Skiing under Sweden's Northern Lights - Alumni

Guests of Alumni are welcome!

Kiruna, Sweden

March 4-12, 2026

Features

- Six nights in backcountry huts + 3 nights in Nordic lodges
- 88 kilometers of pristine backcountry Nordic skiing
- A week of opportunities to see the northern lights
- Terrain appropriate for novice to advanced Nordic skiers
- Following the famous Kungsleden (Kings Trail) in Sweden
- Glacier-carved open valleys

Cost: $3,595 Pre- and post-trip lodging and nordic ski gear rental is included
Minimum Age: 18

Max group size: 12 Participants
3 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

Join a small group of NOLS grads, friends, and instructors for a Nordic backcountry skiing expedition in northern Sweden as we ski from hut to hut along the famous Kings Trail. Some highlights include skiing in pristine snow-covered broad valleys above the treeline, the potential to see the northern lights and finishing the trip by Kebnekaise, Sweden's highest peak.

The route offers easy to intermediate levels of skiing on a trail packed by snowmobiles and which is well marked. You will travel with Nordic backcountry skis, slightly broader and taller than classic Nordic skis and with a steel edge. The ski boot is insulated leather, offering warmth and some ankle support. Skis can be equipped with skins for easier travel uphill. Each day covers a distance between 12-21 km to the next hut. Hut living allows us to carry light packs each day as tents and camp kitchens are not needed. Participants will share the duty of pulling a sled (one sled per 3-4 participants) with the rest of the essentials for the expedition. 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 skiers from around the world.

This trip will re-acquaint you with NOLS in a friendly and visually stunning environment. Instruction is geared toward your interests with possibilities including optional evening ski trips, winter camping skill practice, Swedish "word(s) of the day," northern lights photography, 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 lunch sandwiches and soup to be made with hot water from your thermos.

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 most NOLS winter camping adventures; we will prepare to stay warm and dry in harsh conditions.

On the next day, we'll start with a two-hour transport shuttle to STF Abisko Mountain Station, where we receive and outfit our ski boots, skis, poles, and sleds. You will have the rest of this day to go for a day ski to test out and get used to your equipment. Overnighting in the Abisko Mountain Station will allow the group to have a day of ski lessons before your first travel day!

After packing gear we'll head out to the first leg of 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 buried in 3+ feet of snow.

On the second and third travel days, we will ski in the open landscape above treeline on the snow-covered tundra, crossing frozen rivers and negotiating small uphills and downhills. If the sky is clear, 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 ski over the Tjäktja Pass, the highest point of our trek, and potentially negotiate some strong winds. The next three days slowly descend toward the Kebnekaise Mountain Station along the glacially carved U-valleys.

Upon reaching the Kebnekaise Mountain Station, we'll celebrate the expedition with an excellent dinner and a sauna. The following day we'll be transported by snow machines to a road head, from which we'll bus to Kiruna. In Kiruna we'll eat a final dinner together as a group.

Trip Environment

Abisko is at a 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 12 hours of daylight during the expedition. The temperatures can vary from -20 celsius to +5 celsius depending on the elevation, weather, and time of day. Weather can be a mix of sunny days, cloud-covered skies, and snowfall. Snowstorms with high winds and low visibility are possible during the expedition; we will carry appropriate emergency shelters and other gear for an unplanned night out. All travel will happen on snowpack varying from 1 foot to 10 feet.

The King's Trail is well-marked and established. Navigation is not challenging except with extreme weather conditions. The trail travels through many types of terrain starting from low-growing birch and pine forest. On the open tundra, the established, marked trail is up-and-down mellow hills with some steeper sections, crossing over snow-covered streams and traveling along frozen lakes.

There are a few tricky sections along the trail such as steeper sections on rolling hills that require attention but, for the most part, it is not technically challenging. The trail avoids avalanche terrain by staying on low angle terrain.

The landscape was formed by glaciers 14,000 years ago, with U-valleys and some terminal and lateral moraines and round peaks. The peaks around Kebnekaise still feature glaciers. Even though the glaciers might be hard to tell apart from the snowpack, the landscape gets slightly more dramatic toward the end of the trip.

Not much fauna lives on the tundra during the winter. If we are lucky, we might see footprints of the arctic fox or wolverine, or spot a snow ptarmigan flying off from the hillside.

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, thermos 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 skiing with breaks spread out for lunch and other needs. Pulling sleds or carrying packs will make sure that your body is working hard enough to generate warmth while outdoors!

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 another ski tour if you want to explore a different trail spur with an instructor.

Dinner will be another group-prepared meal and folks will rotate responsibilities so that you are only cooking 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 for the brave souls that dare to venture outside in their bathing suits! (Saunas have a bucket of warm water for a rinse off post sauna)

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.

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 minor 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 have significant food allergies this trip might not be for you, the shared hut accommodations and group meals will likely strain your comfort levels, please speak to us before signing up for this trip.

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.

Curriculum

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts, including map reading and group travel as well as traditional Nordic skiing. 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.

Your instructors are excited to work with all skill ranges of skiers on this trip. They will ensure that you are comfortable traveling on and playing on the unique Nordic skis that are native to this area. The skiing is closest to the "Classic Style" that many in the US are used to, kicking and gliding on flat surfaces while using skins to go up hills. The skis have metal edges so downhill turns are a bit easier than nordic track skis. Nordic skiing is hard work and participants should expect to be tired at the end of every day.

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 been 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 course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

March 2	Depending on connections and pre-trip plans, many participants will depart home on this day.	We recommend coming over at least a day early to ensure travel delays don't cause you to miss any of the trip.
March 4	We will meet at 7 p.m. at the hotel for orientation, organize our gear, and get to know each other. Please eat dinner ahead of time.	Lodging in Kiruna is included in tuition.
March 5	After breakfast we will take 2 hour train ride north to Abisko where we will rent our skis for the trip. You will spend the afternoon getting used to your gear and having ski orientation.	Stay overnight in Abisko Mountain Station
March 6	This is your first travel day! After breakfast you will get on the snow and head out. Ski ~15 km	Stay overnight in Abiskojaure Mountain Hut
March 7	Ski ~21 km	Stay overnight in Alesjaure Mountain Hut
March 8	Ski ~13 km	Stay overnight in Tjäktja Mountain Hut
March 9	Ski ~12 km	Stay overnight in Sälka Mountain Hut
March 10	Ski ~12 km	Stay overnight in Singi Mountain Hut

March 11	Ski ~15 km Our last day of skiing as we arrive at a full service Mountain Station	Stay overnight in Kebnekaise Mountain Station, meals included at the hut
March 12	We will take snowmachine transport out to Nikkaluokta and then transfer back to Kiruna via shuttle bus	Final dinner and night together in Kiruna (included in trip tuition)
March 13	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 separately, it can be cheaper than booking a single ticket from your home. If you follow this method, you will need a ticket to Stockholm and then 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 in Kiruna is provided by NOLS.

Camp Ripan
Campingvägen 5, 981 35
Kiruna, Sweden
+46 980 630 00

During the skiing 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 skiing; 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, but the hut stays relatively warm. There is a mattress on the bunk but pillows and linens are not provided. The rooms are small and sleep upwards of 20 people while also functioning as dining rooms. Warm clothing and heavy sleeping bags are not needed inside. 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 but almost never uses cash. In truth, it is hard to use cash in Sweden in any area including in the backcountry huts. You might want to purchase miscellaneous things throughout the trip such as souvenirs, beer, or snacks at mountain huts and your credit card is best for this. You can take out a small amount of Krona, but don't expect to use it.

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. To plug in elsewhere in Sweden, you will need a Type C or F style adapter. There is no wifi at the huts, 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.

Things to Do pre-Trip

Stockholm

If you can budget a few days, Stockholm is well worth a visit. The city has a plethora of things to do in the realm of history, culture, and nature and is also a beautiful city to simply walk around. Seek out Gamla Stan (Old Town), where Stockholm was founded in 1252, for a taste of history or take a short ferry ride to the island of Djurgarden where Rosendals Garden exemplifies Sweden's love of nature.

Top museums to consider in Stockholm are:

- Skansen: this is the world's first open air museum and houses five centuries of Swedish history
- Fotografiska: this museum is dedicated solely to contemporary photography
- Vasa Museum: artifacts of many historic sunken ships

An unexpected treasure in the city can be found at many of the metro stations that imitate small art galleries. Or perhaps visiting the more extravagant Telefonplan Tower in the dark is more up your alley. Home to the biggest design school in Sweden, it is an interactive art exhibit after sunset; the tower lights up and if you download the app, you can help control the colors.

While wandering around this magnificent city, don't forget to find an afternoon to enjoy fika, the afternoon coffee and "snack" break.

Kiruna

Kiruna is a tourist destination for foreigners and Swedes so there is a large variety of different things you can do in town if arriving early. Dogsledding, snowshoeing, snowmobile tours, and a mine tour are all possible. Kiruna tourism website

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

Equipment List

Gear provided by NOLS			
Skis, boots, poles	Ski sleds	First Aid Kits	Emergency Communication
Maps and Compass	All food	Emergency Shelter	

Rental ski gear is included with your tuition and we recommend using it. Traveling internationally with ski gear is challenging and expensive. If you want to bring your gear, please talk to us ahead of time.

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)	Heavy-weight fleece or a medium-weight puffy layer
Insulated Parka	Synthetic or down fill winter parka with a hood. Must fit comfortably over all your upper body layers. This is a really warm jacket for around camp.
Wind shirt (optional)	A lightweight, breathable, nylon wind shell, 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	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
Neck gaiter / Balaclava / Buff	Wool or synthetic neck warmer. Offers great insulation in combination with a hat. Lightweight versions offer sun and wind protection. Buffs and Smartwool products are popular and comfortable.
Mittens/gloves (1-2 pairs)	Heavy weight, wool or fleece.
Mitten Shells (optional)	Water-repellent nylon or Gore-Tex mitten shells should fit over a pair of liner gloves and a pair of fleece/wool gloves or mittens.
Liner gloves (1-2)	Thin synthetic or wool gloves, you never want bare hands in the winter.

Lower Body Clothing	
Equipment	**Notes**
Light/midweight base layer	(1-2) Optional: Synthetic or wool

Expedition weight bottoms	Expedition-weight bottoms such as Patagonia R1 or wool.
Soft shell or Gore-tex pants	Gore-Tex or soft shell pants without insulation are the preferred option.
Insulated pants	Synthetic-fill ski pants that fit comfortably over all your lower body layers.
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	Wear what's comfortable; cotton, silk, or synthetics are fine
Footwear	
Ski boots	We will rent skis, boots and poles from Abisko. (included in tuition)
Booties with overboot for life around/in the huts	Something to wear around the huts. Waterproof, insulated booties are a great option. Rubber soles are optimal.
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	
Medium backpack	Must be big enough to carry personal items (e.g., water, food, clothing layers) and group lunch supplies—40-55 Liters
Sleep sack	Hut beds come with a pillow and quilt. Please bring a compact sleep sack to protect the bedding and up the hygiene.
Pillow Case	Pillows are provided, but having your own covering is good.
Ski Goggles	Many folks prefer to ski with goggles, it can help in windy conditions
Plastic trash bags (1-2)	Heavy-duty compactor bags (33 gallon) waterproof items in your pack
Water bottle	2 Liters capacity. Bladders are not advised due to freezing temperatures.
Thermos	1 Liter capacity or more
Bowl with Lid	A Tupperware bowl w/ lid works great.
Spoon	Light and durable.
Insulated mug	12/20 oz insulated mugs with lid, a .5 L nalgene bottle is a good option
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.
Large Camp Towel	You might use this in the huts with the sauna
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc. (travel or trial sizes are enough), ear plugs and eye covers can be nice
Optional Items	
Camera	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Casual clothes	Shirt/pants for hanging out around the hut. Should pack small.