

Course Description

Scandinavia Sea Kayaking & Backpacking

Features Of This Course:

- Hiking route: ~ 80 – 110 Kilometer (50 – 70 miles)
- Sea Kayaking route: ~ 100-160 kilometers (60-100 miles)
- On and off-trail hiking
- Average Pack Weight: 40-55 pounds
- Elevations of Sea level to 1500 meters
- Excellent wildlife and natural history
- Average group size: 12 students / 3 instructors
- Minimum Age: 18
- 30 days with approximately 14 field days on each section

The Expedition

Your NOLS expedition north of the Arctic Circle will take you around rugged islands, in and out of fjords, and along the coastal brim. The lowland areas stretch from the ocean to the steep glaciated Scandinavian Mountains. You'll see much of this wild country as you explore on foot and by sea kayak. During this month-long adventure, you will experience two wilderness travel skills—backpacking and sea kayaking—while exploring two different environments. The order of the course sections may vary—you might start with backpacking and then transition to sea kayaking, or it might be the other way around.

At the same latitudes as Siberia, Greenland and Northern Alaska, you will enjoy long summer days with the midnight sun. You will learn technical sea kayaking and backpacking skills needed for an expedition of this nature anywhere in the world. From coastlines to forested valleys, arctic tundra, and high peaks, this unique backcountry classroom provides great opportunities for immersion into the core NOLS curriculum. The Arctic climate varies widely and can change quickly. You might experience weeks of warm sunny weather or be challenged by long periods of rain, wind, and cold temperatures. In either case we will teach you the skills necessary to be comfortable regardless of the conditions, while using appropriate LNT for the vulnerable arctic environment.

Features of the Sea Kayaking Section

- Paddling route 100-160 kilometers (60-100 miles)
- Opportunity for day hikes and village visits
- Fishing for mackerel, halibut, cod and pollock
- Travel in both single and double kayaks
- Chance of rain on and off throughout the course
- A rich marine environment, full of wildlife
- 24 hours of daylight!

The Salten Coast of Nordland is the classroom for the sea kayaking section, a spectacular place for observation, exploration, and discovery of the unique natural history. The impressive coastline offers a mix of remote paddling without any human encounters to days where you might pass or visit fishing communities that dot the rugged shores. The Norwegian Sea has a rich marine life, abundant with cod, herring, halibut, porpoises and is home to the largest deepwater coral reef in the world. Sea eagles make their home in the coastal areas, as do arctic terns, oystercatchers, cormorants, Atlantic puffins and other coastal birds. You'll work hard paddling with all your gear for the expedition stowed in your boat, but you'll play hard as well. During the course you will learn the skills needed to competently paddle in various coastal environments.

These skills begin with the basics, which include camping, cooking, map and chart reading, stove use, Leave No Trace techniques and sanitation. These skills are the foundation for wilderness travel. You'll move into the sea kayaking curriculum beginning with paddle strokes, tides and ocean currents, weather, marine hazards, rescue techniques and wet exits. Throughout the course, the instructors hold both formal and informal classes, sometimes as a whole expedition or in small groups. Hopefully, you will have an opportunity fish and practice advanced paddling skills. Do not be surprised to find yourself sitting in a class about local geology, sea mammals, or participating in a discussion on different leadership styles and expedition behavior.



Depending on your route along the intricate Salten Coast, we have opportunities to encounter small local villages, such as Nes, Korsnäs, and Tranøy. We may make a short stop to purchase vegetables or snacks before paddling on. Depending on your route you may visit the 100-year-old Tranøy Lighthouse.

Features of the Backpacking Section

- Backpacking route ~80 -110 Kilometer (50 -70 miles)
- Elevations of Sea level to 1500 meters
- Hiking in both Norway and Sweden
- Potential for non-technical peak ascents
- Travel through tundra, shrub thickets and birch forest
- Off-trail hiking, some animal and dirt road tracks
- Passes may involve travel on boulders and snow
- Opportunities to see wildlife: reindeer, moose, lemmings, ptarmigans and possibly arctic fox

The interior of Nordland, in Norway and Lapland, in Sweden, will be your home for the backpacking section. Here, the land is dominated by the Scandinavian Mountains. A region so pristine that it contains 9 national parks and UNESCO has designated part of it as a World Heritage Site, called Lapponia. Some routes may start in Norway at Fjord level and will move to remarkably unspoiled higher elevations. Other alternatives included taking a train into Sweden, where your expedition will begin when you step from the rail platform directly into the wilderness. A mix of rolling hills and snow-covered peaks punctuated by glaciers, this area has been home to the Sami peoples for hundreds of years. The vistas here are wide, the mountains rugged, and the possibilities endless for returning home with lessons to last a lifetime.

The mountain regions north of the Arctic Circle have fascinating ecosystems to observe and enjoy. These lands are home to reindeer, wolverines, moose and arctic fox. Hiking over the tundra and rocky passes, you might also catch a glimpse of the very rarely seen 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 on later course you might be stopping to feast on cloudberry and blueberries growing in abundance.

At first, hiking distances will be short to give you time to grow accustomed to your pack. To help ease the loads there will be a re-supply of food and fuel, which will be brought in about half way through the hike. Later, hiking days will average between six and twelve kilometers (four to eight miles). Instructors conduct formal and informal classes on a wide range of subjects. There will be plenty to learn in this mountain environment.

You'll be living with two or three other students in a 'cook' group during the course. These small groups help disperse the impact on the land and enable you to learn the art of backcountry cooking and living. You'll get lots of coaching from your instructors while you learn these 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.

One of the first things that you will notice upon your arrival in Scandinavia is the light. You will see the sun at midnight in the latitudes where we travel, and it will stay light through the night during June and July. This offers unique opportunities for active, long days though your body may take a little while to adjust and learn to sleep when it is still light at 2 a.m.!

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 unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course starts or between sections of courses.



Independent Student Group Travel

An emphasis of this course is the development of skills that permit you to be self-sufficient in remote backcountry areas. Our teaching progression for accomplishing this is carefully planned and executed. Initially, travel groups, usually of four to six students, will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you gain proficiency, the instructor will allow you to take on more responsibility and make more of the decisions. When you have demonstrated the necessary competency to the instructors, you may have the option to travel in student-led groups without instructors for a day at a time as you hike from camp to camp. We call this 'daily independent student travel' and it is an effective educational tool. It allows you to practice travel skills and leadership and gives you responsibility for the outcome while still having indirect supervision by instructors and the benefit of the NOLS support systems.

Although the dual-skill nature of this course makes it unlikely that there will be time for multi-day independent student group travel, under some circumstances a Scandinavia Sea Kayaking and Backpacking Course may culminate in a Student Expedition. If a Student Expedition were to take place, it would be only after successful practice with daily independent student travel. Your instructors would help you divide into student expedition groups (usually four to six students each), select a leader and carefully plan and execute an overnight independent student-led expedition. Students would be aware of where the instructors and the other student groups were planning to travel and camp. Each Student Expedition group will carry an emergency communication device that will allow students to initiate an emergency response in the event of a serious emergency. In most cases students will have a personal locator beacon, but in some situations they will have a satellite phone, cell phone, radio or possibly another type of device. The instructors with a satellite phone, or additional communication capability, may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the student expedition was the highlight of their course.

Weather and Other Challenges

In the summer, there can be plenty of rain. Be prepared for it to rain or drizzle for the majority of the course. Storms can prohibit paddling for a few days. 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.

Bears are a very 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 colleagues will help make your expedition in this wild and beautiful place healthy and fun.

The group will learn to work together, and as you learn about and depend upon each other for support and comfort, strong friendships can develop. Learning to be 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 dangers in a cold-water environment
- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in this mountain environment e.g. snow, 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 and sea conditions appropriate for safe 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 maritime and mountain environments: learn how to dress for a variety of conditions
- Camp and cook with a minimum of impact
- Responsibly explore the shore and coastal forest 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



Sea Kayaking and Backpacking Skills

The necessary skills for responsible 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 launchings and landings in various conditions
- Basic paddling strokes; forward, reverse, sweep, draw, low and high braces
- Basic self and assisted rescues
- Coastal hazards; wind, waves, weather, currents, tides and geography of the coastline
- Competent group travel and use of safety equipment
- Travel efficiently in mountainous terrain using map and/or compass 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.

