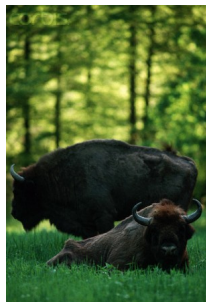


BIALOWIEZA FOREST: VISIT THE HOME OF EUROPEAN BISON



The Białowieża Forest, a UNESCO site, is the biggest original lowland forest in Europe. It is also home to number of interesting animals and especially to the rare European bison.

The Polish national park, Białowieża Forest, occupies an area of approximately 150 thousand hectares. It is an ideal home to the mighty animals - bisons - that were hunted here since the ancient times. In the forest itself there are around 450 European bisons, another 40 bisons live in a nearby reserve. All over the world there are more than 3000 European bisons, reported Ihned.cz.

The main tourist center in the Polish part of the forest is Białowieża, where the Tzar's hunting-lodge used to be before it was destroyed in the WW2. Today it is the seat of the forestry-natural science museum and hotel Iwa.

The main part of the museum exhibit is dedicated to over 1200 animals who live in the forest. Visitors can enjoy a remarkable collection of stuffed animals. There is also one of the biggest collections of birds in Poland. Besides that the museum also includes a historical survey of various hunting traps and 19th century bee hives.

The biggest attraction of the forest, where some of the trees are older than 500 years, is the strictly protected part called Orlówka, where the forest grew entirely without human intervention. Visitors can walk the 4 km tour or go by bicycle. To go off the marked route you have to be part of a group with a guide.

The European bison could be seen even while on the marked routes but if you want to be sure you will spot them then it is advisable to visit the nearby European bison reserve. You can watch the animals from a very short distance - not only the bisons but also other animals like elks or deer. The partly marshy forest is home to numerous kinds of animal species. There are 120 kinds of birds including cranes, storks and nine types of woodpeckers. Mammals are represented e.g. by elks, deer, wild swine, beavers, lynxes and wolves.

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