

Course Description

Scandinavia Backpacking – 30 days

Features Of This Course:

- Hiking route: ~160 – 200 kilometers (100 - 125 miles)
- Average Pack Weight: 40 - 55 pounds
- Average group size: 12 students / 3 instructors
- Minimum Age: 18
- Elevations of Sea level to 1500 meters
- Potential for non-technical peak ascents
- Travel through tundra, shrub thickets and birch forest
- On and off-trail hiking, some animal and dirt road tracks
- Travel will include boulders and snow
- Unique natural history: Unparalleled wild flower displays and late season berry picking
- Cultural component: 3-4 day in-field visit with local Sami guides

The Expedition

Your NOLS backpacking expedition is located north of the Arctic Circle in Nordland, Norway and Lapland, 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 month-long 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. 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.

These mountains have fascinating ecosystems to observe and enjoy. The mountains are home to reindeer, lemmings, ptarmigans, moose and fox. In this land of tundra and rocky passes, you might also catch a rare glimpse of a lynx, wolverine, arctic fox 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.

It is possible to spend an entire month walking through this region and not encounter another hiker. However, there is a rich and storied human history in Lapland. The indigenous people to this area, the Sami, herd reindeer from the mountains in the summer months to the low lying birch forest of Sweden to the east in the winter. During your expedition you will get a chance to meet some local Sami Wilderness Guides and learn how modern Sami's incorporate their traditions to present day life.

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.!

Expeditions, unlike a college or high school classroom, are influenced by weather, terrain, and the group's health, as well as its skills, experience, and ability. We cannot script our courses, as precisely as your 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 that range from first aid to snow travel, from GPS navigation to expedition behavior, and from discussing environmental issues to identifying plants and animals.

You'll be living with two or three other students in a "cook group" during the course. These small groups help disperse our impact on the land and enable you to master 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.

You will also travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor. However, once students have learned map reading, route finding, and hazard evaluation, they often travel on their own. NOLS courses are designed for the learning to take place through experience. Your instructors are there to train, supervise, and provide feedback and advice, but ultimately, what you learn depends on what you practice.

Backpacking courses often hike three out of every four days, but the exact schedule depends on many factors including your route, the weather, the health of the group, and so forth. As mentioned, you'll travel in small hiking groups so you have more opportunities to lead, make decisions, and map read as you move through beautiful wilderness. The days begin early when you light your stove, cook and enjoy breakfast, and then organize and pack your pack. You're usually hiking by mid-morning. Lunch on the trail might be bread you baked the day before, or a trail mix of nuts and dried fruits. You may stop for a short class on natural history, or to learn how to cross a river, travel through boulders or snow, or move over a high pass. When you arrive at your new camp location, you'll first spend time choosing a Leave No Trace site, organizing camp, then preparing and enjoying dinner. If the day was long, a short evening meeting may wrap up the day. If the hike was short, there may be a class or discussion.

The difficulty of a hiking day is hard to predict. Long miles on trail may be physically easier than hiking through high mountain passes or a day hike 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.

You'll occasionally have a layover day to rest, enjoy a special location, have classes, or climb a peak. On these layover days, after breakfast and organizing camp, there may be a class or an excursion to go hiking. Lunch may be something cooked—layover days are great times to bake for the next day's travel. The evening may hold a class, games, a discussion, or a planning meeting.

Expedition behavior and leadership are an integral part of our curriculum. You'll learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the mountains. Bring a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for other members, and a willingness to work hard. As your group gains leadership skills and experience working together, you can expect your instructors to give you more responsibility for leading yourself and your peers.

You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and input throughout the expedition, with written performance summaries 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 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.

This course may culminate in a Student Expedition. After successful practice with daily independent student travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, the instructors will help you divide into student expedition groups (usually three to six students each.) With instructor oversight, each group will then select a leader and carefully plan and execute a multi-day



independent student led expedition. This part of the course builds on the skills you've learned and practiced and allows you to travel without instructors for up to four days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are 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.

Fasting is an optional part of the curriculum for the Student Expedition (or optional solo if applicable) on this course. If the instructors think fasting is appropriate for the conditions and student abilities, the students may chose to fast during the Student Expedition (or optional solo.) Rations will be carried to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

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. 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 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.

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 hazards in this mountain environment e.g. snow travel, river crossings, rock fall and 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 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 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.

