

Welcome to Scandinavia



Outdoors

The great outdoors is rarely greater than in Europe's big north. Epic expanses of wilderness – forests, lakes, volcanoes – and intoxicatingly pure air mean that engaging with nature is utter pleasure. A network of well-cared-for protected areas stretches across the region, offering some of Europe's best hiking as well as anything from kayaking to glacier-walking to bear-watching. Spectacular coasts, whether rugged fjords, cliffs teeming with seabirds, or archipelagos so speckled with islands it looks like the artist who designed this canvas flicked a paintbrush at it, invite exploration from the sea. It's rare to find such inspiring landscapes that are so easily accessed.

City Style

Stolid Nordic stereotypes dissolve completely in the region's vibrant capitals. Crest-of-the-wave design can be seen across them all, backed up by outstanding modern architecture, excellent museums, imaginative solutions for 21st-century urban living, some of Europe's most acclaimed restaurants and a nightlife that fizzles along wildly despite the hefty beer prices. Live music is a given: you're bound to come across some inspiring local act whether your taste is Viking metal or chamber music. Style here manages to be conservative and innovative at the same time, or perhaps it's just that the new and the old blend with less effort here than



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Effortlessly chic cities balance remote forests, enchanting style gurus and wilderness hikers alike. Endless day, perpetual night. Rocking festivals, majestic aurora borealis. Scandinavia's menu is anything but bland.

(left) Ice cave in Skaftafell (261)
(below) Waterfront living in Sweden

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in other places. A side trip to seductive Tallinn will add an eastern Baltic kick to your Scandinavian city experiences.

Seasons

They have proper seasons up here. Long, cold winters with feet of snow carpeting the ground and the sun making only cameo appearances – if at all. Despite the scary subzero temperatures, there's a wealth of things to do: skiing, sledding behind huskies or reindeer, taking snowmobile safaris to the Arctic Sea, dangling a fishing line through a hole in the ice, spending romantic nights in snow hotels, visiting Santa Claus and gazing at the soul-piercing Northern Lights. Spring sees nature's

tentative awakening before the explosive summer with its long, long days filled with festivals, beer terraces and wonderful boating, hiking and cycling. Autumn in Scandinavia's forested lands can be the most beautiful of all, as the birches and other deciduous trees display a glorious array of colours, offering marvellous woodland walking before the first snows.

Green Choices

You'll rarely come across the word *ecotourism* in Scandinavia, but those values have long been an important part of life here. Generally, green, sustainable solutions are a way of living, rather than a gimmick to attract visitors.