

NORDIC EXPLORER**Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen & Norway-in-a-Nutshell****14 days**

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Day 1 Arrive in Helsinki

Arrival in Helsinki, a vibrant city where modern design meets historic charm. This coastal capital is renowned for its stunning waterfront, world-class museums, and laid-back Nordic lifestyle.

Overnight in Helsinki.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Helsinki: City Tour

Affectionately known as the 'Daughter of the Baltic', Helsinki is sited at the arrowhead of a peninsula, surrounded by an archipelago of 315 islands, perfectly placed between its two great trading cousins, Stockholm and Moscow. In a European perspective, Helsinki is relatively young (450 years), yet it is Finland's sixth-oldest town. The Swedes, who extended their empire into Finland in 1155, founded the city of 'Helsingfors' (the name still used by the Swedes) in 1550 when King Gustav Vasa needed a site for a strategic, competitively placed trading port. It languished as a coastal backwater until Imperialist Russia invaded in 1809.

Today we will enjoy a comprehensive walking tour taking in the most important and interesting parts of Helsinki, such as the historical centre and the diplomatic quarters, the Presidential Palace, City Hall, and the Parliament building. We'll stop at Senate Square, and, if possible, Temppeliaukio Church.

During the afternoon you can explore the busy market place or the many souvenir shops close to the harbour. Fans of modern architecture and/or libraries may enjoy a visit to the Oodi Helsinki Library, which occupies a hugely significant site in central Helsinki: facing the steps of the Finnish parliament building. The upper surface of the canopy structure has been used to create a large public terrace, from which one can look directly over the square to the steps and main entrance of parliament. The terrace doubles the amount of public outdoor space provided for library visitors and creates a new destination where people can meet and observe the city below.

Overnight in Helsinki.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Free time in Helsinki / Ferry to Sweden

Today you will have a free morning to explore Helsinki.

Helsinki is small and intimate; lively but not bustling. Its size makes it easy to walk around and cafes, markets, and the nearby islands are just a few of its summer delights.

A popular option for today is a quick 15-minute ferry trip over to Suomenlinna Island, an interesting and charming piece of Helsinki, even if it's not technically part of the city. In the history of military architecture, the Fortress of Suomenlinna is an outstanding example of general fortification principles of the 17th and 18th centuries, notably the bastion system, and also showcases individual characteristics. Suomenlinna is meant to be seen on foot at your own pace (many of its roads are paved with cobblestones, so you need to wear comfortable walking shoes). Your Tour Leader will point out the location of the dock during yesterday's tour.

This afternoon/evening we will board our overnight ferry to Stockholm. Our overnight ferries feature modern facilities, restaurants, duty-free shopping, and cozy cabins with low beds (ie not bunks) and en-suite washroom.

Overnight ferry (dinner on board).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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Day 4 Stockholm: Old Town & Vasa Museum

Welcome to Sweden!

After our morning arrival we check into our hotel and have a bit of a break to grab some lunch before commencing with our walking tour of the Old City and the Vasa Museum.

With its location on the east coast of Sweden at the mouth of Lake Malaren, Stockholm is widely renowned for its beauty. Three islands make up the oldest part of Stockholm -- Riddarholmen, Staden and Helgeandsholmen -- the whole history-riddled mass a cluster of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Renaissance buildings backed by narrow medieval alleys.

We'll begin our exploration at the magnificent Stockholm City Hall, a stunning architectural masterpiece that has hosted the prestigious Nobel Prize banquet since 1930. Our guided tour will take us through the iconic Blue Hall, the grand banquet hall where Nobel laureates and dignitaries gather to celebrate their achievements. We'll marvel at the hall's elegant decor, intricate details, and the historic ambiance that permeates the space.

From here it takes only a matter of seconds to cross the bridge into Stockholm's Old Town, or Gamla Stan. This medieval heart of the city is a maze of narrow, cobblestone streets lined with colourful buildings, historic churches, and charming shops. We'll see the Royal Palace, one of Europe's largest; its grand facade and intricate details are a sight to behold. We'll pass by St. Nicholas' Church, the oldest church in Stockholm, and the Riddarholm Church, the traditional burial place of Swedish royalty. Along the way, we'll discover hidden courtyards, charming cafes, and unique boutiques. We will visit the square which hosts the Nobel Museum, which showcases the history of the Nobel Prize and its laureates (you'll be able to visit on your own during free time tomorrow).

From here we take a quick ferry to the extraordinary Vasa Ship Museum. This world-renowned museum houses the only preserved 17th-century warship in the world. The Vasa, a magnificent ship that sank on its maiden voyage in 1628, was salvaged in 1961 and meticulously restored. As you explore the museum, you'll be amazed by the intricate details of the ship's construction, its stunning carvings, and the fascinating stories of the people who sailed on it. After a full day, we'll transfer back to our hotel by either public tram or taxi (your Tour Leader will arrange and advise).

Overnight in Stockholm.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Stockholm: Boat Tour & Leisure Time

Our day begins with a 50-minute boat tour that will take you on a journey through Stockholm's rich history. Departing near the City Hall, the cruise will wind its way through the heart of the city, offering stunning views of the picturesque skyline. We'll have the opportunity to admire the historic island of Kungsholmen, known for its elegant architecture and cultural institutions. We'll also pass by the intriguing islands of Langholmen and Reimersholme, each with its own fascinating story to tell. The cruise guide will share insights into Stockholm's maritime heritage, explaining how the city's development has been shaped by its unique location. From its humble beginnings as a medieval trading post to its transformation into a modern metropolis, you'll gain a deeper understanding of the city's past and present.

The remainder of your day is yours to explore Stockholm at your own pace. This vibrant city offers a wealth of opportunities for sightseeing, shopping, and dining. Lose yourself in the charming streets of the Old Town, with its colorful buildings, historic churches, and quaint shops. Indulge in some retail therapy at the stylish shops and boutiques in the city center. Relax in one of Stockholm's beautiful parks, such as Kungstradgarden or Djurgarden. Whether you prefer to wander through the city's historic neighborhoods, soak up the sun by the water, or simply enjoy a leisurely meal, Stockholm has something for everyone.

Overnight in Stockholm.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Stockholm, Sweden - Fly to Copenhagen, Denmark

Today we fly to Copenhagen. Welcome to Denmark!

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Upon arrival and after check-in, we'll enjoy a relaxing and scenic introduction to this vibrant capital.

We kick off our Copenhagen touring with a one-hour historical canal boat tour, which provides an excellent introduction to our stay. As we'll glide along the picturesque canals, we'll have the opportunity to admire some of Copenhagen's most iconic landmarks. We'll pass by the stunning Amalienborg Palace, the official residence of the Danish royal family. You'll also catch a glimpse of the historic Christiansborg Palace, which houses the Danish Parliament. As we cruise through the canals, you'll see colorful townhouses, charming bridges, and the iconic Little Mermaid statue (from a distance).

A knowledgeable guide will provide commentary on the city's history, culture, and architecture, making the tour both informative and entertaining.

Overnight in Copenhagen.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Copenhagen: City Touring

Today's walking tour offers a unique opportunity to immerse yourself in Copenhagen's rich history and culture.

We begin in the vibrant and colourful Nyhavn. Once a bustling port, this picturesque canal-side district is now a popular tourist destination. As you stroll along the waterfront, you'll see brightly painted 17th-century townhouses, cozy cafes, and charming shops. Nyhavn is also closely linked to the beloved fairytale writer, Hans Christian Andersen. He lived in one of the houses here for many years, drawing inspiration from the lively atmosphere and diverse characters that filled the streets. On your free time, you can even visit the house where he once resided, now a museum dedicated to his life and work.

From Nyhavn, we'll head towards Amalienborg Palace, the official residence of the Danish royal family. You'll have the opportunity to admire the elegant Rococo architecture of the four identical palaces that surround the square.

Our next stop is Rosenborg Castle, a Renaissance castle that once served as the royal residence. Today, the castle houses a fascinating collection of royal treasures, including crowns, scepters, and ornate tapestries. You can also explore the beautiful castle gardens, which offer stunning views of the city.

This afternoon (or tomorrow), you may choose to visit Copenhagen's excellent National Museum with its permanent collections pertaining to Danish history as well as several very good ethnological rooms.

NOTE: The order of Copenhagen sightseeing may depending on weather, hotel location, and other logistical considerations.

Overnight in Copenhagen.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Copenhagen: City Tour - Overnight Ferry to Oslo

Today we delve deeper into Copenhagen's rich history with a visit to the magnificent Christiansborg Palace. This imposing granite castle, surrounded by canals on three sides, stands as a testament to Denmark's royal past. While the current palace is the third to occupy the site, its grandeur and significance remain undiminished. The first two castles were tragically destroyed by fire, but the current Baroque structure, built in the 18th century, is a masterpiece of architectural elegance.

As we explore the castle, we'll learn about its fascinating history and the important role it has played in Danish politics and culture. We'll have the opportunity to admire the opulent state rooms, the historic Royal Reception Rooms, and the beautiful chapel.

If time permits prior to our ferry, you may choose to visit the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, often simply referred to as the Glyptotek, is a renowned art museum in Copenhagen, Denmark. Founded by Carl Jacobsen, the son of the founder of the Carlsberg Breweries, the museum houses an impressive collection of both ancient and modern art.

This afternoon we head to the port to board our evening ferry for the overnight journey to Oslo. Our route takes us along the coast of Denmark and the body of water that separates the North Sea from the Baltic and into Norwegian waters. Our cabins are small but

comfortable with ensuite facilities. These vessels are large and well appointed with amenities that include restaurants, shops, maybe even a cinema and swimming pool.

Overnight ferry (dinner on board).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Arrival in Oslo: City Touring

The final 1.5 hours before docking are a must-see event. Grab your camera and head up to the deck early to capture the enchanting scenery. The historic Drobak Fortress, a picturesque landmark, will come into view, its imposing silhouette contrasting with the tranquil waters. Scattered throughout the fjord, you'll spot charming islands dotted with colourful summer homes, creating a postcard-perfect scene. The ship will dock just outside the city centre and a bus/guide will be waiting to commence our sightseeing program.*

Upon disembarkation, we'll visit one of Oslo's most celebrated and popular cultural targets, the Vigelandsparken, an open-air sculpture park which commemorates the modern Norwegian sculptor of world renown, Gustav Vigeland (1869-1943). On our way back to the centre, we'll stop at the outdoor Norwegian Folk Museum, where a collection of city homes, farm buildings, one of the famous Stave Churches, give you an overview of Norway, its culture, and history.

Our tour includes a visit to the Opera House, designed to be walked upon! From here you'll have a great view of the inner harbour where our the guide can point out the Munch Museum, which you can visit on your own at some point during our stay.

After hotel check-in, the balance of the day is yours to spend at leisure, visiting the museums mentioned above and/or possibly strolling down the main street of Carl Johan, enjoying the activity in a city that comes alive during the summer months.

* Please note that our Oslo hotel rooms will NOT be ready for us this early in the day. Your large baggage will be securely stored on the bus; you might want to prepare your day-pack ahead of time.

Overnight in Oslo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Oslo: Area Sightseeing

This morning we walk the short distance to Oslo City Hall for a look at the main hall and the murals depicted on the interior walls.

Nearby, we hop on a small ferry taking us to Bygdoy Peninsula, site of some of Oslo's most visited museums. Here we visit the Viking Ship Museum (please note that this museum has been intermittently closed for renovations and may not be available at the time of our tour), housing the three ships found buried along the Oslo Fjord, all of them nearly 1,200 years old.

We also visit the Fram and Kon-Tiki museums, the latter of which houses the balsa raft used by Thor Heyerdal and his international crew in 1962. They sailed from Peru to Polynesia to confirm his theory that the first Polynesians originally came from Peru. The Fram Museum tells the story of Norwegian polar exploration.

After our visit, we return to the city by public bus in time for a break for lunch and then a visit to the National Museum for a self-guided visit. This has been described as "the best new art gallery in Scandinavia" -- definitely a place where you could spend the better part of your free time after the formal guided part of today's program. This is where Munch's most famous work, "The Scream," is on display (the Munch Museum also displays two other earlier versions).

Overnight in Oslo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Oslo - Flamsbana Railway - Gudvangen - Stalheim

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An early departure takes us to Oslo's train station where we will catch a +/- 08:00 departure to Flam via Myrdal where we connect to the Famous Flamsbana, the Flam Railway, one of the world's most spectacular rail journeys.

In 1923 work was started on the separate railway line from Myrdal down sheer cliffs to Flam. Since the tunnels were done by hand, the first of the track wasn't put down until autumn 1936. By 1940 the line was opened and run first by steam engines. Electric engines took over in 1944. It takes about an hour to cover 20 km (12 miles) of track on the Flamsbana train. Eighteen of the 20 tunnels were chiseled out by hand which took one month of hard labour for each meter excavated. To avoid risk from avalanches, the railway criss-crosses the river and the bottom of the valley three times. Then, instead of building bridges, the river was routed through a tunnel under the railway line. Nowhere else in the world do adhesion rail cars on normal tracks have a steeper journey. Almost 80% of the railway line has a gradient of 5.5% (1:18).

At the bottom, we will enjoy the scenic landscape of the Flam Valley and admire the lovely Aurlandfjord, an offshoot of the Sognefjord, the longest in the world.

We will enjoy a break for lunch in Flam and then board a leisurely 2-hour cruise along the narrowest arm of Sognefjord and Aurland fjords. Here we are surrounded by the dramatic West Coast fjord landscape of steep snow-capped mountains (up to 1800 m /6,000 ft) and tumbling waterfalls, sheltered hamlets, and high mountain farms. After this journey we will catch a bus at Gudvangen and continue on to Stalheim, located at the very heart of Western Norway's beautiful fjord region.

Overnight in Stalheim.

Day 12 Stalheim - Train to Bergen

Our day begins with a visit to the fascinating Stalheim Folkemuseum. This open-air museum offers a glimpse into Norway's rural past, showcasing traditional crafts, rustic objects, and a collection of 30 log buildings arranged to resemble a traditional farm. As you wander through the museum, you'll gain a deeper appreciation for the region's rich cultural heritage.

Afterwards we'll embark on a scenic journey along a winding mountain road to the charming town of Voss. This picturesque route offers breathtaking views of towering mountains, cascading waterfalls, and lush valleys.

Once in Voss, we'll board the world-renowned Bergen Railway. This iconic railway line is renowned for its stunning natural beauty, winding through dramatic landscapes and passing by majestic fjords and snow-capped peaks. As we journey along this scenic route, you'll have the opportunity to admire the breathtaking scenery before arriving in Bergen..

Bergen is widely-regarded as one of the more beautiful cities of Norway, and is an ancient city that looms large in Viking sagas. Until the 14th century, it was the seat of the medieval kingdom of Norway. Later the Hanseatic merchants established a major trading post here, holding sway until the 18th century, when the locals reclaimed their trading rights. Bergen has survived many disasters, including several fires and the explosion of a Nazi ship during World War II. It is a town with important traditions in shipping, banking, and insurance, and its modern industries are expanding rapidly. The oldest part of town overlooks the busy harbour; along the harbour's edge are myriad shops, boutiques, and the famous open-air fish market.

Overnight in Bergen.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Bergen: City Tour

Our tour starts in the center of town and Bryggen, the wharf on the northeast side of Bergen's harbour. The gabled wood warehouses lining the docks mark the site of the city's original settlement. We take time to walk the narrow passageways between buildings; shops and galleries are hidden among the wooden facades.

Our walk continues down the wharf, past the historic buildings to the end of the Holmen promontory and to Bergenhus festning (Bergenhus Fort), which dates from the 13th century; the nearby Rosenkrantztaarnet is a 16th century tower residence. Bergen's oldest cathedral is located behind the fort, the 12th century church called Mariakirken. Walking around the back of the church down four blocks to Floybanen, we take the funicular that runs up and down Floyen, one of the city's most popular hiking mountains -- the view is spectacular. At the base of the funicular is an area of crooked streets and hodgepodge architecture where you'll find most of Bergen's antiques shops.

Balance of the day at leisure to enjoy this charming town. We recommend a stop at the Fish Market, where you can enjoy fresh caught prawns right of the fishing boats. Sit down and enjoy them like the locals do -- peel and load them onto fresh bread, add a bit of lemon and locally made mayonnaise.

Balance of the day at leisure to enjoy this charming town.

Overnight in Bergen.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Departure

Today we depart from Bergen.

BON VOYAGE!