

# Course Description

## Scandinavia Backpacking

### - 23 & Over -

#### Features Of This Course:

- Hiking route: ~ 70 – 110 kilometers (45 - 70 miles)
- Average Pack Weight: 40-55 pounds
- Average group size: 10 students / 2 instructors
- Minimum Age: 23
- Elevations of Sea level to 1500 meters
- Potential for non-technical peak ascents
- Travel through tundra, shrub thickets and birch forests
- On and off-trail hiking, some animal and marked trails.
- Travel is likely to include areas with boulders and snow
- Unique natural history: Unparalleled wild flower displays and late season berry picking

#### The Expedition

Your NOLS backpacking expedition is located north of the Arctic Circle in Norway and/or Sweden. From lowland forested areas and ocean fjords to the steep glaciated mountains, you'll see much of this wild country as you explore the land by foot. During this two-week adventure, you'll learn a foundation of skills for wilderness travel while exploring one of the most beautiful places on earth.

Considered by many across the Atlantic as Europe's last great wilderness, Lapland encompasses a huge territory. No less than 9 national parks can be found within its borders and UNESCO has designated part of it as a World Heritage Site, called Laponia. For hundreds of years, this area has been home to the Sami people. Trekking starts either in Norway at Fjord level, or in Sweden, and will move to remarkably unspoiled higher elevations. The vistas are wide, the mountains rugged and the possibilities endless for returning home with lessons to last a lifetime.

The Scandinavian mountains have fascinating ecosystems to observe and enjoy. The mountains are home to reindeer, ptarmigans, lemmings, moose, jaegers, as well as many nesting shorebirds. In this land of tundra and rocky passes, you might also catch a rare glimpse of a wolverine, arctic fox, lynx, or brown bear. The tundra itself has a surprisingly rich and varied flora. Both the wetter meadows and the higher, rockier terrain can have spectacular flower displays from mid June to mid August, and wild berries add to the diet on the later summer courses.

One of the first things you will notice upon your arrival in Scandinavia is the light. While your course begins at the tail end of the midnight sun season, dusk is but a few hours in length at the latitudes we travel, and it will stay light throughout most of the day and night. The amount of sunlight offers unique opportunities for active, long days though your body may take a little while to adjust and learn to sleep when it is light at 2 a.m.!

The big difference between this course and our other backpacking expeditions is that it has been designed specifically for working adults or adults with families who want a two-week expedition instead of 30 days. We've focused our curriculum, and set an age limit so you can enjoy a wilderness adventure that fits your schedule and needs. You'll find yourself traveling through the Scandinavian Mountains with a group of peers from a wide variety of backgrounds: teachers, graduate students, architects, businessmen and women, doctors, and so forth. The main commonality is that you are all adults with extensive life experience who are now interested in exploring and learning about the mountains of Scandinavia.

Expeditions, unlike a traditional college or high school classroom, are influenced by weather, terrain, and the group's health, as well as its skills, experience, and ability. We can't script our courses as precisely as a school, but to give you a sense of the experience, we'll describe what your days might be like.

Your course will begin with the basics: cooking, camping, stove use, map reading, and *Leave No Trace* techniques. Eventually, the curriculum will move on to more advanced instruction on topics such as first aid, GPS navigation, expedition behavior, leadership, or environmental studies.



You'll be divided into groups of two to five people for cooking and camping to help disperse our impact on the environment and to provide more intimate leadership opportunities. You'll get lots of coaching from your instructors while you learn new skills. Before you know it, you'll be savoring homemade pizza and cinnamon rolls— gourmet delicacies that you made from scratch on a single-burner stove.

You'll also travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor. However, later in the course, your group may travel independent of instructors. NOLS courses are designed for the learning to take place through experience. This is not a guided tour or a vacation from responsibility.

The difficulty of a hiking day is hard to predict. Long miles on trail may be physically easier than high mountain passes or a day hiking through boulders and fallen timber in a wilderness without trails. Your pack may be lighter than usual as you approach a food re-supply day, or you may be carrying extra gear to lighten the load of a course mate who is not feeling well. The wilderness has a knack for finding challenges for all.

While you will have many days of hiking, occasionally you'll have a layover day to rest, enjoy a special location, have classes, or climb a peak. On these layover days, after breakfast and camp organization, there may be a class or an excursion to go hiking. The evening may hold a class, games, a discussion, or a planning meeting.

Expedition behavior and leadership will be an important part of the course curriculum. You'll learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the mountains. Bringing a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for others, and a willingness to work hard will be critical to success. You will be introduced to the NOLS leadership model and should expect to apply this model to daily experiences. The emphasis of the leadership curriculum will be on experiential learning and you may or may not be exposed to many "formal classes" on leadership.

You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and feedback throughout the expedition, with written performance evaluations at course end.

### **Student Independence**

On all NOLS courses, students will be independent (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. Students often have independent unstructured time, usually in town, before and after their course starts or between sections of courses.

### **Weather and Other Challenges**

Mountain weather is capricious. On any given day, temperatures may range from below freezing to sweltering. In the summer, there can be plenty of rain as well as long stretches of sunny, blue skies. Be prepared for it to rain or drizzle for the majority of the course. There will be times when you will be wet, cold and tired, but you will learn to manage these situations, and maybe even smile as you do. Sunny, warm summer days are a welcome break. In some areas we travel, mosquitoes are abundant.

Bears are a rare sighting where NOLS operates in northern Norway and Sweden. If we encounter recent bear signs, we will teach bear avoidance techniques while camping and traveling.

Identifying and managing hazards will be a constant theme in our instruction. You'll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away. Managing risks and assuming responsibility for yourself and your course mates will help make your expedition in this wild and beautiful place healthy and fun.

Group dynamics are a common challenge on all NOLS courses. Groups are comprised of unique individuals who bring a diversity of life experiences, leadership, communication and learning styles. You will be expected to practice open communication with group members and instructors and if necessary participate in conflict resolution. Being a contributing member of an expedition can be a challenge with immense personal rewards. Leadership and teamwork will be stressed on this course. It takes a lot of commitment to the group and a willingness to set aside personal goals at times for an expedition to succeed. Just as you need to be physically fit you also need to be mentally ready to take on the challenges and have a blast.



## Personal Electronics

A key element to a NOLS education is time spent in wilderness. The benefits of this include being closer to nature, time away from society and civilization, and being in an environment where natural forces predominate and students have the opportunity to develop good judgment and practice self-reliance. NOLS does not permit students to use personal cell or satellite phones or other communication devices including personal tracking devices (e.g. SPOT), while in the field. Additionally, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc). Instructors will be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone) to handle any emergencies that may arise.

## Course Objectives

Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels, and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, it is our intent to accomplish the following outcomes:

## Risk Management, Judgment and Decision-making

NOLS teaches wilderness users to practice responsible actions that promote the health and well being of self, others and the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in this mountain environment e.g. river crossings, rock fall, weather.
- Describe and consistently perform specific techniques to negotiate or avoid hazards.
- Formulate and put into effect an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors.
- Learn and apply the basic first aid skills appropriate to this environment.
- Display an awareness of weather appropriate for responsible travel.
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion.

## Leadership

At NOLS, we define leadership as “timely, appropriate actions that guide and support your group to set and achieve realistic goals. Great leaders create an environment that inspires individuals and groups to achieve their full potential.” On this course, the emphasis will be on gaining competence as a foundation for leading in the backcountry. We expect each student’s leadership ability to grow by accomplishing the following:

- Gain an understanding of the four types of leadership: self-leadership, active followership, designated leadership and peer leadership.
- Demonstrate a willingness to grow in each of NOLS’ seven leadership skills:
  1. Gain outdoor skills competence and thus be a better leader in the outdoors.
  2. Demonstrate positive expedition behavior, by serving the goals of the group.
  3. Tolerate adversity and uncertainty with a positive attitude.
  4. Actively cultivate your self-awareness as an outdoors person and a leader.
  5. Work to understand the leader’s vision and when appropriate develop your vision as a leader. Follow through with appropriate action to help the group achieve its potential.
  6. Improve your judgment and decision-making skills, learning the pros and cons of various decision-making styles on the continuum between directive and consensus.
  7. Practice effective communication skills from active listening to public speaking.
- Gain understanding of your own signature style of leadership.

## Outdoor Skills

At NOLS our students learn to live and travel in remote areas within a framework of personal health and care of the environment and the equipment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Live comfortably in mountain environments: learn how to dress for a variety of conditions.
- Camp and cook with a minimum of impact.
- Responsibly explore the mountain environment by foot.
- Demonstrate a respect for and care of all personal and expedition equipment.



## **Environmental Studies**

An integral part of every NOLS Course is to raise students' awareness of their effect on self, others and the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Consistently perform sound minimum-impact living and travel skills by following the Leave No Trace principles; be able to extrapolate this knowledge to new environments.
- Display an understanding of the history, facts and potential solutions to pertinent environmental issues.
- Demonstrate basic knowledge and respect for local cultures.
- Use basic observation and interpretive skills to demonstrate an understanding, appreciation and respect for the natural world above; know characteristic flora and fauna of the area.
- Develop basic natural history observation and interpretive skills.
- Demonstrate knowledge of public land management and discuss means to be involved in issues of interest.
- Strive to integrate wilderness practices and ethics into daily personal and professional life.

## **Backpacking Skills**

The necessary skills for safe travel are taught throughout the course. The teaching progression is dependent on students' abilities and the weather conditions experienced on each particular course. Objectives include the ability to demonstrate an understanding of the following:

- Competent group travel and use of safety equipment.
- Travel efficiently in mountainous terrain using map and/or compass and GPS skills.
- Utilize off-trail navigation and route-finding techniques to mitigate hazards.
- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of different river crossing techniques.

**At the conclusion of this course, we expect our students to be competent and responsible wilderness travelers and leaders.**

