

Destination Scandinavia

Describing Scandinavia as a region of stunning beauty is hard not to do but it's about as helpful as labelling Asia 'exotic'. Epic and spectacular it surely is, but these words do not begin to describe its northern European diversity.

Its visual signifiers for the uninitiated may include Nordic good looks, clean air, healthy outdoor fun and sparse populations, but they hardly do justice to this expanse of extremes.

True, the visitor will find some common features in the languages, culture and environment, in the inhabitants' bewildering dedication to preserved herring and their sinister partiality to bitter, salty liquorice.

And yes, the entire region knows winter's frigid, implacable dark as well as summer's short but spectacular lease, when the place bursts into life in a fevered celebration of nature, food culture and music.

But it's not all statuesque blondes and rugged fjords. Scandinavia spans the vast, Siberian north where polar bears roam; it includes in its grand dimensions the mighty peaks of Sweden and Norway and the gentle rural idyll of the Danish countryside. It encompasses elemental Iceland – nature's volcanic, glacial foundry – as well as the urbane and the cosmopolitan in vibrant Copenhagen and historic Helsinki.

In a single trip you can explore Stockholm's almost Venetian splendour and also acquaint yourself with the ancient ways of migrating reindeer and their herders through great swathes of virgin Lapland forest and lake.

Given all this geographic variety, to fully explore the region you may find yourself using more means of transport than Phileas Fogg, from plane, car and sleek modern train to bicycle, husky sled, parachute, snowmobile, Arctic icebreaker and canoe.

In fact getting around can be half the fun. The train and road networks just, well, work. They also offer great romance – the mountainous Oslo–Bergen train trip is one of the world's most scenic. This watery region also rewards maritime adventurers. 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.

Getting Started

Scandinavia is an easy destination to like. Efficient and approachable, it ingratiates itself to the traveller. The modern, plentiful and sleek transport infrastructure generally runs with the precision of an atomic clock, standards of living are high and other European languages (English in particular) are widely spoken. What's more, you'll never have to fight for elbowroom or decent hotel beds in the way you might elsewhere during Europe's summer.

What may surprise (and catch out) first time visitors is Scandinavia's diversity. This is a big region containing starkly different terrain, from the severe Arctic north to the expansive forests and mellow farmland further south.

Depending on the season even the same country can feel like a different place; midsummer has little in common with midwinter anywhere in Scandinavia, so it's worth being mindful of this fact when planning your trip.

The weather can be fickle much of the year, so you may well need to pack winter and summer clothes. A little forward planning will also help you squeeze the most out of your trip and make your budget go as far as possible in what can be a costly region to explore. It also pays to prepare for some long journeys as distances can be great, especially in the wilds of Arctic Lapland or the Icelandic interior.

It's worth noting too that the global financial slump is playing havoc with prices, and in some cases the existence of some businesses, particularly in Iceland so plan and travel with this in mind.

See Climate Charts (p486) for more information.

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

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 – 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, post-sauna 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.

Small padlock – For securing bags.

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.

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). 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.

Throughout the region, especially in the south, summer can be surprisingly warm. Spring and autumn – May, June and September – are also good times to visit. You can still expect fine, sunny days and fewer tourists. Beware though, 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, dogsledding, 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 fading away. 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) when the forests briefly blaze with colour is the perfect time for hiking and cycling.

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.

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 can keep costs down. A night on the town 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 €3.

Sightseeing costs can add up (museum admissions range from €3 to €12) 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 €35 to €60 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 €75 to €90 per person per day. Add to that the 'nonessentials' –

The northern lights, or aurora borealis appear above the Arctic Circle (latitude 66°), are visible around the equinoxes (late September and March), and during the dark winter.

With a shattered economy thanks to a broke banking system, at the time of writing Iceland was considering adopting the euro. Check before you go.

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 around €100 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 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.

The Scandinavian Cookbook by Trina Hahnemann. This Danish cook and caterer to the stars will have you drooling before you've booked your flight, with her 'rødgrød med fløde' (red berry pudding with cream) and other Nordic recipes.

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.

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.

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.

Walpurgis night, an old pagan springtime ritual adopted by Christianity is celebrated with bonfires, carnivals, partying and drinking on the night of 30th April in Sweden, Finland and Estonia.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

FLYING & CLIMATE CHANGE

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

CARBON OFFSET SCHEMES

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

As polar ice retreats each year the fight to lay claim to the oil, gas and other resources locked under the north pole heats up. Norway, Denmark, Russia and Canada all lay claims.

If you do want to limit the environmental impact of your journey here and you're coming from Europe, overland options by road or rail are a realistic possibility (with the exception perhaps of travel from the UK). Sea links are also plentiful. Travelling overland rather than air travel within the region is certainly going to be more pleasurable and immersive.

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?

Accommodation & Food

There's growing number of eco-minded places to stay and eat right across the region, minimising waste, energy consumption and focusing on ethical and healthy products. In many cases eco-accreditation schemes are making this easier, as with Denmark's Green Key mark (p37).

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.

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

TOP 10

FAROE ISLANDS
(DENMARK)

SWEDEN

FINLAND

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.

- 1 *101 Reykjavík* (2000; director Baltasar Kormákur)
- 2 *Before the Storm* (2000; writer and director Reza Parsa)
- 3 *The Seventh Seal* (1957; director Ingmar Bergman)
- 4 *Children of Nature* (1991; director Friðrik Thór Friðriksson)
- 5 *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (1989; director Aki Kaurismäki)
- 6 *My Life as a Dog* (1987; director Lasse Hallström)
- 7 *Songs From the Second Floor* (2000; director Roy Andersson)
- 8 *The Dudesons Movie* (2006; directors Jukka Hilden and Jarno Laasala)
- 9 *The Man Without a Past* (2002; director Aki Kaurismäki)
- 10 *Under the Sun* (1998; director Colin Nutley)

TOP 10 FESTIVALS

- 1 **Tromsø International Film Festival** (mid-January) One of Norway's most exciting cultural festivals (p370).
- 2 **by:Larm** (mid-February) There are more than 350 gigs across the burgeoning music hub of Oslo (p382)
- 3 **May Day & Eve** (1 May) This is the Labour Day holiday everywhere except Denmark; 30 April is Valborgsmässoafton (p472) in Sweden and Vappu (p149) in Finland, with some of the biggest liquid-fuelled student celebrations imaginable.
- 4 **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.
- 5 **Roskilde Rock Festival** (late June/early July) The Roskilde is one of Europe's biggest and best rock-music festivals (p58) celebrated in Denmark.
- 6 **Copenhagen Cooking** (Denmark, July) Scandinavia's largest food festival with dozens of events taking place over one week at the end of August (p45).
- 7 **Copenhagen Jazz Festival** (July) Ten-day jazz fest (p44) held in Denmark's capital.
- 8 **Savonlinna Opera Festival** (July) A month of high culture in the stunning Olavinlinna Castle (p177) in Finland.
- 9 **Stockholm Pride** (late July/early August) Scandinavia's biggest gay and lesbian festival (p472) held in the Swedish capital.
- 10 **Þjóðhátíð** (early August) This crazy festival celebrating Iceland's independence is held on Vestmannaeyjar island a month after the rest of the country (p282).

Slow Travel

Yes, you can fly quickly around the region on low cost carriers but trust us, the journey really is half the fun in Scandinavia. The bus and rail (p31) transport works, it's relatively inexpensive and in most cases it is simply a pleasure, not least on some wonderfully scenic train journeys. Oh, and it also happens to be far greener.

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.

Events Calendar

Throughout the region certain seasons and months are celebrated with festivals, events and general Wassailing including midsummer and May Day. The summer months with warmer days and short nights are the busiest for festivities of all types but the colder months have their share of events too, centred often around Christmas, New Year and to a lesser extent Easter. See the Directory section in individual country chapters for additional details.

JANUARY

KIRUNA SNOW FESTIVAL last week in Jan
Based around a snow-sculpting competition, this annual Swedish event (www.kiruna.com/snow-festival) draws artists from all over.

FEBRUARY

PORRABLÓT
This midwinter feast for the fearless includes delicacies such as putrid shark.

MARCH

VASALOPPET 1st Sun in Mar
This ski race (www.vasaloppet.se) between Sälen and Mora, started in 1922, salutes Gustav Vasa's history-making flight on skis in 1521; it has grown into a week-long ski fest and celebration with different races, short, gruelling or just for fun.

EASTER FESTIVAL Easter
Thousands of Sami participate in reindeer racing, theatre and cultural events (www.saami-easterfestival.org) in Norway's Karasjok and Kautokeino.

BEER DAY 1 Mar
Dating back to the glorious day in 1989 when beer was legalised in Iceland. As you'd expect, Reykjavík's clubs and bars get particularly wild.

APRIL

SUMARDAGURINN FYRSTI 1st day of summer
Optimistic Icelanders celebrate summer's advent on the first Thursday after April 19, with Reykjavík holding the biggest carnival-style bash.

JAZZKAAR mid-Apr
Jazz greats from all around the world converge on the picturesque Estonian city of Tallinn (www.jazzkaar.ee).

REYKJAVÍK ARTS FESTIVAL two weeks in Apr
The city is taken over by local and international theatre performances, films, lectures and music (www.artfest.is).

VALBORGSMÄSSOAFTON (WALPURGIS NIGHT) 30 Apr

This public holiday, a pagan holdover that's partly to celebrate the arrival of spring, involves lighting huge bonfires, singing songs and forming parades.

MAY

COPENHAGEN MARATHON mid-May
Scandinavia's largest marathon (www.sparta.dk) is on a Sunday in mid-May and draws around 5000 participants and tens of thousands of spectators.

JUNE

OLD TOWN DAYS early Jun
Week-long fest (www.vanalinnaevad.ee) featuring dancing, concerts, costumed performers and plenty of medieval merrymaking.

SKAGEN FESTIVAL late Jun
Held over four days this festival (www.skagenfestival.dk) in Skagen features folk and world music performed by Danish and international artists.

ROUND ZEALAND BOAT RACE late Jun
Held over three days this substantial yacht race circles the island of Zealand, starting and ending in Helsingør.

ROSKILDE FESTIVAL late Jun
Northern Europe's largest music festival (www.roskilde-festival.dk) rocks Roskilde for four consecutive days each summer. Advance ticket sales are on offer in December, and the festival usually sells out.

JULY

FREDERIKSSUND VIKING FESTIVAL

late Jun–early Jul

Held in Frederikssund over a two-week period. Costumed 'Vikings' present an open-air drama, followed by a banquet with Viking food and entertainment (www.vikingspil.dk).

COPENHAGEN JAZZ FESTIVAL

early Jul

This is the biggest entertainment event of the year in the capital, with 10 days of music. The festival (www.jazzfestival.dk) features a range of Danish and international jazz, blues and fusion music, with 500 indoor and outdoor concerts.

VARMAKELDA BONFIRE

1st weekend of Jul

Bonfires and hot-spring fun at Fuglafjørður on Eysturoy on Faroe

ÓLAVSØKA

28-29 Jul

Norway's largest and most exciting traditional festival, celebrating the 10th-century Norwegian king Olav the Holy, who spread Christian faith on the isles.

GFESTIVAL

mid- to late Jul

The Islands' original and biggest music festival (www.gfestival.com) features local and international artists on Syðrugøta beach in Gøta.

STOCKHOLM JAZZ FESTIVAL

19-23 Jul

Held on the island of Skeppsholmen, this internationally known jazz fest (www.stockholmjazz.com) brings artists from all over, including big names like Van Morrison and Mary J Blige.

WORLD WIFE-CARRYING CHAMPIONSHIPS

early Jul

Finland's, nay, the world's premier wife-carrying event held in Sonkajärvi. Don't forget to bring the wife.

AUGUST

MIEVEAL WEEK

early Aug

Find yourself an actual knight in shining armour at this immensely popular annual Swedish fest (www.medeltidsveckan.se) in Visby, Gotland's medieval jewel.

HAMLET SUMMER PLAYS

1st half of Aug

Theatre performances of Shakespeare's Hamlet take place at Kronborg Slot in Helsingør (www.hamletssommer.dk).

ÅRHUS FESTIVAL WEEK

last Fri in Aug

The 10-day Århus Festuge bills itself as Denmark's largest annual multicultural festival (www.aarhusfestuge.dk) and features scores of music performances, theatre, ballet, modern dance, opera, films and sports events at indoor and outdoor venues.

AIR GUITAR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

early Aug

Finnish town Oulu's annual 15 minutes of fame.

OSLO INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

Aug

Six days of amazing gigs (www.oslojazz.no).

NOTODDEN BLUES FESTIVAL

early Aug

Another seminal Norwegian music fest (www.bluesfest.no), featuring dozens of bands, such as the Fabulous Thunderbirds and Koko Taylor.

SEPTEMBER

COPENHAGEN COOKING

end Aug–early Sep

Scandinavia's largest food festival (www.copenhagencooking.dk) focuses on the gourmet end of the food spectrum.

REYKJAVÍK INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

This annual occurrence sees blockbusters make way for international art films in cinemas across the city, and talks from film directors from home and abroad (<http://isl.riff.is>).

REYKJAVÍK JAZZ FESTIVAL

A fun yearly cultural event is the Jazz Festival (www.jazz.is) with jazz concerts around the city.

OCTOBER

ICELAND AIRWAVES

3rd week of Oct

This five-day event (www.icelandairwaves.com), in Reykjavik, is one of the world's most cutting-edge music festivals: don't expect to sleep.

NOVEMBER

STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

mid- to late Nov

Screenings of new international and independent films, director talks, and discussion panels draw cinephiles to this important annual festival (www.stockholmfilmfestival.se); tickets go quickly, so book early if you're interested.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

SCANDI IN A NUTSHELL

10 Days / Copenhagen to Copenhagen

The obvious place to start is well-connected **Copenhagen** (p38). Spend a couple of days here before catching a train to **Stockholm** (p395) for two days, then take the overnight ferry to **Helsinki** (p143). If you're in a hurry you could spend just the day in Helsinki and get 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 charming **Porvoo** (p155), Finland's second-oldest town, or even **Tallinn** (p213). If you're keen to experience some midnight sun (or northern lights in winter or early spring), jump on the overnight train to **Rovaniemi** (p195), on the Arctic Circle. Returning to Helsinki, and then Stockholm, take the overnight train to **Oslo** (p295) for the day, then the rail trip to **Flåm** (p343) and the combination boat/bus trip along the Sognefjord to **Bergen** (p331). From here, go to **Kristiansand** (p323) and take the ferry to **Hirtshals** (p98) in Denmark then return to Copenhagen via **Århus** (p80).

With three weeks or longer spend more time in Sweden, at **Malmö** (p426), **Göteborg** (p435) or **Kalmar** (p451), more time in Norway, with three days in **Fjærland** (p345) and **Geiranger** (p347), or more time in Denmark at **Odense** (p70) 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

Wild, expansive 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** (p477) to **Helsinki** (p143), 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** (p213) in Estonia. Returning to Helsinki (Tallinn can be done as a day trip if time is short), take the overnight sleeper train to **St Petersburg** (p220). 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 shimmering lakescapes of **Savonlinna** (p177), with its awesome medieval castle and opera festival, or **Kuopio** (p182), home of the world's biggest smoke sauna, or northwest to the dynamic, cultural city of **Tampere** (p167). At any time of year you could also take the overnight train to **Rovaniemi** (p195), for a reindeer-sleigh or husky ride cross the Arctic Circle and then visit Santa in his official grotto.

Finally, you can return to Sweden by taking the train to **Turku** (p157) then the ferry to Stockholm through the southern archipelago via the **Åland Islands** (p162) – 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

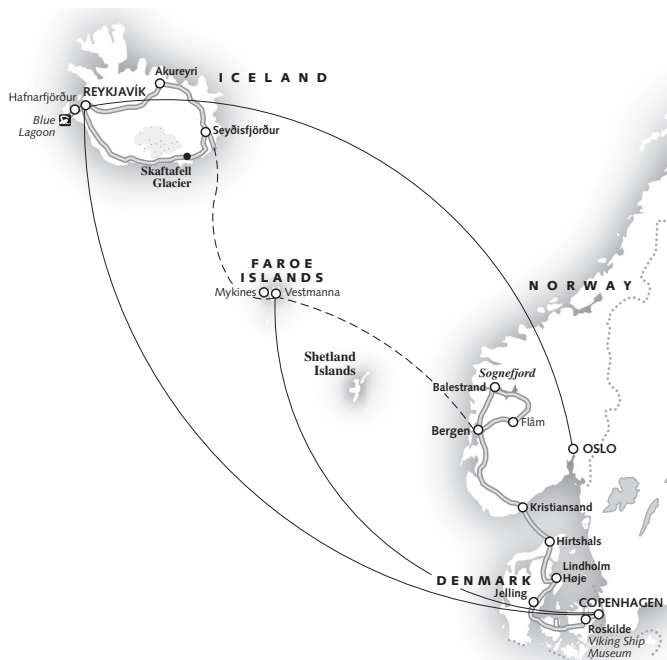
Four to Six Weeks / Copenhagen to Reykjavik

From **Copenhagen** (p38) head to the fascinating **Viking Ship Museum** (p59) in Roskilde, then on to Jutland and on to **Jelling** (p87) the Viking burial ground to **Lindholm Høje** (p93) before taking the ferry from **Hirtshals** (p384) to **Kristiansand** (p323) in Norway. Spend a few days in **Bergen** (p331) before taking the train to **Flåm** (p343) and the boat/bus trip along the **Sognefjord** (p343) to see the Viking ruins at **Balestrand** (p344). From Bergen, there is one summer ferry a week to Iceland. You can stop at the **Faroe Islands** (p110) and wait for the following week's ferry, visiting **Vestmanna Bird Cliffs** (p123) and **Mykines** (p122).

The ferry continues to Iceland, arriving at **Seyðisfjörður** (p266). From here the best route to Reykjavik is along the south coast past **Skaftafell Glacier** (p269). In Reykjavik, visit the **Saga Museum** (p240) 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 midsummer 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 and August), when the midnight 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** (p143). Take the overnight train to **Rovaniemi** (p195), visit the **Santa Claus Village** (p199) then take a bus up to the Sami village of **Inari** (p201) to learn about the Sami way of life. From here there are direct buses all the way to **Nordkapp** (p375) via Karasjok in Norway. After standing at the top of Europe with a glass of bubbly, catch the coastal steamer *Hurtigruten* to the stunning **Lofoten Islands** (p363) with a possible stop in **Tromsø** (p369). From here you can continue on the steamer all the way to **Bergen** (p331), or get back to the mainland at **Narvik** (p361) and take the train to **Kiruna** (p466) 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 midnight golf before returning to Helsinki. Or go to Boden, perhaps via the Sami village and museum of **Jokkmokk** (p465), 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** (p65), **Funen** (p70) and the **Lake District** (p87) of Jutland. The Finns are also avid cyclists. The best region for pedalling are the **Åland islands** (p162), but rides anywhere in the eastern Lakeland area and around **Turku** (p157) or **Oulu** (p191) are rewarding. In Sweden head for **Skåne** (p426) or **Gotland** (p455).

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** (p195) and treks in **Karelia** (p188). In Sweden, the 450km **Kungsleden** (King's Trail, p468) 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** (p329) in Norway, **Åre** (p462) in Sweden, and **Levi** (p203) and **Ruka** (p194) 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** (p369) or **Karasjok** (p377) and in Sweden head to **Kiruna** (p466). In Finland, **Rovaniemi** (p195) is a magnet for winter activities and there are husky farms organising safaris at **Muonio** (p203) and **Ivalo** (p201).

Other winter highlights to add to your itinerary should include the **Ice Hotel** (p466) at Jukkasjärvi near Kiruna in Sweden and the **Arctic Icebreaker cruise** (p199) at Kemi in Finland.



ON THE RAILS

With a Eurail or InterRail Pass (see p509) 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** (p38) and take the train via **Malmö** (p426) to **Stockholm** (p395). Cruise on the overnight ferry (50% discount) to **Helsinki** (p143), then the overnight train to **Oulu** (p191) or **Rovaniemi** (p195), almost at the Arctic Circle – if you have time, consider stops in **Kuopio** (p182) or **Tampere** (p167). Rail down the Gulf of Bothnia coast to **Vaasa** (p173), where you can catch a ferry across to **Umeå** (p462) in Sweden. From here catch a train south to lakeside **Östersund** (p461), then west to **Trondheim** (p353) 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** (p330) and on to Oslo: detour on the spectacular journey to **Åndalsnes** (p348). Take the bus to **Geiranger** (p347) for the unmissable cruise on **Geirangerfjorden** (p347).

From here you can return to the main train line and Oslo, or make your way through the western fjords to **Bergen** (p331) and take the spectacularly scenic train to **Oslo** (p295) from there. Finally, board the train for **Göteborg** (p435), 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** (p38) and spend a couple of days exploring around the Danish capital. Take the ferry out to **Bornholm** (p65) and spend a few days cycling, stopping at island beaches and its wonderful, inexpensive smokehouses. 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** (p453), a natural beauty with lots of good camping. Next stop is a ferry from Oskarshamn to the large island of **Gotland** (p455), great for cycling through prehistoric sites. Continue up to **Stockholm** (p395), 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** (p166) in Finland's Åland islands, though a much easier option is to take the ferry direct from Stockholm to **Mariehamn** (p163), 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** (p157) in Finland. Explore Finland's beautiful southeast coast and beaches before taking the train to **Helsinki** (p143) and selling your bike!



The Authors



ANDREW STONE

Coordinating author; Denmark

Andrew has been a regular visitor to Scandinavia, and Denmark in particular, since the mid-1990s as a traveller and journalist. He has written for previous editions of this title as well as editions of Lonely Planet's *Denmark*.



TOM MASTERS

Faroe Islands

Tom has long been a fan of the far north, travelling widely in Arctic Russia, Greenland and Norway. This assignment to the Faroes in mid-summer was one of the most enjoyable Lonely Planet jobs he's ever taken on, and it was refreshing to find out just how spectacular and foreign this group of islands a short distance north of his native Britain really were, whether from the window seat of an Atlantic Airways helicopter or on a long hike across the spectacular cliffscapes of Mykines. Tom lives in London and can be found at www.mastersmafia.com.



BECKY OHLSEN

Sweden

Becky grew up with a thick book of Swedish fairy tales illustrated by John Bauer, so the deep, black forests of Norrland hold particular fascination. Hiking through them, she's alert for tomtes and trolls (which, to the untrained eye, look just like big rocks). Though raised in Colorado, Becky has been an explorer of Sweden since childhood, while visiting her grandparents in Stockholm and her great-aunt in Härnösand. She loves the extremes of light up north, its round-the-clock summer glare and near-total absence in winter. She loves herring and gravlax, Swedish potatoes and aquavit. But mostly she loves getting lost in those forests, among the trolls and tomtes.

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FRAN PARNELL

Iceland

Fran's passion for the country was born while studying for a masters degree in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, and has just kept on growing like a monstrous cuckoo baby. Choosing a favourite place is nigh-on impossible, although she has a particular love of isolation, islands and seacliffs, putting the Westfjords, Grimsey and the Vestmannaeyjar high on the list. On this research trip, she went wild for outdoor activities, and was lucky enough to fit in scuba diving, white-water rafting, horse riding, glacier walking, hiking and kayaking – all of which she heartily recommends. Fran has also worked on Lonely Planet's guides to *Sweden*, *Iceland* and *Reykjavik*.



JOHN SPELMAN

Norway

John frequently travels to Norway to be overwhelmed by the world's most stunning landscape. He's embarked upon Arctic Circle dogsled rides, countless trips amid the Western Fjords and has licked several glaciers. Otherwise, find him in Oslo slowly wandering from cafe to cafe. 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 New England. This is the sixth time he has covered Norway for a Lonely Planet title.



ANDY SYMINGTON

Finland

Andy first visited Finland many years ago more or less by accident, and walking on frozen lakes with the midday sun low in the sky made a quick and deep impression on him, even as fingers froze in the -30°C temperatures. Since then they can't keep him away, fuelled as he is by a love of huskies, saunas, Finnish mustard, moody Suomi rock and metal, but above all of Finnish people and their beautiful country.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Carolyn Bain Melbourne-based Carolyn has investigated great pockets of Europe in the name of work, including Sweden, Denmark and the Baltic countries. For this book she ventured north to Estonia, a country that combines the best of Eastern Europe and Scandinavia and delivers something heart-warmingly unique. Carolyn wrote the Tallinn chapter.

Simon Richmond An award-winning writer and photographer, Simon has been travelling to Russia for over 15 years. He's the co-author of the first and subsequent editions of Lonely Planet's *Trans-Siberian Railway* as well as *Russia*. He's also written about the country for several other publications including the Russian edition of *Newsweek*. Catch him online at www.simonrichmond.com. Simon wrote the St Petersburg chapter.

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