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.
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.

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). 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’ –
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 traveler 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 30º 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.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

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.
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.

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).
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**

**ÞORRABLÓT**
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** 30 Apr
(WALPURGIS NIGHT)
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.vanalinnapaeavd.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.

**ROS KILDE 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.vikingespil.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.

**GIFESTIVAL** 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**

**MEDIEVAL 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.hamletsommer.dk).

**ÄRHUS FESTIVAL WEEK** last Fri in Aug
The 10-day Ärhus 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 Reykjavík, 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.
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 (1 ½ 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 Reykjavík

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 at 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 Reykjavík is along the south coast past Skætfell Glacier (p269). In Reykjavík, 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 Reykjavík, 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-Þórsmörk 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 Tromso (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 Jukkasjarvi 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!
LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It’s simple: our authors are passionate, dedicated travellers. They don’t take freebies in exchange for positive coverage so you can be sure the advice you’re given is impartial. They travel widely to all the popular spots, and off the beaten track. They don’t research using just the internet or phone. They discover new places not included in any other guidebook. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, palaces, trails, galleries, temples and more. They speak with dozens of locals every day to make sure you get the kind of insider knowledge only a local could tell you. They take pride in getting all the details right, and in telling it how it is. Think you can do it? Find out how at lonelyplanet.com.

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 cliffs 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.
FRAN PARNELL

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

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

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.