

INFRASTRUCTURE

Traveling through and within the Nordic region has been simplified due to the countries' heavy investment in infrastructure. Each country has built an intricate network of interconnecting roads, airports near and far, railway and ferry systems, making it relatively easy to get around – no matter the destination.

❖ By Air

The Nordic region as a whole has over a hundred airports, servicing both international and domestic flights. This has made it easy for travelers to reach even the most remote of territories like Svalbard and Norway's North Cape. However, be prepared to change planes once or even twice to reach some destinations!

In the Faroe Islands, helicopter travel is subsidized by the government so that locals living in the archipelago's more remote islands, are still in some way, connected with the rest of the country. And while travelers are welcomed to travel by helicopter, they are only encouraged to take advantage of a one-way trip, especially when there are return ferries available.

And for places like Greenland and Svalbard, where roadways between settlements are sparse, traveling by plane or helicopter is the fastest – and yet, most scenic – way to get around.

❖ By Train

With the exception of the western Nordic countries – the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland – and Svalbard, the rest of the Nordic region has an extensive railway network that not only connects cities and regions with each other, but the countries as well.

In Norway, Oslo serves as the main railway hub, and from there fans out 3,000 kilometers to different parts of the country, giving travelers a chance to see Norway's ever-changing landscape in several hours. The most famous railway journeys in Norway include the Bergen Railway, which runs between Oslo and Bergen over Hardangervidda, and its offshoot, the Flåm Railway, which is one of Norway's top tourist attractions. The other noteworthy railway is the Dovre Railway, which runs from Oslo to Trondheim, and its connecting line, the Rauma Railway, bringing travelers to the stunning alpine fjord town of Åndalsnes. And one thing travelers need to know is that Norway's trains don't offer first class seating.

In Sweden, travelers will find an equally efficient railway system that spans the entire country, with first-class and second-class car options to choose from. On all major routes, travelers are treated with radio and music channel outlets on their seats, and in business class, travelers are served a meal at their seats.

Denmark's railway network extends to most parts of the country, except the edges of northwest Jutland and the southern islands, and runs frequent services – at least hourly on major long-distance routes. Denmark's railway network also connects efficiently with its ground transportation system, making it very easy for travelers to reach their final destination.

In Finland, travelers will find spacious and comfortable trains that run the entire length of the country from Helsinki to Kolari in Lapland. They will also be treated to beautiful scenery, especially in Eastern Finland with all its sparkling lakes – though some travelers, have found it to be quite monotonous after a time, especially on the longer journeys, making air travel the faster and more convenient way to travel.

❖ By Boat

Descendants of the seafaring Vikings, the Nordic people have always had a love affair with the sea; and it is solely because of the region's geography that traveling by boat became the convenient – and sometimes, only – means of transportation, especially in Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and certain parts of Sweden.

Boats continue to be the glue that keep some of the most remote settlements connected with the rest of the world, and has served as an alternative means of travel between destinations when there are no other options.

In the Nordic region, travelers will find it relatively easy to travel by boat, as they run quite frequently throughout the day. Most routes cover long distances with numerous stops, and is a relatively cheap way to travel.

In Norway, especially, travelers will quickly see that traveling by ferry, express boat or the coastal steamer Hurtigruten, is an easy and oftentimes scenic way to get around and see Norway, since traveling by car often takes too much time due to the country's often winding roads caused by its geography. And even by car, travelers will at some point in time end up boarding a car ferry, especially when traveling through Western and Northern Norway, which are known for its vast fjords.

Boats are also a common sight in Svalbard during the summer. The postal boat, M/S Polargirl runs several times a week between the settlements Longyearbyen, Barentsburg and Pyramiden, and passengers can take this boat to travel between these three destinations.

In Sweden, travelers are encouraged to take the coast ferries, which gives them a chance to see certain parts of the country from a different yet equally scenic perspective: The Stockholm archipelago, which is comprised of over 20,000 islands, is one of the world's most beautiful; and Sweden's west coast, with its clear beaches and coastline, is a wonderful experience for travelers whatever the season; and its southern islands, Öland and Gotland, are equally stunning worlds of their own.

In Greenland, the boat remains the most popular form of transportation since there are very limited connecting roadways in the country.

❖ By Car

The Nordic region, over the decades, has invested heavily on the creation and maintenance of its roads and tunnels. They are mostly well-paved and relatively free of traffic, and have a wide network of main roads that connect major cities, regions, and even countries together (this is specific to the Scandinavian peninsula).

Iceland's Ring Road, which is the country's main national road, stretches around the entire island, connecting most of the country's inhabited areas together. It is mainly two lanes wide – one lane going in each direction – and often narrows into one lane bridges, and remains open throughout the year except for certain areas during winter, like the route between Breiðdalsvík and Egilsstaðir in the east due to heavy snowfall. There are also mountain roads, most of which are located in the Highlands region, that are only recommended for seasoned drivers using 4-wheel drive vehicles (and sometimes, even 4-wheel drive vehicles are not suitable!). Travelers need to be aware of these roads, which are marked F-Roads, when navigating their way through Iceland – that, and not stopping in the middle of the road to admire the scenery or take photographs. An increasing number of visitors have gotten into vehicular accidents because of this.

In the Faroe Islands, the construction of tunnels has made traveling through its unique geological landscape easier and faster. Rather than going over or around the mountains, which are sometimes prone to landslides and avalanches, tunnels were built. Though, some of the older tunnel roads remain single lane with priority directions, and have no lights. Over the recent years, subsea tunnels were also built to make traveling from one island to the next more convenient. The two-lane tunnel under Leirvíksfjørður, for example, connects the islands of Eysturoy and Borðoy, going down to a depth of 150 meters below sea level.

In Greenland, cars are rare since most of its settlements are not connected by roadways. In fact, the entire country has some 2,500+ cars, and most of these are located in the capital of Nuuk. There are, however, two other ways to travel through Greenland over land, and that is by snowmobile or dog sled – both of which require a local expert guide, as the terrain is harsh and can be extreme.

As with Greenland, Svalbard's road connections are limited. In fact, the only 'highway' in the region is the one that connects Longyearbyen airport to the Mine 7, and is in most parts a short distance. The settlements themselves have paved streets and like the residents of Longyearbyen, they tend to have cars, but prefer the snowmobile when traveling during winter.

In Norway, there is a network of highways that visitors are recommended to drive through. The National Tourist Routes, as it is called, is composed of 18 highways that stretches over 1,850 kilometers and is known for their stunning scenery, architecture and tourist-friendly infrastructure like rest stops and viewpoints.

And contrary to popular belief, Norway – as with most of the Nordic countries – are much larger than they appear, making them quite deceptive to travelers. Especially in Norway, where the roads are winding and sometimes narrow, it is quite easy for travelers to underestimate the distances and driving times. The drive from Bergen to Oslo, for example, though seemingly a short distance away, can take up to a full 8 hours for travelers who are unfamiliar with the area.

Driving in the Nordic countries is typically easy, as most drivers are polite and law-abiding, and the roads are well-marked with a good network of gas/petrol stations. In the summer, getting around by

car is a breeze but can be challenging during winter if you don't have experience. Roads tend to get extremely slippery and the use of snow tires is mandatory, as is the use of headlights at all times (even if the sun is shining and the sky is clear!). Drivers also need to remain alert when going through areas known for wandering sheep and deer, the latter being most active at dusk. Just remember to keep to the paved roads, follow the speed limit, and obey the rules – as the penalties can be shockingly steep!

❖ Toll Roads

Toll booths in Norway are automatic where you drive through without stopping. A photo of the number plate of all vehicles is taken without an AutoPASS. If you don't have an AutoPASS, you must pay the toll-fee at facilities such as petrol stations close to the toll station. The vast majority rental cars will come with an AutoPASS so you will not need to worry about paying the fee in this way.

In Sweden too, most rental cars have an AutoPASS that will pay for toll roads and congestion fees introduced in Stockholm and Gothenburg.

In Denmark, there are only two toll roads: The Great Belt Bridge and the Øresund Bridge. In Iceland only the The Hvalfjörður Tunnel is tolled. In Finland there are no toll roads or toll bridges.

