

Now we have paddled canoes in Canada, Sweden, Mongolia and for a first visit to Finland I can only say the Tar Route was above our expectations.

Large lakes where a sail could be set, small lakes of winding passages, rivers of charm and intimacy and all set with hundreds of islands for wild camping or use the wind shelters, fire pits and facilities including ready cut wood provided for free by the Finnish State.

Never been "glamping" but some of the sites felt like it! Even one island with a simple empty wood log cottage and smoke sauna to enjoy as one pleased. Water crystal clear and pure enough to drink straight from the side of the boat, pike and perch to catch and smoke on the evening fire, wild Blueberries to pick and put into pancakes, Woodland Caribou with their calves shyly appearing in the forests or swimming across bays, eagles hunting overhead and the knowledge that in this vast (by UK standards) reserve are Wolf and Bear and Wolverine and Lynx; too wary for us to see but one felt this was more of a Canadian type Taiga wilderness with very few people enjoying the blue waters, warm swimming off gentle, soft, sand beaches, the virtual 24 hour daylight with sunsets from one set of gods and thunder storms from another.

Or the sheer hoot of trundling down the cast iron on railway trolleys, used originally to carry the boats laden with barrels of tar over and isthmus, to float on the canoes and push over and through the forest. And all kept oiled and greased and ready still for the odd canoe or kayak.

We opted for a two week trip in July with 11 days canoeing to give ourselves the chance to explore 100km of these charming waters and have 2 "away" days, staying on islands without the hassle of de-camping.

We took our own tents and sleeping gear, but the kit and 17' Bell lightweight canoes, navigation charts, paddles, lifejackets, cooking equipment provided by Urpo, Nature Travels' outfitter in Finland, were superb; high quality.

And for Urpo nothing was too much trouble even arranging that he would pick up all the gear from the Hotel Kalevala so we could finish the trip by paddling straight to the hotel. And what a hotel of great service, fabulous views, free saunas and hot tubs to enjoy at the close of our journey before off for a 6 hour train journey south to Helsinki, a surprising cosmopolitan city full of Art Deco architecture, before our flight home to the UK the next day.

Trains, taxis, food, alcohol are all UK equivalent prices and loads of places for food shopping. Just ask Urpo!

All in all a typical Nature Travels holiday - high quality, great service, very reasonable cost for those looking for an adventure.

One top tip- if you are flying direct from London to Kajaani book through one airline only. We booked through Norwegian and Finn Air and the late take off from the UK created a mild panic in re-arranging our travel arrangement.

Mark and Jane Dixon, July 2016