

EXPLORE!



Wolf Watching in Belarus

5 days

Belarus - Trip code WOF

Wolf Watching in Belarus

On this short break to Belarus we'll explore the capital city of Minsk and journey into the Belarusian wilderness to an eco station where our expert guides will take us deep into the forest to try to spot wolves, bison and other wildlife. This is a true wilderness experience where we'll be out exploring at dawn and dusk, when the animals are most active, and staying in simple accommodation that's in the wilderness. Better still most visitors can travel on this trip visa free, so it's never been cheaper or easier to discover Belarus.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Minsk** - Discover the Belarusian capital on a tour to uncover its Soviet history including its bizarrely shaped library and the Museum of the Great Patriotic War
- ★ **Wolf watching** - Go on four exciting safaris into the Belarusian forest in search of wolves, bison, lynx, beavers, elk and eagles
- ★ **Wilderness experience** - Spend two nights at a simple eco station in a remote forest location where we will truly get back to nature while searching for wildlife
- ★ **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 have the chance to learn much from them
- ★ **Visa free** - Normally a visa is required to visit Belarus but currently visitors from the UK, USA, Australia and more, can travel to Minsk International Airport for up to five days without one

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Simple

These are often small, family run establishments or campsites which provide a no-frills experience with adequate amenities and service standards. Sleeping arrangements are simple, sometimes with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

8 - 12

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 - 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 tipple try krambambula, a traditional Belarusian liquor, which is similar to mead and flavoured with spices and honey.



Accommodation: Hotel Tourist (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Market visit and tour of Soviet Minsk; evening wolf watching safari

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 of four wolf watching safaris that we'll take during our stay. Each safari 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 into the forest. The exact start time of the safaris 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 no more than about 3 kilometres in total per safari) 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 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, but our guides will do their best to locate them for us to see. We will hopefully be able to spot other animals too such as beaver, deer, bison and wild pigs.

After our safari we'll have dinner back at 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 Volga 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 you 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 we may need to go straight to the Eco Station today in order to do our first wolf safari before it gets dark. If so then we will instead go on our Minsk city tour on the afternoon of day 4.



Accommodation: Naust Eco Station (or similar)



Simple Cabins



Meals Provided: Breakfast and Dinner

DAY 3 - Wolf watching safaris 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 wolf watching safari. 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 evening wolf tracking safari before returning to the eco station for dinner and to rest for the night.



Accommodation: Naust Eco Station (or similar)



Simple Cabins



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 4 - Early morning wolf watching safari; 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)



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

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.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 4
Lunch: 1
Dinner: 2



Transport

Bus
4WD
Train



Trip staff

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



Accommodation

2 nights simple cabins
2 nights standard hotel

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.

Time difference to GMT

+3

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Orthodox

Language

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 safari. 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.

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.

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 safaris 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. For the time spent in the forest please take mosquito repellent and you may find a mosquito head net handy. For wildlife spotting it's best to bring binoculars with you and a camera with a good zoom lens and spare battery. It can be boggy and uneven underfoot in the forest so you may also find walking poles handy. Our safaris will be in the early morning and late evening, so you might find a head torch useful for when it gets dark.

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.

Country Information

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

£6

Dinner price

£11

Beer price

£2.00 - 4.00

Water price

£0.4

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Ruble

Recommended Currency For Exchange

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

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

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 on safari such as a book, audio book or an electronic book reader, games device or tablet, pack of cards or a quiz book. 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 your 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 occur, so it's 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 safaris into the forest - 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 consider applying 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 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.

Included activities

If you have any walking difficulties then it may not be possible for you to partake in the safari 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. Please note that you may get wet at any time of year and that wellington boots are essential.

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.

Non refundable permits

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.

