

EXPLORE!



Wildlife Watching in Belarus

BELARUS - TRIP CODE WOF

BEYOND

Why book this trip?

This short break is a true wilderness experience where we'll be out exploring at dawn and dusk to try to spot wildlife with our expert guides, and staying in simple accommodation at an eco station in the forest.

- **Minsk** - Discover the Soviet history of the Belarusian capital including its bizarrely shaped library
- **Wilderness experience** - Stay at a simple eco station in a remote forest location to truly get back to nature
- **Wildlife in Belarus** - Our guides Vadim Sidorovich and Irina Rotenko have dedicated their lives to their research into the wolves, lynx and other wildlife of Belarus and we'll learn much from them

**INCLUDED MEALS**

Breakfast: 4
Lunch: 1
Dinner: 2

TRIP STAFF

Explore Tour
Leader / Driver
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)

TRANSPORT

Bus
4WD
Train

ACCOMMODATION

2 nights simple
cabins
2 nights standard
hotel

TRIP PACE:

Full on

GROUP SIZE:

8 - 12

Itinerary

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

DAY 1 - Join trip in Minsk

Our exciting long weekend begins in Belarus's capital city, Minsk. After checking-in to our hotel and meeting the group, along with our Explore Leader, this evening is at leisure to enjoy a taste of the city and to sample Belarusian cuisine. Popular dishes include machanka, a hearty pork stew, and draniki, which are thick potato pancakes. For an after dinner tippie try krumbambula, a traditional Belarusian liquor, which is similar to mead and flavoured with spices and honey.

This long weekend is different to most other Explore trips and from other wildlife watching trips where the viewing is done from hides - it's designed to immerse you in the Belarusian wilderness and for you to experience the life of the scientists that live here. Wildlife in the forest isn't used to having human interaction and is therefore shy. Our expert guide will try to find wildlife for you to see but this may be at a distance through the trees and there is also the possibility that you will only see wildlife tracks, scats and territorial marking, and view photos on the camera-traps. Our guide is a scientist and you will be staying at a working eco station where they are studying the forest habitat and wildlife found here. The accommodation is simple and is very much a off the beaten track wilderness experience. You'll spend most of your time walking in the forest, which is over boggy and uneven terrain and it will often be necessary to traverse areas of water by walking across tree logs. The walking on this trip is done at a fairly quick pace. You may get wet at any time of year and during winter and autumn it may be snowy and slippery underfoot due to the water freezing. You therefore need to have a good level of physical fitness, be used to walking in the countryside and be steady on your feet in order to be able to do the forest walks and to travel on this trip.

On this trip we have packed in as many highlights of Minsk as we can, but there is very little free time in the city, so if you wish to spend some time discovering more on your own then we would recommend extending your stay for a night or two. Perhaps to visit the Azgur Museum which houses numerous sculptures from the Soviet era or relax in the serene surroundings of the Sendai Japanese Garden or there's the Minsk Botanical Gardens. Please note that many of Minsk's museums are closed on a Monday or Tuesday, so if you wish to visit a particular attraction then please check that it is open on the day you wish to visit it.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Tourist (or similar)

Grade: Standard Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

DAY 2 - Market visit and tour of Soviet Minsk; evening wildlife watching walk

We start our day by boarding the metro for the city market. It's best to visit in the morning when residents are out haggling for fresh fruit and vegetables that are on sale from nearby farms. You can see, and of course buy, a whole range of edible goodies here including meat, cheese, nuts and spices. You might want to pick up some snacks and drinks to have for the next couple of nights whilst we are staying in our remote forest eco station.

Minsk is a city with a long history, set on the banks of the Svislach River it was first settled by the East Slavs back in the 9th century AD. However, our guided tour this morning is going to focus on its more recent history, which has largely been dominated by Soviet rule that lasted from around 1920 to 1991. The city was almost entirely destroyed during World War II with around 80% of its houses and infrastructure reduced to rubble. Afterwards the city was rebuilt with its historic centre being replaced by Stalinist architecture with grand buildings, brutalist statues, broad avenues and imposing squares. Victory Square is the most famous part of the city and features a memorial to the fallen heroes of World War II. During our tour we'll have a brief visit to the Museum of the Great Patriotic War, which is the centre piece in Victory Park. This huge museum has hundreds of exhibits and two of the most poignant rooms are the Hall of Glory that celebrates the heroes of the Soviet Union and the emotive memorial found in the Hall of Remembrance and Sorrow.

Belarusian politics remains controversial with Alexander Lukashenko having ruled as president since 1994. During your free time for lunch you might like to dine in the Parliament's House of Representatives canteen where you maybe lucky enough to spot politicians having lunch. Next we drive to see Minsk's unusual Central Library building, with its unique architecture.

Late this afternoon we drive out of the city to the Naust Eco Station in the Naliboki Forest, which will take us about 1.5 hours to reach. Once here we'll depart on the first forest wildlife watching walk that we'll take during our stay. Each exploration into the forest will last for about three to four hours and the group will be split between two Russian Niva jeeps and a Range Rover that will be driven by our two local guides and our Explore Leader. The exact start time will vary depending on the season and weather conditions as it's best to try and spot the wildlife at dusk and dawn when they're at their most active. Our guides will take us on a number of short walks into the forest (we'll walk approximately three kilometres on each) to show us several different types of wolf dens and habitats, locate wolf tracks, scats and territorial marking, and perhaps to view photos of the wolves captured on the camera-traps. The terrain in the forest is uneven and can be boggy, wet and muddy underfoot so wellington boots and plenty of spare socks are recommended. Our wildlife watching on this trip doesn't take place from within hides but

outside in the forest with our guides tracking animals through the woods. Wolves and lynx are highly intelligent and quite shy and so there is no guarantee of seeing them, but our guides will do their best to locate them. We will hopefully be able to spot other animals too such as beaver, deer, bison and wild pigs.

After our forest discoveries we'll have dinner back at the eco station that is prepared by one of our guides after we have returned to the eco station. Our meal will normally consist of soup or salad to start and then a hot main course made from local produce that is in season at the time with a local beer and followed by a cup of tea or coffee. If you have any dietary requirements then please let Explore know at the time of booking this trip. There is no bar at the eco station so if you fancy a couple of drinks after dinner then you need to purchase these in Minsk and bring them along with you.

We'll stay for two nights at the eco station, which is a true wilderness experience - there's no in-room television, no WiFi, limited mobile phone signal and no crowds of tourists. The eco station is located in a small glade within the forest near to the Volka River and it's from here that our guides conduct their scientific research into the forest and its inhabitants. It is a scientific station that's designed to be environmentally friendly and in keeping with the traditional building style that has been found in the forest for generations. It's not a guesthouse or hotel and so the facilities are basic. The station has three outside toilets, one shower and two small saunas shared by everyone. We'll be staying in a variety of different sized dormitory style rooms that all have simple rustic decor. No bedding is provided, so you'll need to bring your own sleeping bag (four seasons for winter departures) and although there are cushions provided you may prefer to also bring your own pillow.

Please note that depending on the time of year and the road conditions we may need to go straight to the Eco Station today in order to do our first wildlife watching walk before it gets dark. If so then we will instead go on our Minsk city tour on the afternoon of day four. Due to weather conditions and the time of sunrise and sunset our forest guide may adjust the number of forest walks that are included in this itinerary and also some walks maybe shortened or lengthed depending on the conditions. If this mean we're unable to go on a walk then our forest guide will instead tell us more about the environment, the wildlife and their scientific studies of the area.



ACCOMMODATION:
Naust Eco Station (or similar)

Grade: Simple Cabins



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST AND DINNER

DAY 3 - Wildlife watching walk and talk on Belarusian flora and fauna

Early this morning (at around 4am) we'll board our Niva jeeps and Range Rover and head into the forest on another wildlife watching walk. As well as trying to spot the mammals that roam the forest there's also a variety of birdlife in the area and depending on the season we may be able to see species such as black grouse, hazel grouse, golden eagle, white-tailed eagle and black storks.

After our time in the forest we'll return to the eco station for breakfast which normally consists of warm rolls, biscuits, cheese and tea and coffee. We'll then have some time to relax and catch-up on sleep before having lunch. Following this one of our forester guides will teach us more about the flora and fauna of

Belarus and the local wolf population.

This evening we'll head out again on another forest walk before returning to the eco station for dinner and to rest for the night.



ACCOMMODATION:
Naust Eco Station (or similar)



Grade: Simple Cabins



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST, LUNCH AND DINNER

DAY 4 - Early morning forest walk; return to Minsk

This morning we get up very early once again to drive out into the forest for our final chance to hopefully spot wolves and more. After spending a few hours out exploring we'll return to the eco station for the last time to have breakfast before we board our bus for the drive back to Minsk. The afternoon is free for you to relax, have a long shower and catch-up on some sleep or perhaps to go out into the capital and see more the sights at your own pace.

This evening you might like to take a stroll through the Trinity Suburb, which is one of oldest and most picturesque areas. You may like to visit one of a number of Stolle Restaurants in the city, which are famous for their variety of savoury and sweet pies that you can either eat in or take away. Just a few of the many pie fillings include meat and egg, salmon, lemon, and cabbage.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Tourist (or similar)



Grade: Standard Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 5 - Trip ends in Minsk

The trip ends after breakfast at our hotel in Minsk.



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

Trip information

Country information

Belarus

Climate

Belarusian climate is moderately continental, a transitional form from maritime to continental climate with mild and humid winters, warm summers and damp autumns. Average July temperatures range from +17 C to +18.5 C, January temperatures vary from -8 C to -4.5 C. In the Naliboki Forest area temperatures in winter can fall as low as -25 C.

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion	Language
+3	2 Pin Round	Orthodox	Belarusian

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

There are no optional excursions offered on this trip.

Clothing

On this trip you will be spending a lot of time outside in the forest in the earlier morning and late evening which can be chilly at anytime of year, therefore we would recommend packing layers including a fleece and taking a hat, gloves, scarf and sufficient waterproofs (jacket and trouser) with you just in case. It's best to have spare changes of clothes in case you get wet whilst on our forest walks. You will need to bring long trousers for the forest walks.

July and August are the hottest months so we'd recommend taking lightweight cotton clothing. During spring and autumn temperatures can be lower and there is also a stronger possibility of rain.

During the winter months you should take warm layered waterproof clothing and thermals with you as it

may well be snowy and you might get wet. A good quality heavy duty wind and waterproof jacket and trousers are essential. We also strongly recommend packing thermal underwear, fleece under trousers, a fleece jumper, woolly hat, thick socks, scarf or snood and gloves (and glove liners for when you're taking photos). You may also find ski trousers or salopettes and a ski face/neck mask useful.

Footwear

We recommend taking wellington boots and plenty of spare socks for in the forest as it is very likely to be wet and muddy underfoot (whatever the season) and also to take comfortable waterproof walking boots.

If travelling in winter then your walking shoes/boots should have sufficient grip for icy conditions and be waterproof in case of snow. You may wish to bring a spare pair in case your feet get wet and your boots don't dry out overnight.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a day pack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Equipment

We advise taking a water bottle for our included forest walks as well as sun glasses, sunscreen and a sun hat. For our stay in the Eco Station, you will need to bring a sleeping bag and towels are not provided so you may wish to bring your own. You may also find dry shampoo useful.

In case of emergency we also recommend that you carry a torch and a first aid kit. If you have allergies please also bring an Epi pen and antihistamines. For the time spent in the forest please take mosquito repellent and you may find a mosquito head net handy. We also advise bringing tick remover, bite cream and cold compress. It can be boggy and uneven underfoot in the forest so you may also find walking poles handy. Our forest walks will be in the early morning and late evening, so you might find a head torch useful for when it gets dark.

For wildlife spotting it's best to bring binoculars with you and a camera with a good zoom lens and spare battery.

If travelling in winter you may find taking some over shoe ice grips to be of use and walking poles in case of icy conditions.

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 please allow £10.00 for tipping.

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.

Belarus

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	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£6	£11	£2.00 - 4.00	£0.4

Foreign Exchange

Local currency	Recommended Currency For Exchange
Ruble	USD or Euro

Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

You might find it difficult to obtain money from some ATM machines using Maestro and Visa cards due to difficulties in reading the card.

Credit Card Acceptance

Restaurants and shops in major towns.

Travellers Cheques

Are difficult to cash on this tour.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, 4WD, Train

Accommodation notes

Our hotel in Minsk is conveniently located just a few minutes' walk from the Partyzanskaya Metro Station and it's a 15-20 minute journey into the very centre of the city. Close to our hotel is the Belarus Department Store where you may like to browse for local products such as textiles. The area around the hotel is dominated by locals including a large tractor manufacturing base which employs an astonishing 17,000 people. They are extremely proud of their tractor production and so there are monuments to the tractor and even children's parks with tractor shaped toys. The hotel and the surrounding area have a very Soviet layout and give us a glimpse into what normal life is like in the city. The hotel is tall and offers

great views from the higher floors.

We also spend two nights at the Naust Eco Station, which is a true wilderness experience - there's no TV, no WiFi and limited mobile phone signal. You might like to take entertainment with you for during the day when you're not out in the forest such as a book, audio book or an electronic book reader, games device or tablet, pack of cards or a quiz book. Please tell us at time of booking if you have any dietary requirements, Eco station should be able to cater but will need to have advance notice. We recommend you also bring your own supplies just in case. The station has three outside toilets, one shower and two small saunas shared by everyone. We'll be staying in a variety of different sized dormitory style rooms with simple rustic decor that have between one to three beds in them. Some of the beds are mattresses on the floor and others are on bed frames constructed from timber found in the forest. No bedding is provided, so you'll need to bring you own sleeping bag (four seasons for winter departures) and although there are cushions provided you may prefer to also bring your own pillow. Some bedrooms have curtains rather than doors separating them from other rooms and need to be passed through to reach communal areas. Rooms will be allocated on a run of house basis and might be mixed gender. No single room option is available at the station - the single room supplement on this trip is for the two nights spent in Minsk only. The Eco Station does have electricity and there are plug sockets available in most rooms to charge camera and phone batteries, but power cuts do occurs, so its best to bring spare batteries if you can and also to carry a torch with you just in case. The Eco Station is family owned and the husband and wife will be our guides during our forest walks - they have over 35 years of experience on the wildlife of Belarus. They do have their own private house which they share with their two children and they also have a few friendly dogs that roam freely around the Eco Station.

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

Belarus: All national passport holders from the UK and Ireland, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada (except those entering on a diplomatic or official passport) can now enter Belarus for a maximum of thirty days without a visa. Please note that the day you arrive counts as day one, regardless of your

arrival time and entry and exit will only be permitted at Minsk International Airport. On arrival you will need to show your passport, documentation proving that you have medical insurance valid in Belarus and valued at a minimum of €10,000, and funds equivalent to €25.00 per day (so €125.00 in total for five days). This can be in the form of cash, credit cards or travellers cheques in any currency.

A maximum of 90 days stay in Belarus in any one calendar year is permitted. If you wish to stay longer than thirty days then a visa is required. If you're travelling from/to any Russian airport then this visa-free arrangement doesn't apply and you'll need a visa.

There are 80 countries in total that the visa free arrangements apply to and a full list of these and further information can be found on the Belarus Embassy website:

http://uk.mfa.gov.by/en/consular_issues/visas/

Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may be able to apply through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See 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 complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

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.

Included activities

If you have any walking difficulties then it may not be possible for you to partake in the walks into the forest. The terrain is very uneven and boggy and it will often be necessary to traverse areas of water by walking across tree logs. You will spend between two and three hours out in the forest at a time.

Please note that you may get wet at any time of year and that wellington boots are essential. During winter, early spring or autumn there maybe snow or ice on the ground and therefore be more slippery

underfoot. We strongly recommend checking the weather forecast before you travel and ensuring you pack accordingly. You need to have a good level of physical fitness and be steady on your feet in order to be able to do the forest walks or otherwise you will need to remain at the eco station.

The minibus used for the journey to the Naust Eco Station and the vehicles used to explore in the forest do not have air conditioning. The vehicles used for this part of the trip are older than those used in Minsk due to the uneven forest terrain.

Ability to swim

No

Belarus

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Rabies, Tetanus, Tick-borne encephalitis, Tuberculosis and Typhoid. 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.

Wildlife Watching in Belarus



We've set the dates for this trip to offer us the best possibility of seeing wolves in the wild, but spotting these intelligent and timid predators can be tough and the probability of seeing them is between 12- 18% per safari.

During September to April it's also possible to see bison (30%), elk (30%), red deer (80%), roe deer (100%), beaver (50%), capercaillie (50%), black grouse (30%), hazel grouse (80%), golden eagle (10%) and white-tailed eagle (10%).

During June to August it's also possible to see bison (5%), elk (20%), red deer (40%), roe deer (100%), beaver (40%), black stork (20%), white stork (100%) and many other interesting bird species including various birds of prey.

The percentage of sightings shown above have been supplied by the guides at the Naust Eco Station and are the average percentage sighting per safari taken.

Our wildlife guide Vadim Sidorovich has his own blog where he recounts his wilderness experiences. This can be seen here:

<https://sidorovich.blog/author/vadimsidorovich/page/3/>

Why book this trip

What better way is there to spend a long weekend than exploring the remarkable city of Minsk and tracking wild wolves through the forest? What's more it's visa free! Until recently a visa was required to visit Belarus but currently visitors from the UK, USA, Australia and more, can travel to Minsk International Airport for up to thirty days without the need for a visa, so it's never been cheaper or easier to discover Belarus. See the Visa Information section of our trip notes for further details.



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