

# Destination Scandinavia

Rugged and breathtakingly beautiful one minute, flat and featureless the next – there's something undeniably cool about Scandinavia. There's a purity to the air, blondness in the hair and a sense of space you won't find anywhere else in Europe.

There's so much natural beauty in Scandinavia it's difficult to know where to start. Iceland is a volcanic hotspot of lava flows, waterfalls and glaciers. Norway has an overwhelming coastline of dramatic steep-sided fjords and mountains. Finland is a patchwork of lakes and pristine forests. Spy on puffins from clifftops, spot whales breaching at sea or pause as a herd of reindeer crosses your path in Lapland. Parts of northern Scandinavia can seem incredibly remote and empty, but in the south, the cosmopolitan cities of Copenhagen, Stockholm and Helsinki brim with history, architectural highlights, active harbour scenes, nightlife and culture.

Nudging the Arctic Circle, this latitude brings the extremes of near constant daylight in summer and the bluish darkness of long polar nights in winter. While it's natural to imagine snow when you think of this part of the world, southern Scandinavia in summer can be as warm and sunny as southern Europe. Locals live for those summer months when the days are long and there's a buzz of excitement and energy everywhere you go, as summer festivals explode throughout the region. Feeling energetic? You can hike and cycle in virgin forests, canoe through stunning island archipelagos, or in winter (and spring) you can ski, snowmobile or dogsled.

Travel in Scandinavia is easy and getting around can be half the fun. Cruise on a ferry between Helsinki and Stockholm or Tallinn, sail all the way from Bergen in Norway to Seyðisfjörður in Iceland via the Faroe Islands, or catch Norway's famous *Hurtigruten* coastal steamer beyond the Arctic Circle. The mountainous Oslo–Bergen train trip is one of the world's most scenic.

# The Authors



## PAUL HARDING

**Coordinating Author, Front Chapters & Finland**

Paul first left his comfy job as a newspaper reporter and strapped on a backpack to explore Europe 10 years ago. Mesmerised by the midnight sun, stunned by Scandinavia's pristine environment and wooed by Helsinki's summer energy and nightlife, he has made several trips to Scandinavia, particularly Finland. Covering thousands of kilometres around Finland, he once again snowmobiled on frozen lakes, suffered mild shock from ice swimming after a sauna, managed to survive Vappu in Helsinki (but only just) and even got arrested by Russian police on a side trip to St Petersburg. Fortunate enough to travel and work as a writer and photographer for the past eight years, Paul has contributed to Lonely Planet's *Finland*, *Iceland* and *Scandinavian Europe* guides, among others.

## Life on the Road

It was  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  and the snow was still heavy on the ground when I arrived in Helsinki (p148) in late March. The Baltic ferries were ploughing through the ice into the harbour and people were skating, kite-surfing and ice-fishing on the frozen lake and inlets. I took an €18 flight to Oulu and made my way up to Kemi (p200), snowmobiled out to the world's only passenger Arctic icebreaker and marvelled as it cut through 20m-thick pack ice in the Gulf of Bothnia, before bedding down in a polar sleeping bag at a hotel made entirely of ice and snow. In Rovaniemi (p205) I visited Santa at the Arctic Circle and drove on icy roads to Inari (p206), where the annual Sami reindeer racing championships were in full swing. Finally, I swallowed my budget and spent the night in a glass igloo at Kakslauttanen (p207) hoping to see the aurora borealis, but on this particular night it wasn't to be. Next time!



## MARK ELLIOTT

**Faroe Islands**

Among previous 'great north' guidebook assignments Mark has traversed the extraordinary vastness of Siberia and explored the fabulous fjords of southern Greenland, where an escapade with Inuit hunters nearly left him fatally trapped in offshore ice floes. The relative warmth of the Faroes sounded like a much safer proposition. But there was plenty of alternative excitement including dive-bombing skuas and dizzying chasms that lay invisibly across his hiking trails. Sudden gales at Kollur lighthouse almost gusted him off the clifftops. But he was equally 'blown away' by the amazing music scene and stimulating encounters with local artists.

## LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the Internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com).



## BECKY OHLSEN

**Sweden**

Becky has her parents to thank for her early exposure to and affection for Sweden. But it was the pickled herring and *snaps* that cinched it. In recent years she's made annual pilgrimages to the motherland and has studied the language enough to be able to enter into conversations that ultimately leave her baffled. She likes the gloom of Swedish art and the gleam of its pop – everything from August Strindberg to ABBA, and Bergman to Pippi Longstocking. Most of all she loves hiking in Norrland forests, sharing the road with reindeer, and eating saffron ice cream in Gamla Stan. Becky has also coauthored Lonely Planet's guide to Sweden.



## FRAN PARNELL

**Iceland, Directory & Transport**

Fran's love of the country began while studying for a masters degree in Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic, and has just kept on growing. It's impossible to choose one favourite spot, but the Westfjords, the Vestmannaeyjar and Grimsey are high on her list, as is Reykjavik with all its Viking history, fine cafés and odd museums. Fran has also worked on Lonely Planet guides to Sweden, Iceland and Reykjavik.



## JOHN SPELMAN

**Norway**

John Spelman spends a lot of time trying to obtain refugee status so that Norway will let him emigrate. Until then, he visits as often as possible to drink tasteless beer, freeloader off his generous friends and be overwhelmed by the world's most stunning landscape.

When Lonely Planet isn't footing the bill, John is a PhD student researching architectural and urban histories, some of them Norwegian. He currently lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. This is the fourth time he has covered Norway for a Lonely Planet title.



## ANDREW STONE

**Denmark**

Andrew first visited Denmark in the mid-1990s to see friends of his in Copenhagen. He returns every year or so just to check that Copenhagen is as effortlessly cool as before, to check out the latest bit of weird architecture, to stock up on hip little design classics and to feed his interest in Denmark's rich Iron Age, Viking and Renaissance history. Andrew is also an author of Lonely Planet's *Denmark* guide.

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## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

**Steve Kokker** is a die-hard Eastern European lover, having spent most of his time since 1996 living away from his native Montreal, basing himself in his father's homeland of Tallinn, Estonia, and trekking through the Baltic region, Russia and beyond. He's been writing for Lonely Planet since 1998, and was responsible for the Tallinn chapter of this book.

**Tom Masters** aged 15, travelled around Eastern Europe by train with his intrepid mother, and at 18 finally got to see Russia, his true passion. Since graduating from the University of London with a degree in Russian, Tom has returned more times than he can remember, living in St Petersburg and working throughout the region. Now living in London, he finds himself back in Russia all the time. He wrote the St Petersburg chapter for this book.

# Getting Started

Let's make one thing clear: travel throughout Scandinavia is a breeze. Communicating in English is rarely a problem, transport is efficient and frequent between main towns, standards of living are high and you won't find the crazy crowds that blight summer travel elsewhere in Europe.

On the down side, travel expenses are high, weather can be fickle and distances can be long, especially in the wilds of Arctic Lapland or the Icelandic interior. Scandinavia is a big place; there's a lot of diversity from the Arctic north to the forest and farmland of the south, and midsummer has little in common with midwinter. Depending on where and when you go, you'll probably need to pack winter and summer clothes. No matter how long you plan to travel here, and whatever your budget, a little forward planning will help you squeeze the most out of your trip. There's no point turning up at Bergen to catch the ferry to Iceland in April or planning to see the aurora borealis (northern lights) in September.

## WHEN TO GO

Scandinavia has very distinct summer and winter seasons and extremely different climates, especially when comparing the north and the south. For most travellers, the best time to visit is undoubtedly summer – the brief window from June to August – when you can usually be guaranteed some fine weather and long, long hours of daylight. This is the time when camping grounds and hostels are all open, summer festivals are in full swing and there's a buzz of excitement on the streets with lots of shiny, happy Scandinavians. The holiday season begins after Midsummer's Day (usually the third weekend in June). This is when locals take their holidays and vacate the cities en masse for the countryside, but no matter what time of year, Scandinavia rarely feels overcrowded and hotels actually drop their rates in summer. The exceptions are camping grounds and family attractions, which are often packed.

See Climate Charts (p486) for more information.

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

**Sleeping bag or sleeping sheet** – even if you're not camping you'll sleep cheaper in hostels with your own sheets, and a sleeping bag is a must in Iceland

**Insect repellent** – for keeping mosquitoes and biting insects at bay in summer, especially in Finland and Iceland

**Hat and gloves** – for those inevitable cold snaps

**Swiss army knife** – essential multipurpose tool

**Watch** – everything in Scandinavia runs on time!

**Mobile phone/PDA** – it's easy and inexpensive to get hooked up to local prepaid networks in Scandinavia and handy for making bookings or keeping in touch with other travellers

**Swimsuit and towel** – for soaking in 'hot pots' or thermal springs in Iceland, postsauna swims and spas in Finland, or for the beaches of southern Sweden and Denmark

**Credit card** – Scandinavians love to pay with the plastic so it's handy to have a credit card for general use or emergencies; essential for car hire

**Eye mask, earplugs and torch** – useful for sleeping on long summer nights; rowdy hostels; and finding your way in the dark

**Sense of adventure and humour** – vital for when those fjords and glaciers are lost in fog, when you just missed the last bus by 30 seconds, when you get the bill for that fancy restaurant 'splurge', and for making new discoveries away from the beaten track

Throughout the region, especially in the south, temperatures can be surprisingly warm in summer. Spring and autumn – May, June and September – are also good times to visit. You can still expect fine, sunny days and fewer tourists. Temperature changes can be swift at this latitude – above the Arctic Circle you might find yourself wrapped in layers one day, but wearing only a T-shirt the next. Iceland and the western coast of Norway remain mild thanks to the Gulf Stream, but this also brings rain – hikers and campers should always carry waterproof gear.

Winter (and early spring in the far north) brings its own tourist season, where snowbound activities such as skiing and snowboarding, dogsledging, ice-fishing and snowmobiling are all the rage. Peak ski season in Lapland and the north is generally February to April, when the snow is deep but the gloomy depths of winter are over. True winter (November to January) is the time to view the aurora borealis, but otherwise travel in Scandinavia is a pretty cold, dark and miserable option, when the sauna becomes a sanctuary from the snow and much of the tourist infrastructure outside the main cities shuts down completely. Autumn (late August to September) is the perfect time for hiking and cycling, thanks to the beautiful forest colours.

See the Climate & When to Go section of the country chapters for more information.

## COSTS & MONEY

By any standards Scandinavia can be expensive, especially for accommodation, eating out and nightlife, but overall the daily costs of travel are comparable to northern Europe and in some cases cheaper than London or Paris. And there are plenty of free things for travellers to do: hiking, visiting churches, parks and gardens, national parks, fjords, glaciers and beaches which all cost nothing more than the effort to get there. Travel costs vary slightly from country to country – Denmark is probably cheapest, followed by Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. Tallinn and St Petersburg are considerably cheaper than anywhere in Scandinavia.

### THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

The haunting sight of curtains of charged light swirling across the sky on a chill Arctic night is an irresistible lure for many travellers. The northern lights, or aurora borealis, are a surreal and exhilarating sight, often visible to observers standing at or above the Arctic Circle (latitude 66°), which includes a large part of northern Scandinavia. They're especially visible around the equinoxes (late September and March), and are particularly striking during the dark winter.

The aurora appears as curtains of greenish-white light stretching east to west across the sky for thousands of kilometres. At its lower edge, the aurora typically shades to a crimson-red glow. Hues of blue and violet can also be seen. The lights seem to shift and swirl in the night sky, as if in a celestial dance.

These auroral storms are created when charged particles (protons and electrons) from the sun bombard the earth. These are deflected towards the north and south poles by the earth's magnetic field. There they hit the earth's outer atmosphere, 100km to 1000km above ground, causing highly charged electrons to collide with molecules of nitrogen and oxygen. The excess energy from these collisions creates the colourful lights we see in the sky.

The ancients had other explanations for the spectacle: the Greeks described it as 'blood rain'; the Inuit attributed the phenomenon to 'sky dwellers'; and the Sami of Lapland believed it was caused by a giant fox swishing its tail above the Arctic tundra.

Like anything in nature, the northern lights can be fickle and certainly don't occur every night. To see them you need at least a cloudless, very cold night and the luck of the heavens.

Once you're in the region, your biggest unavoidable expense is finding a bed, but camping (you can pitch a tent in many places for free) and Scandinavia's excellent network of hostels will keep costs down, and most hotels discount their rates on weekends and in summer. A night on the town in Stockholm, Oslo or Helsinki – say dinner, a few drinks and a nightclub or music bar can easily require a small bank loan, but shopping at markets, filling up on lunch buffets and buying alcohol from supermarkets or state-run liquor stores is relatively cheap. Little things like a cup of coffee, doing your laundry or storing your bag in a locker cost about €2 to €2.50.

Sightseeing costs can add up (museum admissions range from €2.50 to €10) but most capital cities offer good-value discount cards that give free admission to sights for a limited period. An ISIC student card or youth card can cut costs in half.

On a rock-bottom budget – camping or staying in hostels, self-catering, using a rail pass or bus transport – you can squeak by on €30 to €55 a day, which is pretty tight and doesn't allow for much amusement. Staying in private hostel rooms, guesthouses or two people sharing in a cheap hotel, eating at least one sit-down meal a day and seeing a few sights, expect to budget €65 to €80 per person per day. Add to that the 'nonessentials' – shopping, drinking, activities such as cruises, tours and skiing – to come up with your own budget. Travel is a personal thing and everyone spends differently. With €95 a day and some common sense you can travel pretty comfortably.

Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Faroes and Iceland each have their own kroner, while Finland uses the euro. The easiest way to carry or obtain money in Scandinavia is with debit and credit cards – ATMs (24-hour) linked to international networks (Cirrus, Maestro, Eurocard, Plus, Visa and MasterCard) are common.

## READING UP

There are lots of ways to pique your interest, pick up ideas and fuel the dream before your trip. Reading travel books, studying maps and surfing the internet will all help drive that wanderlust.

## Books

*Frost on My Moustache: The Arctic Exploits of a Lord and a Loafer* by Tim Moore. In this contemporary account following 19th-century traveller Lord Dufferin, British writer Moore hauls himself across the North Atlantic, enduring chronic seasickness, cycling through Iceland's interior, taking a Viking longboat to Norway via the Faroes and finally landing in Spitzbergen. A great read.

*Pole to Pole* by Michael Palin. The former Monty Python star and his BBC crew travel from the North to South Pole along the 30° line of longitude. The early part of the trip conveniently includes the far north of Norway, Finnish Lapland, Helsinki, Tallinn and St Petersburg. Palin's casual journal-style narrative is typically funny and engaging.

*To the Top of the World: Norway's Coastal Voyage* by PE Johnson. The author takes the stunning coastal route from Bergen to Kirkenes, stopping in villages along the way. This is a must-read if you're planning this awesome sea journey.

*A Year in Lapland: Guest of the Reindeer Herders* by Hugh Beach. This is a unique peek into the lives of the Sami reindeer herders, written by an anthropologist who spent a year living among the Sami in the Jokkmokk district of Swedish Lapland.

**'Most capital cities offer good-value discount cards that give free admission to sights'**

*In Forkbeard's Wake: Coasting Around Scandinavia* by Ben Nimmo. With his sailing boat and a quest to retrace the steps of a Norse warrior, British writer Nimmo comes up with a quirky and funny collection of experiences that reveal a lot about Scandinavia and its people.

*Just As Well I'm Leaving* by Michael Booth. Not strictly about travel in Scandinavia, but this funny travelogue follows the 19th century travels of Denmark's favourite writer, Hans Christian Anderson.

*Culture Shock!* is a series of short, light-hearted books that delves into the culture, customs, etiquette and foibles of various countries – you may want to pick up the Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark or Iceland editions.

## Websites

**Go Scandinavia** (www.goscandinavia.com) Site of the Scandinavian Tourist Board in North America; links to country sites, tour ideas.

**Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) This site has destination summaries on all Scandinavian countries, plus the Thorn Tree bulletin board for travellers.

**Scandinavia News** (www.scandinavianews.com) World News network site with English-language news and views from Scandinavia.

**Scandinavia Travel** (www.budgettravel.com/scandinavia.htm) Comprehensive site of links and budget travel info for all of Scandinavia.

**Scandinavica** (www.scandinavica.com) Site devoted to Nordic culture and tourism with links to country sites.

## TOP 10 MOVIES

Some of Scandinavia's most famous filmmakers in recent years have included Denmark's Lars von Trier, Finland's Aki Kaurismäki and Sweden's Lasse Hallström.

- *101 Reykjavík* (2000; director Baltasar Kormákur)
- *Before the Storm* (2000; writer and director Reza Parsa)
- *Buddy* (2003; director Morten Tyldum)
- *Children of Nature* (1991; director Friðrik Thór Friðriksson)
- *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (1989; director Aki Kaurismäki)
- *My Life as a Dog* (1987; director Lasse Hallström)
- *Songs From the Second Floor* (2000; director Roy Andersson)
- *The Dudesons Movie* (2006; directors Jukka Hilden and Jarno Laasala)
- *The Man Without a Past* (2002; director Aki Kaurismäki)
- *Under the Sun* (1998; director Colin Nutley)

## TOP 10 FESTIVALS

**Tromsø International Film Festival** (mid-January) One of Norway's most exciting cultural festivals (p380).

**Jokkmokk Winter Market** (February) – Sami celebration in Swedish Lapland (p461).

**May Day & Eve** (1 May) This is the Labour Day holiday everywhere except Denmark; 30 April is Valborgsmässoafton in Sweden (p470) and Vappu in Finland (p212), with some of the biggest liquid-fuelled student celebrations imaginable.

**Midsummer** (around 23 June) Celebrated throughout Scandinavia in late June, this a national holiday; Midsummer Eve is usually a big party with bonfires and dancing.

**Roskilde Rock Festival** (late June/early July) One of Europe's biggest rock music festivals (p63) held in Denmark.

**Copenhagen Jazz Festival** (July) Ten-day jazz fest (p109) held in Denmark's capital.

**World Wife-Carrying Championships** (Finland, July) One of Finland's many whacky events (p192).

**Savonlinna Opera Festival** (July) A month of high culture in the stunning Olavinlinna Castle (p185) in Finland.

For a unique and super cool experience check out the Ice Hotel (p464; www.icehotel.com) in Jukkasjärvi near Kiruna, Sweden or the Snow Castle & Hotel in Kemi (p200; www.snowcastle.net), Finland.

For more on Scandinavian summer festivals, see www.efa-aef.org/.

**Stockholm Pride** (late July/early August) Scandinavia's biggest gay and lesbian festival (p471) held in the Swedish capital.

**Þjóðhátíð** (early August) – this crazy festival celebrating Iceland's independence is held on Vestmannaeyjar island a month after the rest of the country (p281).

## RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Scandinavia is largely a clean, green environment. Air and water pollution from pulp factories and power plants, deforestation and acid rain are certainly environmental issues facing the Nordic countries, but on the whole travellers will breathe in clean air, see virtually no litter and drink pristine water.

Travellers can have a potentially negative impact, particularly when hiking in forests or national parks. The Right of Common Access (Everyman's Right) is a code that applies in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, meaning you can walk virtually anywhere, provided you respect private land and behave responsibly. Stick to marked trails, leave flora and fauna alone, and always carry rubbish out with you – don't leave it on trails, at camp sites or around huts. Don't use soap or detergent when washing in streams (use a bucket).

If you're using wilderness huts that require paying a fee on an honesty system (as in Iceland), make sure you pay, and leave the huts as you found them. Don't make campfires on private land, and check local regulations before making a fire anywhere. Never cut down wood for a fire, use only dead wood.

When taking an organised tour, check the credentials and philosophy of the tour company. Are they using knowledgeable local guides? Do they have a responsible attitude to the environment and ecosystem?

In many cities and towns, recycling bins are provided for plastics and paper etc, so use them. In Sweden and Finland there are collection points (at Alko stores in Finland, for instance) for glass and plastic bottles.

If you're driving, particularly in the far north, keep your speed down. Domesticated reindeer herds frequently wander onto the road, and quite apart from your own safety, a dead reindeer is a financial loss to its owner.

Finally, be sensible. Don't exploit the land and its people, learn a few words of the language, and respect local culture.

The best place in Finland for a legendary Finnish smoke sauna is Kuopio (p187).

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### SCANDI IN A NUTSHELL

Ten Days / Copenhagen to Copenhagen

The obvious place to start your tour of Scandinavia is **Copenhagen** (p40). Spend a couple of days in this cosmopolitan city before catching a train to **Stockholm** (p394) for two days, then take the overnight ferry to **Helsinki** (p148). If you're in a hurry you could spend just the day in Helsinki and catch the ferry back to Stockholm, especially if you book a cabin and get some sleep, or take in some Helsinki nightlife and a day trip to **Porvoo** (p162) or even **Tallinn** (p218). If you're keen to experience some midnight sun (or northern lights in winter or early spring), jump on the overnight train to **Rovaniemi** (p201), right on the Arctic Circle. Returning to Helsinki, then Stockholm take the overnight train to **Oslo** (p302) for the day, then the scenic rail trip to **Flåm** (p342) and the combination boat/bus trip along the Sognefjord to **Bergen** (p329). From here, travel to **Kristiansand** (p321) and take the ferry to **Hirtshals** (p101) in Denmark then return to Copenhagen via **Århus** (p82).

With three weeks or longer spend more time in Sweden, at **Malmö** (p424), **Göteborg** (p432) or **Kalmar** (p446), more time in Norway, with three days in **Fjærland** (p344) and **Geiranger** (p346), or more time in Denmark at **Odense** (p72) and **Årø** (p81) on the way back to Copenhagen.

A quick city-hop using the train or bus and ferries. If time is very short, you'll be limited to the capitals or you may have to skip Helsinki. Iceland is out of the question!



### BALTICS & THE EAST

Three Weeks / Stockholm to Stockholm

Finland, sharing a border and a fair slice of history with Russia, is quite unlike the Scandinavian ideal presented by Sweden, Norway and Denmark. This itinerary combines a brief tour of the Baltics with southern Finland.

Start in Stockholm so you can take advantage of the fantastic overnight **ferries** (p475) to **Helsinki** (p148), with their smorgasbord meals and all-night partying. After a couple of days in the Finnish capital take the ferry (1½ to three hours) to medieval **Tallinn** (p218) in Estonia. Returning to Helsinki (Tallinn can be seen as a day trip if time is short), take the overnight sleeper train to **St Petersburg** (p224). You must have a visa, which can be obtained in Helsinki through specialist agents or at the Russian embassy (allow at least a week). After a few days in this enchanting, Imperial city, return to Helsinki.

If it's summertime, take the train to the Lakeland towns of **Savonlinna** (p184), with its awesome medieval castle and opera festival, or **Kuopio** (p187), home of the world's biggest smoke sauna, or northwest to the dynamic, cultural city of **Tampere** (p173). At any time of year you could also take the overnight train to **Rovaniemi** (p201), cross the Arctic Circle and visit Santa.

Finally, you can return to Sweden by taking the train to **Turku** (p163) then the ferry to Stockholm through the southern archipelago via the **Åland islands** (p169) – stop off at the islands for as long as you wish and maybe take a cycle touring holiday.

The Finnish capital Helsinki offers easy access to the charming and splendidly preserved old town of Tallinn as well as the cultural treasures of St Petersburg. Finland's own attractions include Father Christmas himself and the beautiful Lakeland.



## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### THE VIKING TRAIL

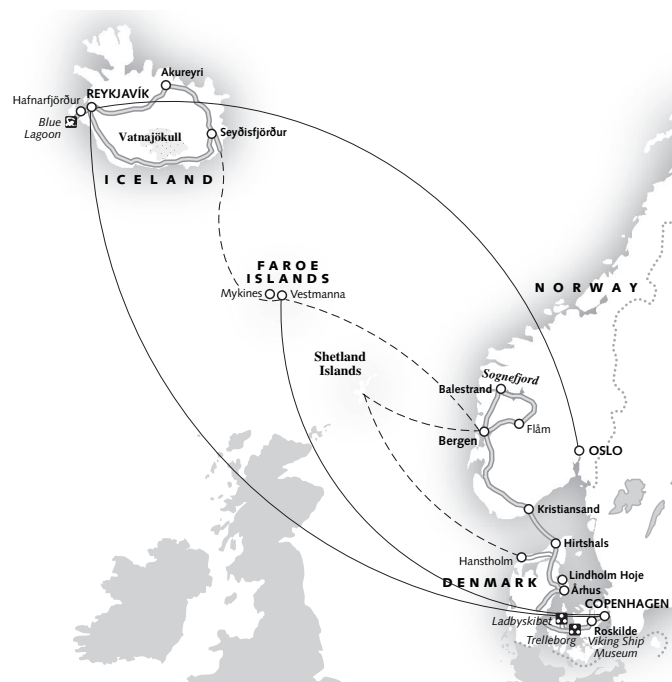
Four to Six Weeks / Copenhagen to Reykjavik

From **Copenhagen** (p40) head to the Viking Ship Museum in **Roskilde** (p61) and the Viking fortress in **Trelleborg** (p64). Cross to Funen, with a trip to **Ladbykibet** (p77), then to **Århus** (p82) and the Viking burial ground at **Lindholm Høje** (p95) before taking the ferry from **Hirtshals** (p383) to **Kristiansand** (p321) in Norway. Spend a few days in **Bergen** (p330) before taking the train to **Flåm** (p342) and the boat/bus trip along the **Sognefjord** (p342) to see the Viking ruins at **Balestrand** (p343). From Bergen, there is one summer ferry a week to Iceland. You can stop at the **Faroe Islands** (p115) and wait for the following week's ferry, visiting **Vestmanna Bird Cliffs** (p128 and **Mykines** p127; or catch the ferry from **Hanstholm** in Denmark (via the Shetland Islands), instead of Bergen, which gives you two days in the Faroes (see p112).

The ferry continues to Iceland, arriving at **Seyðisfjörður** (p266). From here the best route to Reykjavik is along the south coast past the **Vatnajökull icecap** (p267). In **Reykjavik** (p237), visit the Saga Museum and the Viking village of **Hafnarfjörður** (p251), take a trip to the **Blue Lagoon** (p250), then fly out. If you plan to return by ferry, take a bus trip through the interior to **Akureyri** (p257) then bus back to Seyðisfjörður on the Ring Rd. Remember there's only one ferry a week, so plan for either one or two weeks in Iceland.

Alternatively, fly direct from Copenhagen or Oslo to Reykjavik, and spend a week or more travelling around the Ring Rd.

The Viking Age had its beginnings in Denmark, Norway and Sweden in the 9th century AD, and it was a Viking who settled Iceland. You can still see the remains of Viking fortresses, burial grounds, longboats and churches, while exploring their ancient route.



### BEYOND THE ARCTIC CIRCLE Three Weeks / Helsinki return or Stockholm

There's something magical and foreboding about the Arctic Circle, the imaginary line at 66°33' N latitude where the sun never truly sets in mid-summer and never peeps above the horizon in winter. The remarkable clarity of light, eerie remoteness, Sami culture and reindeer herds add to the mystique. A trip to Nordkapp (the North Cape), the most northerly point in Europe, is something of a spiritual pilgrimage for many travellers. This trip is best tackled in summer (July–August), when the mid-night sun shines and all public transport is running, but September to March is the time to see the northern lights and experience dogsledding and other activities.

Start at **Helsinki** (p148). Take the overnight train to **Rovaniemi** (p201), visit the **Santa Claus Village** (p205) then take a bus up to the Sami village of **Inari** (p206), perhaps stopping to stay in an igloo at **Kakkslauternen** (p207). From here there are direct buses all the way to **Nordkapp** (p372) via Karasjok in Norway. After standing at the top of Europe with a glass of champagne, catch the coastal steamer *Hurtigruten* to the stunning **Lofoten Islands** (p361) with a possible stop in **Tromsø** (p366). From here you can continue on the steamer all the way to **Bergen** (p330), or get back to the mainland at **Narvik** (p359) and take the train to **Kiruna** (p463) in Sweden. Unfortunately, the famous Ice Hotel will have melted away by summer but you can still visit the Ice Hotel Art Centre in a giant freezer!

From Kiruna head south to Haparanda where you can cross back into Finland at the border town of **Tornio** (p200) – and have a round of mid-night golf before returning to Helsinki. Or go to Boden, perhaps via the Sami village of **Jokkmokk** (p461), and catch the train to Stockholm.



Go to the top of Europe, visit a Sami village, play golf through two countries – all possible above 66°33' N.



## TAILORED TRIPS

### THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Scandinavia's pristine environment begs to be explored at close range – on foot, a bicycle, canoe, skis, skates or dogsled! This itinerary is not a point-to-point tour, but suggestions on where you can enjoy some of Scandinavia's best activities.

#### Spring/Summer

Flat, rural and not too big, Denmark is a haven for cycling. Popular areas include **Bornholm** (p67), **Funen** (p72), **Langeland** (p80) and the **Lake District** (p90) of Jutland. The Finns are also avid cyclists. The best region for pedalling is the **Åland islands** (p169), but rides anywhere in the eastern Lakeland area and around **Turku** (p163) or **Oulu** (p196) are rewarding. In Sweden head for **Skåne** (p424) or **Gotland** (p451).

Hiking in national parks and forests is sensational in Scandinavia – Iceland and Lapland in particular have some of Europe's last great wilderness areas, and trails, huts and camping grounds are set up for walkers. In Iceland, the **Landmannalaugar-Pósmörk trek** (p276) is an awesome walk through lava flows and lunar landscapes. In Finland, try **Oulanka National Park** (p199) and treks in **Karelia** (p193). In Sweden, the 450km **Kungsleden** (King's Trail, p465) is a major marked hiking route.

Other summer activities include canoeing, white-water rafting and fishing; see the Activities section of each chapter for information.

#### Winter/Spring

Skiing – both downhill and cross-country – is a national obsession in Finland, Sweden and Norway, and December to April is the time to go. The best resorts include **Lillehammer** (p328) in Norway, **Åre** (p458) in Sweden, and **Levi** (p208) and **Ruka** (p199) in Finland.

Think of Arctic Lapland and it's not hard to imagine mushing through the snow behind a team of huskies or a reindeer-sleigh. While you'll have to budget big for these activities, Scandinavia is one of the best places in the world to do it. In Norway, try **Tromsø** (p366) or **Karasjok** (p374) and in Sweden head to **Kiruna** (p463) or **Abisko** (p465). In Finland, **Rovaniemi** (p201) is a magnet for winter activities and there are husky farms organising safaris at **Muonio** (p208) and **Ivalo** (p206).

Other winter highlights to add to your itinerary should include the **Ice Hotel** at Jukkasjärvi near Kiruna in Sweden (p464) and the **Arctic Icebreaker cruise** (p200) at Kemi in Finland.

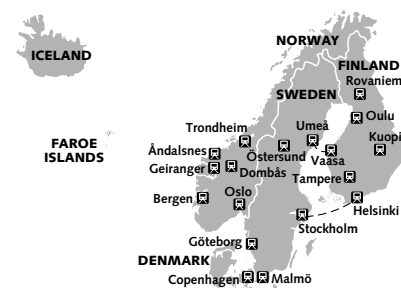


### ON THE RAILS

With a ScanRail Pass (see p513) you can take to the rails and cover a lot of ground in Scandinavia economically, including discounts on ferries. To get the most out of your pass, long (possibly overnight) trips work well, but you can always pay for shorter trips to reach more places. Consider this megacircuit.

Start in **Copenhagen** (p40) and take the train via **Malmö** (p424) to **Stockholm** (p394). Cruise on the overnight ferry (50% discount) to **Helsinki** (p148), then the overnight train to **Oulu** (p196) or **Rovaniemi** (p201), almost at the Arctic Circle – if you have time, consider stops in **Kuopio** (p187) or **Tampere** (p173). Rail down the Gulf of Bothnia coast to **Vaasa** (p180), where you can catch a ferry across to **Umeå** (p459) in Sweden. From here catch a train south to lakeside **Östersund** (p457), then west to **Trondheim** (p352) in Norway. You're now heading toward the spectacular fjords of Norway, where you'll have to combine bus and boat travel with the train. The rail line heads south to **Dombås** (p329) and on to Oslo: detour on the spectacular journey to **Åndalsnes** (p346). Take the bus to **Geiranger** (p346) for the unmissable cruise on **Geirangerfjorden** (p346).

From here you can return to the main train line and Oslo, or make your way through the western fjords to **Bergen** (p330) and take the spectacularly scenic train to **Oslo** (p302) from there. Finally, board the train for **Göteborg** (p432), Sweden, and back to Copenhagen.



### ISLAND-HOPPING BY BIKE

Southern Scandi is great for cycling and there are some lovely islands and beaches waiting to be discovered. Grab a set of wheels in **Copenhagen** (p40) and spend a couple of days exploring around the Danish capital. Take the ferry out to **Bornholm** (p67) and spend a few days cycling, stopping at island beaches such as **Dueodde** (p69) and a possible trip to tiny **Christiansø** (p71). Back on the mainland (it's possible to take a ferry direct to Sweden), head up to Kalmar, the jumping off point for the windmill-crammed island of **Öland** (p448), a natural beauty with lots of good camping. Next stop is a ferry from Oskarshamn to the large island of **Gotland** (p451), great for cycling through prehistoric sites. Continue up to **Stockholm** (p394), which has its own amazing archipelago of some 24,000 islands. About 70km north, the port of Grisslehamn is the place for the short ferry hop across to **Eckerö** (p173) in Finland's Åland islands, though a much easier option is to take the ferry direct from Stockholm to **Mariehamn** (p171), the island capital. You could spend a week or more cycling and camping on this beautiful island archipelago, before taking the ferry across to **Turku** (p163) in Finland. Explore Finland's beautiful southeast coast and beaches before taking the train to **Helsinki** (p148) and selling your bike!



# Snapshot

The Alþing, established in 930, makes Iceland the oldest continuous parliamentary democracy in the world.

For purists, the term Scandinavia encompasses only Denmark, Sweden and Norway – the three kingdoms of the region. Many Finns and Icelanders prefer to regard their republics as being part of the 'Nordic countries'. But it's not just geography that links these countries. They share a long, intertwined history and today share many environmental, social, political and economic issues – inflation, unemployment, immigration... Eurovision.

Sweden, Denmark and Finland are fully-fledged members of the European Union (EU) but Norway and Iceland are holding out. Both countries are members of the European Economic Area (EEA), which allows them to participate in most aspects of the European single market, but oil-rich Norway has sniffed at the idea of becoming a full member, rejecting it most recently in a 1994 referendum. Both Norway and Iceland are extremely protective of their fishing rights and fear they may lose some of their territorial waters and quotas under EU rules. Iceland spent many years during the so-called 'cod wars' with Britain fighting for its 200-mile exclusion zone and doesn't want to lose it now. Finland is the only Nordic country to adopt the euro – Denmark and Sweden have both rejected it at referendums.

In an age of global terrorism, Scandinavia has kept itself a safe distance from international conflict since WWII, although Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway all have some form of mandatory military service. Iceland has had the benefit of an American military base since 1951, but the US has announced imminent plans to pack up and move out, 15 years after the end of the Cold War. Presumably they need the troops elsewhere. In 2005, however, peace-loving Denmark managed to set off a chain of world-wide rioting, scores of deaths and the worst national crisis since WWII – all because of the publication of a cartoon. As part of a debate about religion, Islam, self-censorship and freedom of speech, Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed, any depiction of whom is a serious taboo according to the Islamic faith. The cartoons were reprinted by other European papers, sparking a firestorm of controversy and violence all over the world, but it was the Danes who got the blame. Critics called the cartoons Islamophobic and blasphemous while supporters claim they highlighted the importance of free speech and pointed out that cartoons about other religions are frequently printed. The controversy died down, but for a time Danes around the world feared for their safety.

Such an incident only fuelled the fears of many Scandinavians, not only in Denmark, about growing immigration. It's not that Scandinavians are overtly racist or unwelcoming, but immigration, particularly from asylum-seekers, is still quite new to the region and old attitudes die hard. The usual fears of foreigners taking local jobs, straining the generous welfare system and struggling with language difficulties do exist. In a small minority there's the more serious issue of isolated race-related violence and anti-Muslim sentiment. In Denmark, the government's increasingly hard-line attitude to immigration (such as limiting the right of asylum seekers to migrate to Denmark with their families) led to a censure from the likes of the Council of Europe and the Danish Red Cross over the country's role in upholding international human rights. Iceland (6%) and Finland (2%) have some of the lowest numbers of foreign residents in Europe.

Whales are still getting a hard time of it in Icelandic and Norwegian waters, and the issue is guaranteed to start some finger-pointing and

divided opinion. While most of the world opposes whale-hunting, Iceland ended its own 14-year ban on whaling in 2003, allowing a quota of 500 whales to be hunted 'for scientific purposes'. This euphemism may not last since Iceland has plans to start commercial whaling by 2007. Icelanders on the whole support the decision, or at least their government's right to make it. One view is that an overpopulation of whales affects fish stocks, a major issue in Iceland and Norway since it's the backbone of their economy. Others say it's damaging the nation's international standing and, more tangibly, its multimillion-dollar whale-watching industry. In a publicised incident in 2006, a Norwegian ship actually harpooned a minke whale while a sickened boatload of tourists were 'spotting' it! Norway has been culling minke whales since 1993 and you'll find the average Norwegian fisherman willing to argue strongly in favour of it. At present, all whale meat is used for the domestic market, not export.

Declining fish stocks may have something to do with Iceland looking to heavy industry, tourism and technology to boost the economy. The first two don't go hand in hand, and projects such as the Kárahnjúkar hydroelectric project, which will flood a large area of eastern Iceland in order to power a massive new aluminium smelter, are seen by some as environmental suicide. Björk's mother, Hildur Hauksdóttir, famously staged a hunger strike in protest but most Icelanders are resigned to the fact that it's going ahead; it's scheduled to be operational by 2009.

On a lighter note, fascination with the royal families of Denmark, Sweden and Norway rarely wane, but it's been the Danes doing most of the celebrating lately with a royal wedding and royal baby. Crown Prince Frederik married Australian Mary Donaldson in 2004 and the fairytale continued in 2005 with the birth on 15 October of their son Prince Christian Valdemar Henri John. Meanwhile, the Swedes are still waiting for Crown Princess Victoria (heir to the Swedish throne) to hurry up and tie the knot, and the Norwegian Crown Prince and Princess had a second child in 2005.

Lyra-suited ABBA won Eurovision for Sweden in 1974, and neither the group nor the competition has lost any popularity in Scandinavia since. Eurovision parties are held each May and fans sit glued to TV screens to see if a Nordic country can pull it off again. But who would have thought that a group of heavy rockers, dressed in monster masks and hailing from Rovaniemi in Finland, would win it in 2006? Monster-rock band Lordi stormed the voting with *Hard Rock Hallelujah* and thus Helsinki will host in May 2007 for the first time. If you think that's trivial, the welcome home party for Lordi was estimated to be the biggest ever public gathering in Helsinki – around 90,000 people.

Young Scandinavians take considerable interest if you know a bit about their local music scene. Iceland is a great example. In Reykjavik, just about everyone under 30 seems to be in a band or producing their own CD of 'experimental music'. Everyone has heard of Björk and the Sugarcubes, but does anyone know the legendary Megas? Or the latest big thing, Cynic Guru? In Helsinki you could well bump into famous musicians at a bar or club. Heavy rock bands HIM and Nightwish are doing big things in Europe. In Norway, black metal is the word and Mayhem, Satyricon and Dark Throne some of the bands to see.

Sport always makes for a good bar-stool topic. In Finland and Sweden ice hockey really stirs the emotions, especially when the two countries are playing against each other. Sweden hit gold in 2006, becoming the first nation in history to hold both the Olympic and world championship gold in the same year when it beat the Czech Republic in the championship tournament. Finland surprised Canada to take third place.

'Ski' is a Norwegian word and Norway lays claim to having invented the sport.

There are about 1.6 million saunas in Finland – enough to hold the entire population.

During the past 40 years, more than 300 million children have played with Lego bricks, a Danish invention.

Learn more about whaling at [www.iwcoffice.org](http://www.iwcoffice.org), website of the International Whaling Commission.

*Blood on the Snow: The Killing of Olaf Palme* by Jan Bondeson, recounts the still-unsolved murder of the Swedish prime minister in 1986.

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