

Backpacking Sweden's Kungsleden Trail - Alumni

Kiruna, Sweden

September 4-13, 2025



Features

- Eight nights in cozy backcountry huts
- 106 kilometers (65 miles) of pristine backcountry hiking
- Stunning alpine tundra and glacier carved valleys
- Following the famous Kungsleden (Kings Trail) in Sweden
- Glacier-carved open valleys
- Opportunity to hike around Kebnekaise, Sweden's highest mountain

Cost: \$3,195

Pre- and post-trip lodging is included

Minimum Age: 18

Max group size: 12 Participants

2 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

Join a small group of NOLS grads, friends, and instructors for a backpacking expedition in northern Sweden as we hike from hut to hut along the famous Kings Trail. Some highlights include walking through broad valleys above the treeline, passing clear alpine lakes and an optional day hike around Kebnekaise, Sweden's highest peak. The tundra will be turning colors with the fall from green to red and yellow, and the peaks around will likely be dusted with snow.

The route offers easy to intermediate level hiking on a trail that is well marked and easy to follow. You will travel through open tundra, marshes, rivers, small brushes, and boulder fields as you move south. Each day covers a distance between 7-12 miles until you arrive at the next hut and settle in for a comfortable evening.

The trip starts with an evening orientation in Kiruna where we will get to know each other, review gear packing, and look at our route. Packing for this trip is similar to other backcountry adventures where we will focus our gear selection on staying warm and dry, even in harsh conditions.

On the next day, we'll start with a two-hour transport shuttle to Abisko Mountain Station and head out to the trail towards Abiskojaure Hut. The trail to Abiskojaure takes us through a world heritage site, the Abisko National Park, and an Arctic birch forest.

On the second and third days, we will walk in the open landscape above the treeline on the tundra, crossing rivers and negotiating small uphill and downhill. If the sky is clear and we are lucky, we'll have conditions to see the northern lights at night. The peaks of the Scandes mountain range will surround us as we travel further into the wilderness.

On the fourth day, we will walk over the Tjåktja Pass, the highest point of our trek, and potentially negotiate some strong winds that tend to swirl around this pass. The next three days slowly descend toward the Kebnekaise Mountain Station along the glacially carved U-shaped valleys.

Upon reaching Kebnekaise Mountain Station, we'll celebrate with a three-course dinner and maybe a sauna. This isn't quite the end of the trip, but any opportunity to celebrate should not be missed!

We will actually spend a couple of nights in the relative luxury of the Kebnekaise station so that those who are feeling up for it can do an incredible day hike in the area.

One more hiking day will take us to Nikkaluokta Mountain Hut where we will spend the night before catching a bus back to Kiruna the next day. After settling into our accommodation in Kiruna, we'll eat a final dinner together as a group.

Hut living allows us to carry light packs each day as tents and camp kitchens are not needed. The rustic, compact huts offer communal living with other groups and individuals, which can be a highlight (and challenge—space is limited) as you mix with other backpackers from around the world.

This trip will re-acquaint you with NOLS in a friendly and stunning environment. Instruction is geared toward your interests with possibilities including optional evening hikes, flora identification, Swedish “word(s) of the day,” photographing the colors of the fall on the tundra, and more. We will prepare meals in the communal kitchen facilities of the huts and everyone's help will be needed for fetching water and making firewood. Each day, we'll pack and carry snacks to be eaten during the day.

Trip Environment

Abisko is at latitude of 68 degrees north, a few hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle in the same latitude as Alaska's Brooks Range. There will be around 18 hours of daylight during the expedition. The temperatures can vary from -2 celsius to +15 celsius depending on the elevation, weather, and time of day. Weather can be a mix of sunny days, cloud-covered skies, and rain. Storms with high winds and low visibility are possible during the expedition.

The King's Trail is well marked and runs through the bottom of big valleys. Navigation is rarely challenging except with extreme weather conditions. The trail travels through many types of terrain starting with low-growing birch and pine forest. On the open tundra, the established, marked trail is rolling mellow hills with some steeper sections, crossing over streams and traveling along lakes.

There are a few tricky sections along the trail that are steeper and require focused attention but, for the most part, it is not technically challenging.

The landscape was formed by glaciers 14,000 years ago, when the glaciers receded leaving U-shaped valleys, terminal and lateral moraines in their tracks while also smoothing out the mountains to leave round peaks. The peaks around Kebnekaise still feature glaciers and the landscape gets slightly more dramatic toward the end of the trip.

Typical wildlife sightings could include reindeer, ptarmigans, and foxes.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are employees of NOLS and trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

A Day in the Life

Each morning the team wakes up around 7-8 a.m. to start the day. Every person shares responsibilities for making breakfast as we have a casual start to the morning with coffee and tea. We will also leave the huts nice and tidy with chopped firewood for the next group—this is a common practice in Scandinavia.

After breakfast is cleaned up, you will pack your lunch food and snacks for the day as well as your gear and head out into the morning sun toward the next mountain hut. Most days will be 4-6 hours of actual hiking but breaks spread out for lunch and other needs will ensure a full day.

Once you arrive at the next mountain hut, the instructors will sort out sleeping arrangements—typically mattresses on bunk beds or occasionally the floor. You might change into a more casual set of clothing for lounging about the hut with the group or possibly head out for a short hike if you want to explore a different trail spur.

Dinner will be another group-prepared meal and folks will rotate responsibilities so that you are only helping to cook or clean 1-2 nights on the trip. Typically around 6-7 p.m., everyone will sit down together and eat as the sun slowly dips below the horizon.

Evenings are spent with card games, socializing, and hoping for spectacular northern lights while enjoying the cozy warmth of the Swedish hut system. Some huts even have saunas that are available with designated sessions for each gender! Rinsing off in a nearby lake is standard with this Scandinavian tradition.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 4 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Curriculum

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts, including map reading and group travel. The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to comfortably travel, as well as optional topics as desired by participants. These could include natural

history, local history, leadership, decision making, and team function, among other things. Formal “classes” are few and mostly optional, but informal discussions are plentiful. Anticipate a required base-level of group management and cohesion—this is a mountain expedition.

Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group’s schedule for your munchies.

About Sweden

The Kingdom of Sweden is one of the Scandinavian countries in northern Europe and has a population of 11 million. Among the other Scandinavian countries, Sweden is known for their social welfare systems, free education, and natural beauty. Sweden follows a rule called “freedom to roam,” where any forest or wilderness area, despite ownership, can be used for recreation by others. Traditions are essential even in modern Sweden, one of them being the “Fika.” Fika is taking a break from whatever you are doing for something to eat. It is more than a snack and less than a meal, often enjoyed with a hot beverage. Many familiar things come from Sweden like IKEA, Spotify, Abba, Candy Crush, and even the invention of the zipper!

Sweden shares a western border with Norway running along the Scandes mountains, one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world. In the east, Sweden borders Finland and the Baltic Sea. In the south, it is connected to Denmark by bridge. Despite being located so far north, the climate in Sweden is favorable for cultivation and human settlement due to the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic bringing warm, humid air to all of Scandinavia.

Humans have settled in Sweden since prehistoric times and the history is full of stories from the Viking kings, battles, and successes. These days, Sweden is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy ranking high in quality of life, equality, prosperity, and civil liberties. Swedes are social and friendly people who often surprise visitors by fluently changing the conversation to English when they notice that someone doesn’t understand Swedish. It is essential to include everyone!

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it’s not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You’ll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self-awareness, risk management, and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip’s anticipated physical rigor and your current health

and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the trip experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

Sept 3	Depending on connections and pre-trip plans, many participants will depart home on this day.	We recommend coming over early to ensure travel delays don't cause you to miss any of the trip.
Sept 4	Meet at 6 p.m. at the hotel for an orientation meeting, organize our gear, and get to know each other. Dinner on your own.	Lodging in Kiruna is included in tuition (we'll double or triple up same gender pairs — let us know if you're pals or a couple!)
Sept 5	We will pack up our gear and take a short train ride to Abisko, where our trail starts. Hike 9 miles	Stay overnight in Abiskojaure Mountain Hut
Sept 6	Hike 13 miles	Stay overnight in Alesjaure Mountain Hut
Sept 7	Hike 8 miles	Stay overnight in Tjåktja Mountain Hut
Sept 8	Hike 8 miles	Stay overnight in Sälka Mountain Hut
Sept 9	Hike 7.5 miles	Stay overnight in Singi Mountain Hut
Sept 10	Hike 9 miles	Stay overnight in Kebnekaise Mountain Station, meals included
Sept 11	Optional day hike towards Kebnekaise peak (6,909', highest peak in Sweden) Summiting is unrealistic and would need 15+ hours	Stay overnight in Kebnekaise Mountain Station, meals included
Sept 12	Hike 11.5 miles	Stay overnight in Nikkaluokta meals included
Sept 13	We will take the bus back to Kiruna (1.5 hours) where we will be able to clean up and explore town a bit more before having our final dinner together.	Final dinner and night together in Kiruna (included in trip tuition)
Sept 14	Depart Kiruna	Breakfast at hotel included

Trip Logistics

Getting to Kiruna

Kiruna can be reached easily in a couple of different ways.

Flying:

The easiest and most time-efficient way is to fly there. Both Norwegian Air and SAS run several flights daily from Stockholm (ARM) to Kiruna (KRN). You will be able to book a flight from your home airport all the way to Kiruna without much problem.

We have found that if you book this flight individually, it can be cheaper than booking a single ticket from your home. This means you would need a ticket to Stockholm and a second ticket to Kiruna.

Once at Kiruna airport you can take a taxi or a bus into town.

Train:

Sleeper trains from Stockholm to Kiruna are typically a bit less expensive than the flight but it takes 18.5 hours. This train journey in itself can be a lovely experience of seeing much of Sweden!

You can purchase train tickets at www.sj.se. Advanced purchases are recommended.

Trains depart from Stockholm Central Station, which can be easily reached from the airport with a single train ride.

Lodging

Our lodging before and after the trip is covered as part of the tuition (we'll double or triple up same gender pairs — let us know if you're pals or a couple!) The group will be staying at:

Camp Ripan

Campingvägen 5
981 35 Kiruna

During the hiking section, we will be staying in the mountain huts along the Kungsleden Trail. These firewood-heated huts are basic and involve sharing small amounts of space with other people. Mountain huts are a melting pot of culture as we meet others from all over the world. We might have a hut to ourselves or we might be sharing a full hut with others. To live together in harmony, cultural curiosity, positive attitudes, and smiling a lot are critical. Dress is very casual in the huts. Some folks wear the base layers that they had on while hiking; others choose to have clean, relaxed clothing like t-shirts or sweatpants. The beds themselves are commonly bunk beds where you will need to sleep in your sleeping sack. There is a mattress on the bunk and pillows and blankets are provided. The rooms are small and sleep upwards of 20 people. Warm clothing and heavy sleeping bags are not needed inside as the huts are relatively warm. Eye masks and earplugs are important for some folks as snoring and other nighttime noises are unavoidable.

Storage of Personal Belongings

Personal baggage that doesn't go into the mountains with you can be stored at our Kiruna hotel. This is reasonably secure storage, but nothing is 100 percent guaranteed. NOLS assumes no responsibility for your stored baggage.

Currency

Sweden uses the Krona as its currency and is going cashless. Some of the huts and businesses only take credit cards. If you want to get some cash, you'll receive the best exchange by simply taking money out of ATMs, but your bank might charge you additional fees for this.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend [South Pole](#). [Their calculator](#) can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. [Here is a link to their calculator.](#)

Tipping

Tipping in the service industry in Sweden is typically included in the bill. If it is not, then 5-10% is a good rule of thumb.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by [a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund](#) which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Visa / Passport - Attention International European travelers - **Must read... Action Required**

If your travels have you **entering or transiting (passing through or laying over in) the UK**, you will need to apply for and have an approved Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) to continue to your destination.

This [article](#) explains that starting Jan 8, 2025, US and Canadian citizens will need to apply for the ETA to enter the UK.

Here's [the link](#) for how to apply.

As well, for NOLS International Alumni trips, your **passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months post trip**. For example, if your trip in Europe concludes on July 30, 2025, your passport must be valid through January 30, 2026.

At some point in the future (July 2025?) Europe (EU) will be requiring a travel authorization for most countries that are visa-exempt. This includes USA citizens. Once this system goes into effect, you will need to apply using this new system before traveling and pay a small fee for the authorization.

[You can read about this new program, check your requirements, and view the most up to date expected implementation date here.](#)

Electricity stuff

The huts along the trail will not have electricity for you to use except for Kebnekaise Station and Nikkaluokta. To plug in, you will need a Type C or F style adapter. There is no wifi at the huts and cell phone service is sparse, so anticipate being out of touch with the outside world during your trip.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Suggested Readings:

Kungsleden: The Royal Trail Through Arctic Sweden by Claes Grundsten

Swedish Folktales illustrated by Jon Bauer

Books by Åsa Larsson; Murder mysteries in the Swedish Lapland

Your Gear List

Upper Body Clothing

Equipment	Notes
Long sleeve base layer (midweight) (1-2)	Synthetic or wool
Expedition weight layer	Expedition-weight top such as Patagonia R1, lightweight fleece or a wool sweater/hoody.
Top layer (fleece or puffy)	Mid-weight fleece or a medium-weight puffy layer
Wind shirt (optional)	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style
Rain jacket	A sturdy, waterproof jacket with a hood— coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable . Must fit on top of the base layer, mid layer and Top layer.
T-shirt (1-2)	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool t-shirt
Sports Bra or Tank (1-2)	Synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank are recommended
Warm hat	Synthetic or wool
Sun hat	Baseball cap or full brim
Mittens or gloves	Medium or light weight, wool or fleece.

Lower Body Clothing

Equipment	Notes
Light/midweight base layer (1-2)	Synthetic or wool
Hiking pants	Synthetic hiking pant
Rain pants	Waterproof pants without insulation are the preferred option.
Insulated Pants	Either a fleece or puffy style pant is great if the weather get wet and cold
Bathing Suit (optional)	Good for saunas or mountain lakes
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	Wear what's comfortable; wool, silk, or synthetics are fine

Footwear

Equipment	Notes
Hiking boots/shoes	Trends are pushing lighter weight hiking shoes or even trail runners, those are great options for this terrain.
Gaiters	A short gaiter is great to keep rocks and dirt out of your shoes.
Socks (3-4 pairs)	½ crew to crew length wool socks. 2-3 sets of travel socks (this may be 4 pr. liners + 4 pr. wool or 4 pr wool); 1 pr. camp socks; 1 pr. sleeping socks

Miscellaneous Personal Gear

Equipment	Notes
Backpack	A 50+ Liter pack is sufficient for your gear and 15 pounds of shared food.
Pack Cover (optional)	Something to keep your pack dry while hiking
Sleep sack	Hut beds come with a pillow and quilt but you will need a sleep sack or sleeping bag liner to sleep in so that you don't soil the linens. Some people like their own pillow case as well.
Plastic trash bags (1-2)	Heavy-duty compactor bags (33 gallon) waterproof items in your pack
Water bottle / bladder	2 Liters capacity minimum
Thermos (optional)	1/2 Liter capacity or more
Bowl with Lid	A Tupperware bowl w/ lid works great.
Spoon	Light and durable.
Lip balm (1-2)	SPF 15 or greater
Sunscreen	SPF 30 or greater
Sunglasses	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection
Headlamp	Bring extra batteries.
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc. (travel or trial sizes are enough), ear plugs and eye covers can be nice
Towel (optional)	Useful for saunas and if you choose to swim in lakes along the way
Optional Items	
Camera	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Casual clothes	Shirt/pants for around the hut. Should pack small and be lightweight.
Trekking Poles	Most folks enjoy having 2 trekking poles
Umbrella	Many folks enjoy having a small compact one.