperatures for this time of year are -10 to -20°C (+14°F to -4°F). There is usually little wind in the forests, and typically 10-20 cm of snow (4-8 inches) on the ground. This sort of cold is in fact much more pleasant for outdoor activities than the raw damp cold hanging about freezing point found in much of western Europe. Detailed equipment and clothing lists are forwarded on receipt of booking. It is only fair to say that although these are 'typical' temperatures, there were several mild winters in Poland with not a great deal of snow, making some of the animals difficult to observe - though improving chances of seeing others, such as Beaver.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All meals from the evening meal on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 7 are included in our price. Accommodation is in forest lodges and hotels. Contrary to the information in the main Naturetrek brochure, all rooms on this tour have private facilities.

Mammal & bird lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure and complete and return the enclosed booking form together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us now on 01962 733051. Alternatively you are welcome to book on the internet by visiting www.naturetrek.co.uk or call the Naturetrek office with a credit or debit card number.

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