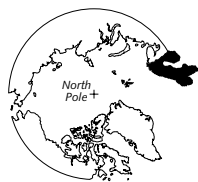


Arctic Scandinavia Travel Routes



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Making it to **Svalbard** (p324), one of the most impressive destinations on earth
- Enjoying a cocktail at the ultra-cool **Ice Hotel** near Kiruna (p309)
- Hiking in **Pallas-Ounastunturi National Park** (p327) or the **Kilpisjärvi** region (p328)
- Looking out over the turquoise seas and fabulous scenery of the **Lofoten islands** (p303)
- Sitting back and admiring the fantastic coastal scenery from the legendary **Hurtigruten steamer** (p298)



The starkly beautiful wilderness of the Scandinavian Arctic makes it a perfect place for the road trip of a lifetime. It's one of Europe's last great wilderness areas and a land of invigorating extremes, but at the same time it's much more accessible than other Arctic regions. A good network of roads, buses and ferries makes travel relatively easy, and the incredible beauty, sense of space and air of serenity that pervade the region are simply unforgettable.

Nature reigns supreme in northern Scandinavia: the scenic coastline, idyllic islands and dramatic fjords dotted with tiny fishing villages give way to majestic mountains, wild forests and the vast windswept stretch of the upland plateau, home to the Sami people, who have herded their reindeer in this area for centuries. Offshore, the Caribbean-coloured seas of Lofoten and the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard are truly an assault on the senses.

The far north of Scandinavia is a land set apart by climate as much as by culture. Long nights of bitter cold and dancing aurora yield to the stark blue skies and crunching snow beloved by skiers, dog-mushers, snowmobilers and ice-fishers. Spring gives way to a fleeting but intense spurt of summer, when you can hike some of Europe's largest and grandest national parks, play midnight golf or hole up in a ramshackle cottage by a lakeshore.

Throw in the towel at work and plan to cover the whole route given here, or bite off a small chunk and explore it in more detail. Dive from a sauna into the snow, sip cocktails in an ice hotel, hike the thousands of kilometres of trails, meander along the coast in search of your own little slice of heaven and enjoy Arctic Scandinavia at its best.

GETTING AROUND

Although most of Arctic Scandinavia is accessible by bus and ferry, it will take you a minor eternity by public transport, as connections only run a couple of times a week on some sections and distances are large. Even for budget travellers, it's worth considering taking the odd flight, or only planning to cover part of the following itineraries. There's a maze of schedules for transport operators, and local tourist offices are invaluable for navigating the region.

Air

The quickest way to get to the far north is by air. **SAS** (www.scandinavian.net) flies to a variety of destinations, including Alta, Bodø, Kirkenes, Kiruna, Narvik and Tromsø. **Braathens** (www.braathens.no) and **Widerøe** (www.wideroe.no) fly to Alta, Bodø, Hammerfest, Kirkenes, Mo i Rana and Tromsø. **Norwegian Air** (www.norwegian.no) flies to Alta, Bodø, Kirkenes, Narvik and Tromsø, and **Finnair** (www.finnair.com) has flights to Ivalo, Kemi, Kittilä and Rovaniemi. Swedish domestic carrier **Skyways** (www.skyways.se) flies to Luleå.

For the best ticket prices book online at least seven days in advance or consider buying an air pass. If you're under 25 it's worth

heading to the airport on the off-chance of getting a standby ticket.

Boat

In Norway an extensive network of car ferries and express boats links the country's offshore islands, coastal towns and fjord districts. Most ferries on the road system accommodate vehicles, but express coastal services normally take only foot passengers and cyclists.

The legendary **Hurtigruten** (www.hurtigruten.no) heads north from Bergen every night of the year, pulling into 33 ports on its six-day journey to Kirkenes, where it turns around and heads back south. The return journey takes 11 days and covers a distance of 2500 nautical miles. In agreeable weather, the fjord and mountain scenery along the way is nothing short of spectacular.

Bus

Express buses follow most main highways across the far north, but they may not be frequent. Distances are long and costs can mount up. Generally, there's no price difference between express and regular buses, and discounts are normally available for students, seniors and children. Inter-Rail and ScanRail