

CULTURE & ART

As you travel through the Nordic region, you will find that its people will proudly and happily share their traditions and customs with you, making it very easy for travelers to pick up on the culture. In fact, the Nordic people are so proud of their heritage that they go to great lengths to share it with the rest of the world.

You can find a great example of this in the Faroe Islands, where a few local enthusiasts – disappointed at not being featured on Google Street View – found a way to bring Google to the Faroes by documenting its roads and landscapes (not by vehicle or bicycle, mind you) using panoramic cameras and the islands' free roaming sheep, creating what is now the internationally celebrated Sheep View 360.

Indeed, the entire region's steadfast culture has found its way centerstage over the recent decades. Whether it's hit TV show adaptations of the early Vikings, big music exports like pop band ABBA and avant-garde artist Björk, acclaimed literature from authors like Jo Nesbø and Astrid Lindgren, or the highly esteemed lifestyle philosophy of balance and simplicity, the world has had its eyes fixed on the Nordic region, and its people could not be any happier to share more of themselves despite their rather shy and reserved nature.

Travelers exploring the Nordic region will find themselves wrapped up in the region's culture from the get-go. It can be seen, heard and felt deeply wherever you find yourself to be, whether in the heart of a cosmopolitan city still with its old-world charm or in the middle of the wilderness with nothing but the sound of the wind in the trees or perhaps the occasional bleat of grazing sheep. Its celebrations like Norway's Constitution Day – where travelers find themselves lost in a sea of proud parade goers dressed in their finest national dress, the bunad – or Sweden's Midsummer, which signals the end of the long summer nights and is celebrated with carefree merriment and dancing around the maypole. In Iceland, they have Konudagur, or the Wife's Day, when the woman of the house is commemorated and celebrated, and in Finland, travelers can experience Friend's Day on February 14, where everyone – not just lovers or those with admirers – receive cards and flowers.

Music has also played an important role in the Nordic region and instruments like flutes, harps, lutes and fiddles of different shapes, sizes and materials can be traced back to the Viking age. In Lapland, revel in the unique music style joik, which is a low guttural sound that can be sung with or without lyrics. Listening to the joik is an experience that will leave everyone spiritually touched.

Like all cultures, the Nordic region is not without its entrancing mythologies and legends. Handed down from one generation to the next, the Nordic countries have a long history of storytelling, which came in the form of sagas and tales about fairies, elves, trolls, the hidden people and many others. With the absence of scientific understanding, these stories were told to help explain the unexplainable – such as the northern lights – and to also keep children (and adults) on their best behavior. These stories still exist today, and while few people believe in them, most have become cherished traditions.

From sounds to sights, the Nordic region is home to some of the world's best and oldest visual artistry. Dating back to 2000 BC, with the discovery of the Trundhold sun chariot in Denmark, Nordic art has evolved over the millennia: From the mighty Viking ships and its intricate woodwork ornamentation,

to Edvard Munch's impressionist masterworks and Svavar Guðnason's abstractions, to Finland's modern day contributions in dimensional art and industrial design. The spectrum is vast and all-encompassing, and travelers can marvel at these visual wonders in the many fascinating museums scattered across the region. Some of the best art museums in the Nordic region include Denmark's Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and Rosenborg Castle, Finland's Ateneum, Stockholm's Artipelag, Nuuk's Kunstmuseum in Greenland, and the National Gallery in Oslo, Norway.

So, when traveling to the Nordic countries, be prepared for great music and merriment, friendly people and mythological creatures. Immerse yourself in the region's fascinating culture. All you have to do is breathe it in.

