



## CHEESEMANS' ECOLOGY SAFARIS

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### **Finland** ***Boreal Wilds***

May 30 to June 11, 2021



Wolverine  
© Alain Verstraete

## **SAFARI OVERVIEW**

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Tour the sparsely populated taiga in Scandinavia's Arctic to watch wolverines, brown bears, and wolves under the midnight sun. Spend four nights in photography/viewing blinds amid these mammals' territories to observe and photograph them at close range. Cruise Lake Saimaa in Linnansaari National Park searching for the endangered and endemic Saimaa ringed seal. Meander through primeval forest and vast bogs of Patvinsuo National Park. Explore the birds and beautiful scenery of Valtavaara Nature Reserve, one of Europe's best birding spots, to search for capercaillie (the largest member of the grouse family), red-flanked bluetail, little and rustic buntings, hazel grouse, three-toed woodpecker, and gray-headed chickadee. Both photographers and wildlife enthusiasts will enjoy fabulous views of difficult-to-see mammals on this trip!

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Spend four nights in special photography/observation blinds to watch wolverines, brown bears, and possibly wolves and white-tailed eagles.
- Discover taiga animals, like the endemic Saimaa ringed seal, forest reindeer, and Arctic birds.
- Get a feel for Finland as you travel from the southern tip of the country to its mid-northern reaches.

**LEADERS:** David 'Billy' Herman assisted by local naturalist guides.

**DAYS:** 13, including estimated travel time.

**GROUP SIZE:** 6.

**COST:** \$6,200 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See the Costs section on page 4.

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** Range from nice to rustic. You'll stay in photography blinds for four nights, which have bunk or single beds and a pit toilet; during the day, you will have a double occupancy room. See the *Accommodations* section on page 6.

**TRANSPORTATION:** Heated 9-seater minibus.

Date	Description	Accommodation	Meals
May 30	Travel to Helsinki, Finland.		
May 31	Arrive in Helsinki.	Hotel Haaga, Helsinki	D
Jun 1	Boating on Lake Saimaa in Linnansaari National Park to search for birds and endemic Saimaa seal.	Hotel Järvisydän, Rantasalmi	B, L, D
Jun 2–3	Discover scavenging wolverines and brown bears during two nights in photography/observation blinds.	Blinds at Erä Eero, Lieksa; Kestikievari Herranniemi Lodge, Vuonisahti	B, L, D
Jun 4	Walk among primeval forests and bogs of Patvinsuo National Park.	Kestikievari Herranniemi Lodge, Vuonisahti	B, L, D
Jun 5–6	Close-up viewing of brown bears and possibly wolves from photography/observation blinds.	Blinds at Lassi Rautiainen's or other, Kuhmo; Hotel Kalevala, Kuhmo	B, L, D
Jun 7	Day of relaxation and local excursions.	Hotel Kalevala, Kuhmo	B, L, D
Jun 8–9	Enjoy birdwatching at Valtavaara Nature Reserve and exploring Oulanka National Park.	Holiday Club Kuusamo Tropiikki, Kuusamo	B, L, D
Jun 10	Wildlife watching and hiking around Kuusamo, and then head to Oulu.	Airport Hotel, Oulu	B, L, D
Jun 11	Depart for home.		B

## LEADER

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### **David 'Billy' Herman**

Billy loves nothing more than sharing nature and wildlife with travelers. He has led trips around the world and his passions are mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and large insects. He worked as an educational assistant for a nature youth movement and Natuurpunt, one of the biggest nature organizations in Belgium. For the last several years he has specialized in nature photography. His enthusiasm for adventure, good food, wildlife, and beautiful landscapes will make this an unforgettable experience.

## DETAILED ITINERARY

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### **May 30 ~ Travel to Helsinki, Finland**

#### **May 31 ~ Arrive in Helsinki**

Arrive in Helsinki where our local transfer agent will transfer you from the airport to the hotel, so you can relax and prepare for your trip. If you would like to arrive earlier, we can arrange extra nights.

#### **Jun 1 ~ Boat trip on Lake Saimaa and explore Linnansaari National Park**

Drive to Rantasalmi where you will enjoy a boat trip in Linnansaari National Park on Lake Saimaa, the largest lake in Finland and the fourth largest natural freshwater lake in Europe. A local guide will accompany you to find the rare, endemic, and endangered Saimaa ringed seal. Together with birds such as the black-throated loon, common goldeneye, and red-breasted merganser, this will be a wonderful start to your trip.

#### **Jun 2–3 ~ Observe and photograph wolverines and bears from blinds**

Travel to Lieksa where you'll spend two nights in comfortable blinds to observe and photograph the secretive wolverine and families of brown bears. Only a few years ago, it was almost impossible to see wolverines in the wild anywhere in the world. Fortunately, the province of Karelia, where Lieksa is located, is one of the best places to observe and photograph this giant member of the mustelid family.

#### **Jun 4 ~ Explore the forest and bogs of Patvinsuo National Park**

Walk amid the unique primeval forest and vast bogs of Patvinsuo National Park, which you're sure to remember. Finland is well-known for its mire ecosystems. Mires, also called peatlands and wetlands, can be divided into two kinds in Finland: raised bogs with thick layers of peat (10 to 20ft deep) and aapa mires with wetter, sedge-dominant habitat (peat layers 2 to 10ft deep). Patvinsuo is where the north meets the south, so you'll find a combination of raised bogs typical of the south and aapa mires typical of the north. Raised bogs rely on rainwater for nutrients, whereas aapa mires rely on the mineral soil for nutrients from groundwater or runoff from surrounding areas. Learn about the ecology as you wander through this unique landscape.

#### **Jun 5–6 ~ Observe and photograph bears from blinds**

Drive toward the border with Russia to the area near the town of Kuhmo, situated among territories of brown bears and if lucky, you may see the elusive wolves of this region. The vast, remote character of nature here is impressive. Spend two nights in a photography/observation blind, while keeping your eyes peeled for white-tailed eagles and common ravens suddenly abandoning carcasses, a sure sign that a carnivore is about to appear.



Brown Bear  
© Alain Verstraete

### Jun 7 ~ Day of relaxation or short excursions

At the hotel, you'll be welcomed with a buffet breakfast, and during the day you may rest or go on short excursions with your leader. You have the opportunity to see mammals and birds including forest reindeer, Eurasian elk (the European version of moose), European pine marten, mountain hare, Eurasian capercaillie (the largest member of the grouse family), hazel grouse, and Eurasian three-toed woodpecker.

### Jun 8–9 ~ Enjoy the birds and scenery of Valtavaara Nature Reserve and Oulanka National Park

Travel to Kuusamo where you'll discover some of birds that

call the taiga home. Enjoy the beautiful scenery, nice paths, and pure air in Valtavaara, one of the best birdwatching spots in Europe. You will search for the red-flanked bluetail, little and rustic buntings, and gray-headed chickadee. At Oulanka National Park, you'll experience rushing rivers amid the Scots pine and Norway spruce and wildflowers unique to this area. You will hopefully find black grouse, white-throated dipper dipping in the powerful waters, red-breasted flycatcher, gray wagtail, and enigmatic owl species including the Ural owl, great grey owl, Eurasian pygmy-owl, and Boreal owl.

### Jun 10 ~ Explore wildlife around Kuusamo and Oulu

Spend the morning in Kuusamo wildlife watching and hiking, and then head toward Oulu where you can explore the hotel's gardens along the Gulf of Bothnia. Here you may find whooper swan, common goldeneye, common and red-breasted merganser, and abundant migrating sandpipers including common redshank, common greenshank, and ruff.

### Jun 11 ~ Fly home

Depending on your flight schedules, you may have a short excursion before your flight home.

## COSTS (ALL COSTS ARE IN US DOLLARS)

### Cost

Type	Cost per Person
Trip Cost, double occupancy	\$6,200
Single Supplement	\$750

Costs are per person, double occupancy, not including airfare, singles extra. See *Included* and *Not Included* sections for more details.

If you are a single traveler, we will find a roommate for you, but if we cannot find you a roommate, we may charge you a single supplement. Single rooms cost extra and are subject to availability.



## Payment Schedule

Payment	Due Date	Amount per Person
Deposit	Due now to reserve your space	\$500
Second	July 15, 2020	\$1,000
Final	December 15, 2020	Remaining balance

Payments are due based on the schedule above. All reservations require a deposit to confirm reservation of your space.

## Cancellations

Until the Final Payment due date, deposits are refundable except for a cancellation fee of \$150 per person, which can be applied toward another trip if reserved within six months of the cancelled trip's departure date. Cancellations are non-transferrable. No refunds are given after the Final Payment due date.

## Included

- All leaders, transport, park entry fees, landing fees, and permits for all activities unless described as optional.
- Accommodations for the nights of May 31 through June 10.
- Group photography/observation blinds for the nights of June 2, 3, 5, and 6.
- Meals from dinner on May 31 through breakfast on June 11.
- Transfers from Helsinki Airport to Hotel Haaga, regardless of arrival day, and to Oulu Airport on June 11.
- Boat trip on Lake Saimaa.
- Non-alcoholic beverages.
- Sleeping bags for time in blinds (if requested).
- Gratuities for included airport transfers and hotel porters.
- Trip Materials – information about flights, packing, entry and departure requirements, airport transfers, gratuities, etc.

## Not Included

- All airfare, airport and departure taxes, and excess baggage fees. Round-trip airfare is approximately \$975 to \$1,700 between the US and Finland, depending on origin.
- We can arrange extra hotel nights for an extra cost.
- Gratuities – tipping is always discretionary. However, we suggest budgeting about \$35 to \$70 total per participant for your leader. All other gratuities are included.
- Mandatory emergency medical and evacuation insurance. For more information see [www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance](http://www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance).
- Optional trip cancellation insurance. For more information see [www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance](http://www.cheesemans.com/travel-insurance).
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls, medical costs or hospitalization, room service, alcoholic beverages, items not on the regular menu, etc. If you have special dietary needs, please indicate them on your Reservation Form.

## SIGN UP

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Please contact us first to check availability, reserve your space, and obtain a Reservation Form. To confirm your reservation, we require a deposit and signed form from each participant.

Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris

Email: [info@cheesemans.com](mailto:info@cheesemans.com)

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## OTHER DETAILS

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### Climate

The weather should be nice, sunny, and warm. Of course, in the high Arctic you can always expect some cloudy, rainy, or cold weather. Average temperatures range from the low 50s°F (~11°C) at night to the upper 60s°F (~20°C) during the day.

### Fitness Level

You spend four nights observing wildlife in blinds, which may lead to sleep deprivation, depending on your sleep needs and habits, which require patience and a positive attitude. Hikes are generally easy with some small hills, depending on the group's fitness level. Please contact us if you have any health concerns that may make this trip challenging.

### Accommodations

You spend four nights in comfortable photography blinds with single beds or bunk beds with sleeping bags (if requested) and a pit toilet. You'll arrive in the blinds around 4:00pm and stay until around 7:00am the following morning. During the daytime and other nights, you will stay at comfortable lodges, with rest time after nights in the blinds.

### Flights

Airfare is not included in trip costs. Detailed logistical information and the contact information for our recommended flight-ticketing agent are included in the Trip Materials we will send you. Please let us know if you are arriving earlier or staying later as we are happy to assist you with any extra overnights that you might want to arrange.

Flights you (or a travel agent) book: Arrive in Helsinki, Finland (HEL) by the evening on May 31. Depart from Oulu, Finland (OUL) anytime on June 11.

### Terms and Conditions

Read our current Terms and Conditions at <https://cheesemans.com/terms-and-conditions>.

### Conservation

Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris is passionate about conserving the precious regions that we travel to and supports many conservation efforts. By visiting these areas, we contribute to sustainable conservation of these valuable wildlife habitats. We urge you to support conservation organizations that protect and restore

natural habitats and write letters to tourism and government agencies to promote work in preserving wildlife.

We aim to make all our trips carbon neutral by splitting the cost of carbon offsetting with our participants. For your convenience, the optional donation amount for your half of the carbon offset will be indicated on your invoice. We source high quality offsets through CarbonTree Conservation Fund, a non-profit we helped found, supporting pioneering forest conservation in the Rio Bravo Reserve in Belize, a Nature Conservancy project ([www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/latin-america/belize/rio-bravo-conservation-area/](http://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/latin-america/belize/rio-bravo-conservation-area/)).