



Northern Europe

In this first part, we explain why a train holiday through Scandinavia is highly recommended and discuss the network of train routes through the various countries.

If you travel through Scandinavia by train, you'll appreciate the distance and endlessness of Scandinavia. The world's most beautiful scenery passes by your train window. The Nordic countries, therefore, have a well-developed rail network. The night train, which, after years of neglect in Europe, is experiencing a revival, has never been absent from Scandinavia and has even been significantly expanded and upgraded in recent years.

You can visit Scandinavia all year round. It's even recommended to visit the same places in different seasons. The atmosphere will be completely different. Pick your perfect season!

There is a chapter on the various ways to reach Scandinavia from the Low Countries.

Furthermore, there is an extensive chapter with practical information about traveling in the different Scandinavian countries.

IMAGES: 1. On the platform in Trondheim, ready for the long overnight train ride to Oslo
2. The train in a snowy landscape in the northern basin of the Baltic Sea
3. Overhead lines running through the night like black veins / 4. A silent corridor as the train moves on / 5. A train, a window, and a horizon that never gets dark in summer

ACCESS ROUTES

Travelling to Scandinavia and Finland

Riding the Rails from the Low Countries

Amsterdam/Brussels → Hamburg → Copenhagen

ITINERARY AND TRAVEL TIME

From Brussels/Amsterdam to Hamburg, calculate between 450 km and 550 km, depending on your departure point (approximately 5 hours from Amsterdam, 6 to 7 hours from Brussels). From Amsterdam, approximately 28 trains per day depart for Hamburg, sometimes with transfers (usually Osnabrück). From Brussels, approximately 8 trains per day depart for Cologne and from Cologne, 1 train per hour to Hamburg.

From Hamburg, you have genuinely good connections to the Scandinavian rail network (see below). The train journey from Hamburg to Copenhagen takes just under 5 hours. The train journey from Hamburg to Oslo takes an average of 13 to 16 hours, depending on the connection and the number of transfers. The train journey from Hamburg to Stockholm usually takes 10.5 to 12.5 hours, depending on your transfers in Copenhagen and sometimes Malmö. There is also a direct night train.

GOOD TO KNOW

Keep in mind that many ICE trains to Scandinavia depart from Hamburg's Altona station, not the main station. If necessary, take a local train there. Until 2023, there will be a major detour from Hamburg to reach Copenhagen directly.

ACCESS ROUTES

1 Brussels/Amsterdam → Hamburg

From Brussels (BE 01) and the southern Netherlands, there's a good chance the ICE from Cologne (DU 05) or a station north of Cologne, such as Solingen or Dortmund (DU 09), is your best option. There's a direct train from Cologne every hour without a transfer. Forsee 4 hours for the journey from Cologne. Destination: Hamburg (DU 09).

From Amsterdam (NL 01), take the train to Berlin and transfer in Osnabrück (DU 02). It's about 6 hours travel time. Destination: Hamburg.

Country	No. Station	Station Name	Km	Type
NL	01	Amsterdam	0	Major hub
DU	02	Osnabrück	225	Hub
DU	05	Hamburg	465	Major hub
BE	01	Brussels	0	Major hub
DU	05	Cologne	210	Major hub
DU	09	Hamburg	645	Major hub

Norway

Traveling by train in Norway is one of the most beautiful ways to explore the long, narrow country. In the northern basin of the Baltic Sea, there are short side routes through fjords, mountains and vast valleys. Long-distance trains like the Nordland Railway, which runs from Trondheim far above the Arctic Circle, let you experience how the landscape gradually changes from green farmland to rugged tundra. The Dovre Railway and Bergen Railway also impressively connect the south and north, with routes that wind through plateaus and mountain passes. In addition to these main lines, there are short side routes known worldwide for their spectacular views: the Flåm Railway descends steeply in just a few kilometres past waterfalls and gorges, while the Rauma Railway takes you past the iconic Trollveggen and the emerald-green Rauma River. Together, these routes form a network that is not only practical but also a travel experience, where every journey feels like a mini expedition through the Norwegian landscape.

IMAGES: 1. The Arctic train makes its way through the endless snow landscapes of Lapland / 2. The Flåm Railway is a joy for train travellers / 3. Colourful facades adorn the historic houses of Bergen / 4. The Oslo Harbour is famous for its clean lines and innovative forms, in an icon of contemporary architecture / 5. The Narvik fjord: narrow, deep, and spectacularly beautiful

89 TO 12: SOUTHERN RAILWAYS

Unfolding Southern Norway's Scenic Routes

The Bergen Railway is the first route you take. From Oslo, we'll travel to Bergen. Along the way, you take a side route to Flåm. These two routes are world-famous and renowned worldwide. After exploring Bergen, we head back south to Stavanger, traveling by sea along the beautiful southwest coast. There, the train awaits to explore the Norwegian south coast. After this beautiful tour of the best of Southern Norway, you arrive back in Oslo.

9 An Iconic Journey with the Bergensbanen

Oslo → Bergen

The Bergensbanen (Bergen Railway), a train route that runs across the Hardangervidda National Park from Oslo to Bergen, is a major access route to Bergen. The route offers beautiful views and is a pleasant way to travel for anyone traveling to Bergen. It is Northern Europe's highest railway line, with its highest point at Finse (1,222 m). You travel through Hardangervidda National Park, fjord landscapes and mountain plateaus. It is often cited as one of the most beautiful train journeys in the world, along with the Flåm Railway, of course!

ITINERARY AND DURATION

A 500-kilometer route and a travel time of 7 hours. There are five trains per day in each direction (four in winter). Reservations are required. There is also a night train in both directions. You'll save on a hotel stay, but you'll miss out on the scenery.

89 TO 12: SOUTHERN RAILWAYS

BEST TIME

In winter, you'll experience a fairytale-like snowy landscape and the route through Hardangervidda is at its most beautiful. Expect thick blankets of snow and frozen lakes. In summer, the days are longer and everything is green. In autumn, there's a chance of fog.

GOOD TO KNOW

There are 22 stops and you'll pass through 182 tunnels. The train is popular, especially during the holiday season. If you want to travel during the day for the views, book well in advance with Entur AS. You can also break up the journey and stay for a few days at a stopover, for example, to participate in nature activities. There are also train packages that include hotel stays and sightseeing stops.

Sweden

Train travel in Sweden offers a relaxing and diverse way to explore this vast country, from the vibrant cities of the south to the tranquil wilderness of Lapland.

The rail network is reliable and well-organized, with long-distance lines like the route from Stockholm to Kiruna or Luleå, where you travel through the winding coastline of Bohuslän, where forests cut deep into the land and granite cliffs reach right up to the tracks. The journey passes tranquil forests and glistening inlets, while small stations like Munkedal and Dingle emerge among pines and lakes. At Tanum (SE 16), the landscape opens and the UNESCO site with its prehistoric rock carvings is just a stone's throw away. Further north, the view becomes more rugged and expansive.

Finally, the train reaches Strömstad (SE 17), a lively seaside town and gateway to the Koster Islands.

IMAGES: 1. Beautiful winter night in Stockholm / 2. A typical Swedish farmhouse (backhaus) in traditional simple, colorful and warm style / 3. A typical Swedish farmhouse (backhaus) in traditional simple, colorful and warm style / 4. Snow-covered roofs in the city of Stockholm / 5. The Peace of the Royal Palace of Stockholm

21. BOHUSBANAN

21 Bohuslän's Islands and Granite Shores

Göteborg → Strömstad

Bohuslän is the rocky, island-rich west coast of Sweden between Göteborg and the Norwegian border, known for its barren granite coasts, narrow straits and hundreds of small islands that together form one of Scandinavia's most beautiful archipelagos. Besides the described fast route via Göteborg directly to Oslo (see route 05), there's another very scenic slow route along the western archipelago heading north. The train journey from Göteborg to Strömstad follows the Bohusbanan, a 180-kilometer-long railway line that winds along the rugged Bohusbanan coastline. It's a route that captures the essence of Bohuslän: rugged, peaceful and always close to the water.

ITINERARY AND DURATION

Granite coasts, narrow straits and hundreds of islands. Allow 4 to 6 days for this region.

BEST TIME

July–August: Island hopping, boat trips and lively harbours. May–June & September: Peace, white light and lower prices. Winter: Quiet and rugged, suitable for hikers and photographers.

Country	No.	Station Name	Km	Type
SE	05	Göteborg	0	Major hub
SE	15	Uddevalleva	89	Hub
SE	16	Tanum	125	Stop
SE	17	Strömstad	180	Terminus

21. BOHUSBANAN

From bustling Göteborg (SE 05), the train quickly travels through a landscape of forests, lakes and granite cliffs, characteristic of this west coast province that stretches all the way to the Norwegian border.

From Uddevalla (SE 15), the train follows the winding coastline of Bohuslän, where forests cut deep into the land and granite cliffs reach right up to the tracks. The journey passes tranquil forests and glistening inlets, while small stations like Munkedal and Dingle emerge among pines and lakes. At Tanum (SE 16), the landscape opens and the UNESCO site with its prehistoric rock carvings is just a stone's throw away. Further north, the view becomes more rugged and expansive.

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Sweden—Finland

The border region between Sweden and Finland is dominated by the Gulf of Bothnia, the northern basin of the Baltic Sea that simultaneously separates and connects the two countries. In winter, the Gulf of Bothnia often partially freezes over, creating an almost Arctic atmosphere. In summer, the light lasts until late and people in the coastal cities on both sides, such as Luleå, Haparanda and Tornio, enjoy the long, clear days.

IMAGES: 1. With the SJ 3000 along the Swedish coast of the Sea of Bothnia / 2. The frozen sea of Bothnia in the winter / 3. A typical Finnish saunahouse (sauna) in traditional simple, colorful and warm style / 4. Snow-covered roofs in the city of Stockholm / 5. The Peace of the Royal Palace of Stockholm

28. SANTA CLAUS EXPRESS

Lapland stays light all night thanks to the midnight sun, allowing travellers to see much of the landscape during the journey. The train is less crowded than in winter. The landscape consists of green forests, lakes and open plains. Spring (April–May) is a transitional period with fewer crowds. The snow gradually disappears and the Northern Lights are no longer visible. The train is especially attractive during this period for an affordable trip from A to B.

GOOD TO KNOW

The train consists of modern double-decker carriages with both seats and sleeper compartments. The train has separate compartments for luggage and bicycles. There are even options to take your car along.

28. SANTA CLAUS EXPRESS

A Nighttime Rail Journey into the Arctic

The Santa Claus Express departs Helsinki at 19:29. Because it's winter, it's been completely dark for a while. The seats are adjustable and offer ample legroom. The sleeping compartments have beds, storage space and a private washroom, depending on the type chosen. Large windows offer views of the landscape, although this is limited in the evening due to the darkness.

On board, there is a dining car serving meals and drinks. Passengers can order food on the spot or use mobile dining cars that circulate throughout the train. Orders can also be placed via the VR app, which will be delivered to their seat or compartment. For those who want to work in a quiet environment, there is an Extra Class section on the upper deck of the dining car.

There is also a car for passengers with children, with facilities for playing and caring for babies. These facilities are like those on other Finnish long-distance and commuter trains. On this winter evening, a peaceful atmosphere prevails on board. After departing from Helsinki, many passengers return to their compartments to settle in for the night. There's limited activity in the corridors: passengers wanting something to eat or a drink get up to the dining car. As the train heads further north, it grows dark outside and life on board falls silent.

By then, a quiet evening atmosphere prevails on the train. Passengers settle into their compartments, catch up on some reading or prepare for sleep. There's limited activity in the corridors.

Through the darkness, snow-covered fields and reflections of village lights are visible. Because the weather is clear, the starry sky is clearly visible, free from any light pollution from civilisations.

The Santa Claus Express follows the main line north through Western Finland, departing from both Turku (FI 16) and Helsinki (FI 01). Both lines converge in Joensuu. From there, the train continues to Tampere (FI 03), where we make a brief stop around 10:30 PM. Then it continues to Parkano and Seinäjoki.

In the sleeping compartments, passengers dim the lights and some gaze out the windows for a while. Through the large windows, forests, snow-covered fields and small villages are visible, illuminated by street-

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