



The Far North

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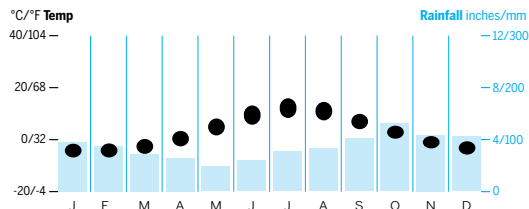
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Why Go?

Norway's northernmost counties of Troms and Finnmark arc across the very top of Europe, where broad horizons share the land with dense forest. Like most of the relatively few visitors who make it this far north, come in summer to enjoy Tromsø, the region's only town of any size. The museums of this sparky, self-confident place will orient you for the Arctic lands beyond. You'll probably respond to the call of Nordkapp (North Cape), the European mainland's self-declared most northerly point. But to really feel the pull of the north, you need to venture further to explore the sparsely populated plateaus of Inner Finnmark and its wild northeastern coast, the Norwegian heartland of the Sami people. For alternative adventure (say, scudding aboard a snowmobile or behind a team of yapping huskies), plan to return in winter, when soft blue light envelops the snowy lands, outsiders are even fewer and the northern lights streak the sky.

When to Go

Tromsø



Early Feb Lots of snowy activities and, with luck, the northern lights on tap.

Easter week The Sami party in Kautokeino before dispersing to their summer pastures.

Mid- to late Jun Hotels and sights reopen, and the crowds have yet to come.

TROMS

Troms, where the Gulf Stream peters out, mitigating the harshness of winter, boasts a couple of near-superlative places: Tromsø, the only place large enough to merit the name 'city' in northern Norway; and Senja, Norway's second-largest island, a less trodden rival to the Lofotens for spectacular scenery.

Tromsø

POP 67,300

Simply put, Tromsø parties. By far the largest town in northern Norway and the administrative centre of Troms county, it's lively with cultural bashes, buskers, an animated street scene, a midnight-sun marathon, a respected university, the hallowed Mack Brewery – and more pubs per capita than any other Norwegian town. Its corona of snow-topped peaks provides arresting scenery, excellent hiking in summer and great skiing and dog-sledding in winter.

Although the city lies almost 400km north of the Arctic Circle, its climate is pleasantly moderated by the Gulf Stream. The long winter darkness is offset by round-the-clock activity during the perpetually bright days of summer.

The main part of town stretches along the east shore of the island of Tromsøya, linked to the mainland by a gracefully arched bridge.

Sights

The tourist office's *Summer Activities in Tromsø* and its winter equivalent both provide a comprehensive checklist of tours and activities.

Around town you'll find a number of interesting churches. **Domkirke** (Storgata), the Lutheran Church of Norway's cathedral, is one of Norway's largest wooden churches. Its opening hours are erratic. Up the hill is the town's **Catholic Church** (Storgata 94; ☉9am-7.30pm). Both were built in 1861 and each lays claim to be – here comes yet another superlative – 'the world's northernmost bishopric' of its sect.

★ **Arctic Cathedral** CHURCH
(Ishavskatedralen; www.ishavskatedralen.no; Hans Nilsensvei 41; adult/child Nkr40/free, organ recitals Nkr70-150; ☉9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 1-7pm Sat & Sun Jun–mid-Aug, 3-6pm Apr, May & mid-Aug–Dec, 2-6pm Feb & Mar) The 11 arching triangles of the Arctic Cathedral (1965), as the Tromsdalen Church is more usually called, suggest glacial crevasses

and auroral curtains. The magnificent glowing stained-glass window that occupies almost the whole of the east end depicts Christ descending to earth. Look back towards the west end and the contemporary organ, a work of steely art in itself, then up high to take in the lamps of Czech crystal, hanging in space like icicles. Take bus 20 or 24.

★ **Fjellheisen** CABLE CAR
(☎77 63 87 37; www.fjellheisen.no; Solliveien 12; adult/child Nkr140/60; ☉10am-1am late May–mid-Aug, shorter hours rest of year) For a fine view of the city and midnight sun, take the cable car to the top of Mt Storsteinen (421m). There's a restaurant at the top, from where a network of hiking routes radiates. Take bus 26 and buy a combined bus and cable-car ticket (adult/child Nkr145/65).

★ **Polaria** MUSEUM, AQUARIUM
(www.polaria.no; Hjalmar Johansens gate 12; adult/child Nkr120/60; ☉10am-7pm mid-May–Aug, to 5pm Sep–mid-May) Daringly designed Polaria is an entertaining multimedia introduction to northern Norway and Svalbard. After an excellent 14-minute film about the latter (screened every 30 minutes), plus another about the northern lights, an Arctic walk leads to displays on shrinking sea ice, a northern lights display, aquariums of cold-water fish and – the big draw – a trio of energetic bearded seals.

M/S Polstjerna SHIP
(adult/child Nkr25/10; ☉10am-5pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug) Between 1949 and 1981, this historic seal-hunting ship killed (or 'brought home', as the literature euphemistically expresses it) nearly 100,000 seals.

Tromsø University Museum MUSEUM
(www.uit.no/tmu; Lars Thøringsvei 10; adult/child Nkr50/25; ☉9am-6pm Jun-Aug, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-3pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Sep-May) Near the southern end of Tromsøya, this museum has well-presented and documented displays on traditional and modern Sami life, ecclesiastical art and accoutrements, and a small section on the Vikings. Downstairs, learn about rocks of the north and ponder a number of thought-provoking themes (such as the role of fire, the consequences of global warming and loss of wilderness).

There's also a replica 'northern lights machine', or terrella, an early invention that gives you in miniature a sense of the splendour of the aurora borealis.