

## Slovakia - In Search of Bears

This is a short break with a difference, combining some great mountain trekking with a search for European 'big game' as we go looking for bears. Working with a local partner, dedicated to conservation we are given unique access into areas of the national park which are normally off limits to tourists. Trekking with an expert ranger, in a group size limited to six, we maximise the amount of time on foot, increasing the chances of observing bears in their natural habitat, whilst also looking out for the wide variety of birds and mammals that populate the park.

### Trip highlights

- ★ **Bears** - Search for and then observe bears in their natural environment
- ★ **Tatras National Park** - Trek with an expert park ranger in areas of the park usually off limits to tourists
- ★ **Short break** - Take only two days off work on a busy but rewarding trip
- ★ **Small group** - Travel in a small group of no more than six, to enhance the bear watching experience

#### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

##### Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

#### WALKING GRADE:

##### Moderate To Challenging

Combining moderate grade walks with some more strenuous hikes. This grade is ideal if you are fit and want to challenge yourself with a few longer, more demanding trekking days, possibly on difficult terrain or at higher altitudes.

**GROUP SIZE:****4 - 6**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

# Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

## DAY 1 - Arrive Poprad and make the short transfer to Spisska Sobota

The city of Poprad is located south of the High Tatras, and is the gateway to some excellent trekking and one of Europe's great wildlife experience, the continent's only realistic opportunity of searching for bears in their natural environment without using baited hides. This trip is based around flights with Wizz Air from London, the only direct carrier from the UK to Poprad. The base for our first night is the charming medieval village of Spisska Sobotta, one of a number of villages which have combined to make up the greater city. Our hotel is a converted townhouse, based just off the central square. Depending upon arrival time there may be time to head up to the square to try one of the restaurants for dinner.



**Accommodation: Alzbetka Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Head into the Tatras, trek the Kamenista Valley

After breakfast we drive through the city and make the relatively short drive to Podbanske, which is located in the foothills of the Tatras. We'll check into our accommodation, a ranger's guesthouse, which is essentially a base used by researchers, government officials and dignitaries who visit the National Park of the Tatras (TANAP). This park was established in 1949 and encompasses a protected area of flora and fauna, as although the park has been recognised as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve since 1993, and although the range is relatively small 25km wide by almost 80km long there are 25 peaks standing over 2500m offering some fantastic and dramatic treks, as well as a host of wildlife.

After check-in we collect our packed lunches and then begin our first walk. Today's walk takes us along one of the many tourist trails within the park. It's an excellent walk to stretch the leg with the possibility of finding bears although the focus of today is definitely on the walk and the beautiful scenery. Unlike other bear watching experiences we spend time looking for bears as opposed to waiting to see bears who approach an area where food has been left. Whilst bear viewings cannot be guaranteed we would be extremely unlucky not to see bears during our 3 days in the park. Sightings may be at a distance and so binoculars are essential.

Heading out from Podbanske, the trail heads west through forests, and briefly joins a sealed road heading into Kamenista valley. The road quickly turns to a path as it follows the stream up through the forests. After an hour or so, the trees are left behind and the valley opens up, with a patchwork of dwarf pine and berry bushes creating an ideal environment for foraging animals including

bears and red deer. The path follows the stream high up the valley, to a saddle, on the Polish border, with magnificent views in all directions before heading back to our accommodation.

We'll have dinner in our guesthouse, and then depending upon the weather conditions we will drive into the park for an late afternoon / early evening walk. A short drive will take us into the heart of the park, and once there we will take a gentle walk along 'bear valley'. On this walk we get some great views of the valleys and avalanche slopes that have become home to the bears, some of which we will explore further in the coming days.

Today's 18 kilometre walk is expected to take approximately eight to nine hours with a total ascent of 850 metres and descent of 850 metres.



**Accommodation: Tri Studnicky Rangers Accommodation** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

## **DAY 3 - Early morning start; meet park ranger and begin trekking in a region of the Tatras usually off-limits to tourists**

The start time this morning very much depends upon the time of the year visiting as we aim to be trekking at first light to increase the chance of seeing bears. In May or June this can mean a very early start to your day.

The exact nature of today's walk will depend very much upon the weather and on local knowledge as to the location of the bears. What makes the trek special today is that we spend it in the company of a specialist ranger from TANAP. Explore has worked with a local NGO who has negotiated exclusive access to areas of the park in zone 5, one of the zones designated as one of the five areas of environmental sensitivity. These areas are usually forbidden to tourists. Group size on this trek is limited to 6, to maximise the opportunities to see bears, but also to create as little impact as possible.

Today's walk focusses on the Koprova Valley. After an early wake-up and hot drinks we will set off. Breakfast is usually carried as a packed breakfast to eat on the trail. The walk takes us into the heart of the park. We climb quite quickly to Tuhova following steep animal trails through the forest and out onto the alpine zone where bears are most likely feeding, before reaching a maximum altitude of 1977m. At this point we can make a further ascent and drop over a region known colloquially as 'bear island' which adds another 10km to the walking distances. The decision on whether we take this walk will be made by the Leader and ranger and is dependent upon the ability of the group as well as the weather conditions.

Depending upon the start time once we return to base we'll have a late lunch / early dinner before once again heading into the mountains for an early evening / late afternoon walk. Dinner is cooked by the Leader but is pre-prepared by his wife, Joshka, who specialises in local dishes such as grilled hermelin (camembert type of cheese) with cranberries and baked potatoes, potato pancakes filled with chicken meat and vegetables or other typical dishes such as Halusky s bryndzou a slanineu - gnocchi with bryndza (specially processed sheep cheese) and bacon.

After a short rest we will head into the park later in the day. The afternoon / evening walk sees us cross a small river and then once again enter zone 5 as we walk on a combination of old tracks and animal paths up to Tomonova meadow where we look for the bears, before heading back to base and bed!

Today's 8 kilometre walk is expected to take approximately four hours with a total ascent of 480 metres and descent of 480 metres. The additional optional walk is expected to take approximately four to five hours with a total additional ascent of 520 metres and descent of 520 metres.



**Accommodation: Tri Studnicky Rangers Accommodation** (or similar)

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Standard Hotel

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Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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## DAY 4 - Further treks with ranger, late afternoon transfer to Poprad

After yesterday's short walk into the Tomonova meadow we continue the exploration of this area as we trek further into the park with our ranger as we continue to explore the park.

This walk sees us climb up through the meadows, and into valleys hidden from the river valley. Our ranger once again accompanies us, as we leave the tourist trail we wind our way up towards the Polish border where we hope to catch sight of the bears foraging for early morning food. If we do come across bears we will spend time observing them, watching them in their natural habitat. As well as looking for bears we are on the lookout for other wildlife such as sightings of eagle or marmot. One of the rarest animals in the Tatras and symbol of the mountains is the Tatra chamois. With a population of approximately of only 1000 the chamois is a protected species. It differs from its Alpine cousins as it has developed in isolation since the glacial age. As we climb higher through the meadows into the more traditional alpine scenery we would expect to see chamois. Eventually we reach the Kaminista saddle, which forms the physical border between Slovakia and Poland. There is the opportunity for a photo with a foot in each country! At this stage the Leader and Ranger will make the decision as to whether we extend the walk or return to the valley floor following the same path taken earlier.

This afternoon we make the short journey to Poprad, before transferring to the airport where the trip ends.

Today's 12 kilometre walk is expected to take approximately six hours with a total ascent of 450 metres and descent of 450 metres. The additional optional walk is expected to take approximately three to four hours with a total additional ascent of 550 metres and descent of 550 metres.

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Meals Provided: None

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## Walking and Trekking information

## DAILY DISTANCE

Day 2	18km	
Day 3	8km	10km
Day 4	12km	6km

Optional Walks

### Walking grade

Moderate to challenging

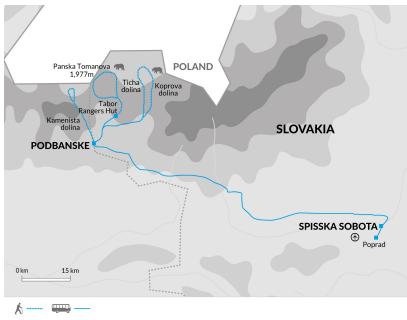
### Trek details

Trek for 3 days for up to 9-10 hours. For 2 days we trek in areas of the national park usually off-limits to tourists. The lengths of the walks very much depend upon the weather conditions and expected locations of the bears with the Leader and park ranger making the final decisions on whether the optional walks will be offered. We tend to trek early morning and then late afternoon as these are the best times to see bears. You should be prepared to trek off-trail, or on small animal paths. The maximum altitude reached on this trip is just 1997m. We have graded this trek as moderate to challenging.

### Max walking altitude (m)

1997

## Departures Coming Soon



Sign up below to be notified when new departures go on sale!

**Title \***

**First name \***

**Surname \***

**Email: \***

**Telephone number: \***

**Please notify me of any other interesting trips by selecting the preferences below**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walking & Trekking Adventures | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Adventures     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cycling Adventures            | <input type="checkbox"/> Polar Voyages         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worldwide Adventures          | <input type="checkbox"/> Tailormade Adventures |

## Why book this trip

This is a unique short break to Slovakia, combining some great trekking in the Tatras Mountains with a search for bears in pristine wilderness. We have been working with a local partner dedicated to conservation and have been given unique access into areas of the national park which are normally off-limits to tourists. The group size is limited to six and we trek accompanied by an expert ranger maximise the amount of time on foot to increasing the chances of observing bears in their natural habitat.

# What's included?



## Included meals

Breakfast: 2  
Lunch: 2  
Dinner: 2



## Transport

Bus



## Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Driver(s)  
Ranger(s)



## Accommodation

3 nights standard hotel

# Trip information

## Country information

### Slovakia

#### Climate

Summers are short in the mountains. July to August is the hottest period, when daytime temperatures average 20-22°C, though it may be much cooler in the early morning or late evening. During the winter, snow and ice is not uncommon, with snow generally starting in December and continuing to early February. Mountain weather is notoriously changeable and it can be cold at any time of year, so be prepared.. Early July is the best time for flowers.

#### Time difference to GMT

+1

#### Plugs

2 Pin Round

#### Religion

Roman Catholic

#### Language

Slovak

## Budgeting and packing

### Clothing

Weather is changeable in the mountains and it can be cold, especially at night or early morning, so bring a warmer jacket/fleece and a waterproof jacket. Bring layers to enable you to be comfortable no matter what the temperature as this could easily fluctuate throughout the day.

### Footwear

We recommend you bring well-worn in waterproof walking boots - leather or fabric are both fine. In addition please take comfortable trainers/shoes or sandals for evenings at the guesthouse. We suggest that on international flights you either carry your walking boots in your hand luggage or wear them - should your luggage be lost or delayed, your own boots are the one thing that

will be irreplaceable.

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

Bring one main piece of luggage and a 20-30 litre day pack is recommended. You will need to carry what you need for the day which may include a raincoat, jumper, camera, sun-cream, picnic lunch etc. On hot days you will carry fewer clothes but more drinking water.

## Equipment

We recommend taking sunglasses, a sun hat, sunscreen and a small torch. You may also find walking poles useful, although they have to be checked into main luggage on the flight. Also, don't forget your camera and any relevant lens along with a good pair of binoculars.

## Tipping

### Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

### Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly you should allow approximately £15.00 for tips.

In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip.

## Country Information

### Slovakia

#### Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

##### Lunch price

£7

##### Dinner price

£15

##### Beer price

£2

##### Water price

£1

#### Foreign Exchange

##### Local currency

Euro

##### Recommended Currency For Exchange

British Pounds Sterling, US Dollars and Euros are accepted at exchange offices and banks

##### Where To Exchange

Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival

##### ATM Availability

Your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival, but please be aware that some ATMs will charge 5% commission and outside of the main cities ATM's can sometimes be difficult to find

##### Credit Card Acceptance

At most shops and restaurants

##### Travellers Cheques



Travellers Cheques can be difficult to exchange

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Bus

## Essential Information

### FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

#### Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

### Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

### Visa and Passport Information

Slovakia: Visas are not required by UK, US, Canadian, Australia and New Zealand citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

### Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

### Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

#### Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

#### Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a

majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

## Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom. Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

### Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

### Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## Maximum altitude (m)

1997

## Slovakia

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, polio and hepatitis A. Tick-borne encephalitis is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Europe, at specific times of the year. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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