

GOING NORTH

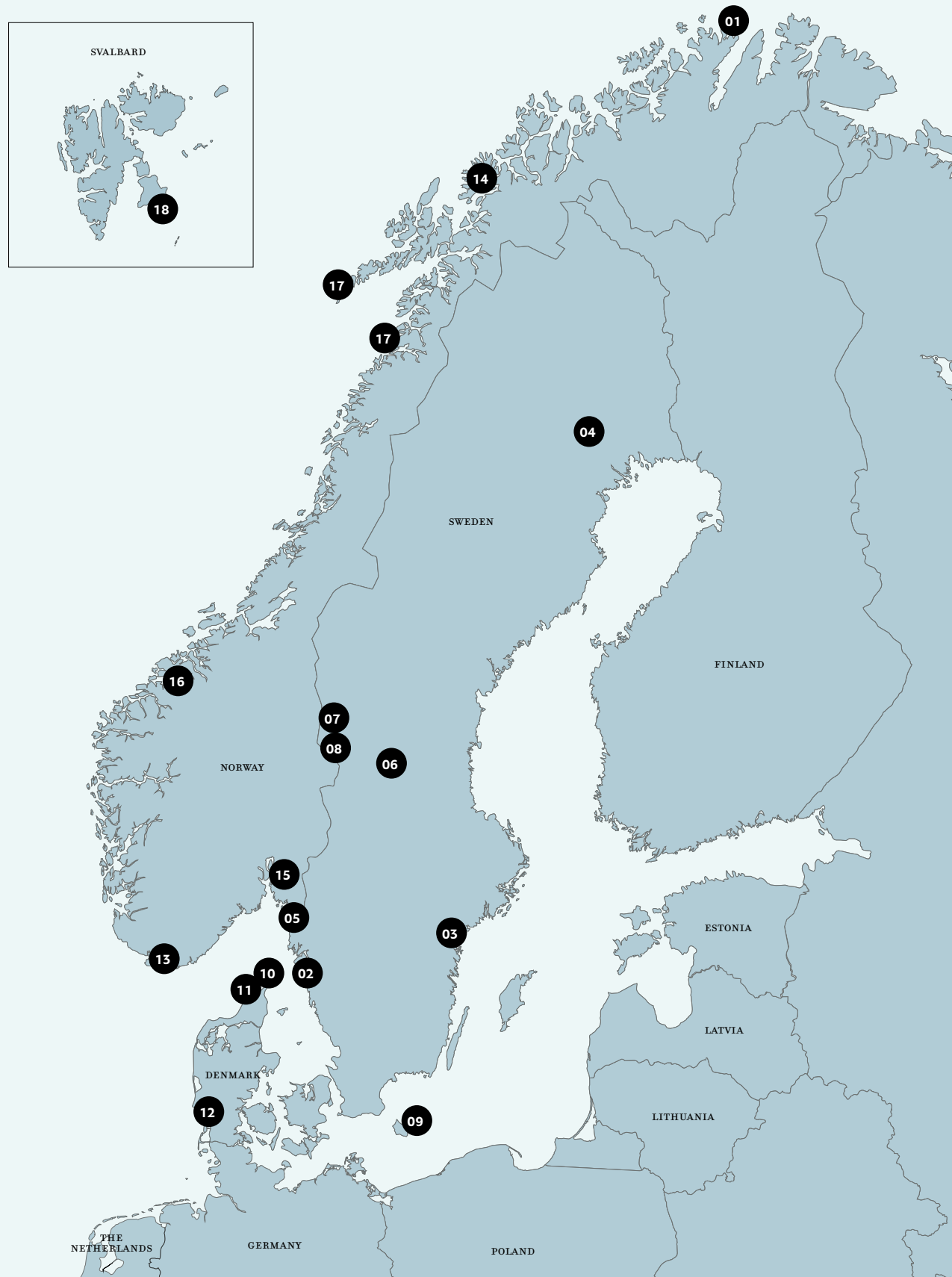
SLOW TRAVEL EUROPE

GOING NORTH

INSPIRING JOURNEYS TO DENMARK,
NORWAY & SWEDEN

BAS VAN OORT





CONTENTS

Endless fresh air	9
01 All the way north – Denmark, Sweden, Norway	13
02 Turning point – Gothenburg, Sweden	37
03 Midsummer Night – Slatbäken, Sweden	51
04 Up in the trees – Harads, Sweden	65
05 On the rocks – Gothenburg-Strömstad, Sweden	75
06 A white winter – Fryksås, Sweden	95
07 The rugged mountain – Fulufjället, Sweden	107
08 The art of ice fishing – Rösjöstunorga, Sweden	121
09 Island cuisine – Bornholm, Denmark	131
10 In the limelight – Skagen-Lønstrup, Denmark	147
11 Closer to the edge – Hjørring, Denmark	163
12 The Danish mudflats – Højer, Denmark	175
13 The light that never fades – Lindesnes, Norway	187
14 Into the deep end – Tranøya, Norway	201
15 The best perspective – Oslo, Norway	211
16 The Troll Ladder – Åndalsnes–Valldall, Norway	221
17 From Å to Bodø – Lofoten, Norway	237
18 The first sunlight after months of dark – Svalbard, Norway	251
Who made this book?	266
Index	270



FOREWORD

Endless fresh air

As you simply cannot visit every single destination as you grow up, my first visit to Scandinavia came relatively late in life. I was well into my twenties and working on the editorial team of a travel magazine when I went to Norway for a week-long trek from Bergen to Stavanger. This convinced me that no place in the world could be more beautiful than the Norwegian fjord region. The landscape's beauty was extreme, as so many features in Scandinavia are, as I have noticed on every trip since.

It still strikes me every time I travel to the north. Can the world look any emptier than it does on the road between Alta and the North Cape? Do the forests and lakes ever end as you travel north through Sweden? And can the wind blow any harder than it does on the summit of Preikestolen? Everything seems infinite in Scandinavia. From the gently rolling meadows in Denmark that just seem to stretch on endlessly to the wind-

ing roads along the Norwegian coast. Even day and night have no beginning or end high up in the north. Northern Scandinavia is the land of eternal darkness and of eternal light.

What I've also noticed, and what I perhaps like most about Denmark, Sweden and Norway, is that those extremes in the landscape never pose an obstacle. No matter how warm, cold, dark or light it is, life in Scandinavia is largely lived outdoors. Since that first visit to the fjords of Norway, I cannot recall a single trip on which being outdoors was not the most important part of the journey. Even on Spitsbergen in winter – speaking of extremes – I spent most of the day outdoors. There is a reason that *friluftsliv* is one of Norway's best-known concepts. It reflects a love of the outdoors, ensuring you always return home with a clearer head after a trip to the north.

Bas van Oort





01 DENMARK — SWEDEN — NORWAY



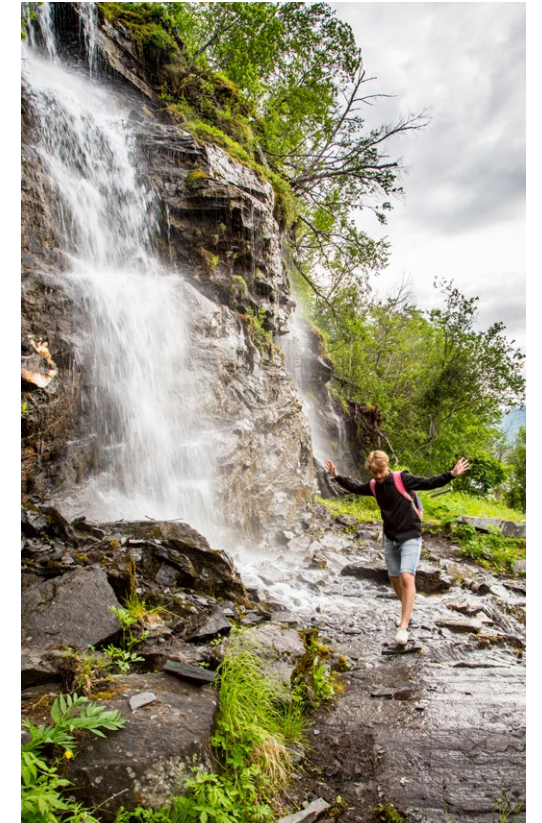
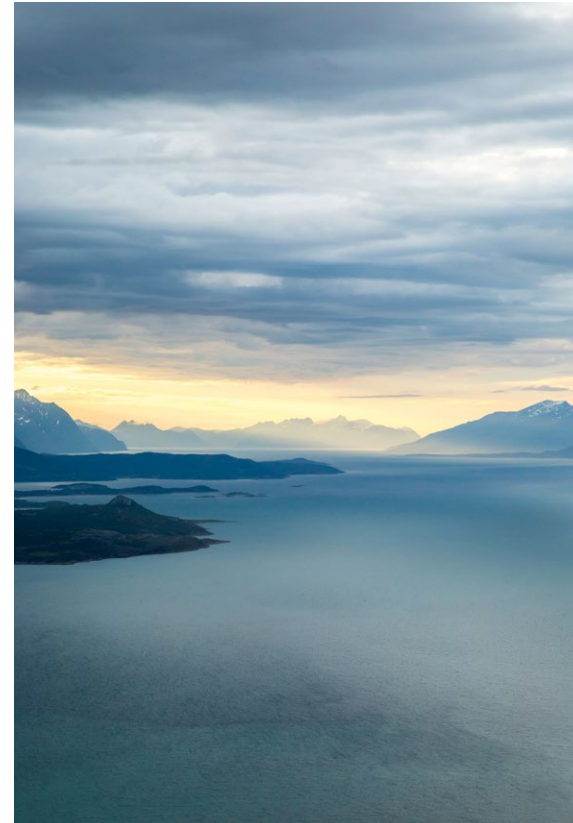
NORTH CAPE

All the way north

A journey overland to the northernmost tip of Europe is full of contrasts. From style, design, and lively cities to vast emptiness. Gradually towards the void, until the world simply ends.

She speaks thoughtfully in a soft voice. As if every word that rolls off her lips has been carefully weighed more than once. Perhaps that is what living in an environment like this does. You adapt to everything around you: the silence, the emptiness, the natural world, and the light.

Marie Angelsen is used to the environment. Not only because she has lived in Skibotn for a few years now, a tiny dot on the map of Europe, just before the continent ends, high up in Norwegian Lapland, beyond Sweden's northernmost tip. No, she knows nature mainly because she was born in the Lofoten. A place that is even more beautiful. Steep mountains rising from the silvery water. Beaches with waves you can surf, provided you brave the cold. She will return there for an August holiday. To pick wild blackberries, maybe even swim if a beautiful summer's day allows it. But now it's June and we're here, and Marie has invited us for an evening walk to Bollmansveien, a 550-metre-high viewpoint just outside Skibotn. It's a good three-and-a-half-hour walk, but at the top you can see all the way to the island of Arnøya, which is about a hundred kilometres away. If the weather is favourable, it will be sunny





until well after midnight when we return to the campsite in Skibotn, where we have a hikers' cabin for the night on our way north. Or whatever time of day it is. It's all starting to get a bit mixed up. The further north we get, the more days and nights merge imperceptibly into one another. Here, far above the Arctic Circle, the distinction is almost impossible to make.

Marie walks ahead of us. She is wearing sturdy walking boots, outdoor trousers and a jumper, and is carrying a large purple backpack. It contains an extra jumper for when we get reach our destination, waffles, and a jar of homemade strawberry jam. We are on our way to a bunker that dates from the German occupation during World War II. It's a gruesome story; almost all the Russian, Yugoslavian, and Polish prisoners, who were forced to build the bunker and the road leading to it, lost their lives.



There is much more to tell along the way. On the left lies the Storfjord, and the water that flows towards the island of Arnøya in the distance is the Lyngenfjord. You don't even have to look closely to notice the difference in colour in the water. The crystal-clear, Caribbean-blue water comes directly from the glacier. The darker-coloured water is saltwater and comes from the Norwegian Sea. A few years ago, a bear was spotted here. Marie herself recently saw a lynx.

Those high mountains over there, across the water? They block the weather, which is why Skibotn is one of the driest parts of Norway.

When we arrive at the bunker, we find a guest-book to write your name in. There are twenty-five mountain peaks in the region with such a book, and if your name is in all of them, you have a chance to win a prize. Nothing big, mind you, it's mainly intended to keep the local population fit and active.

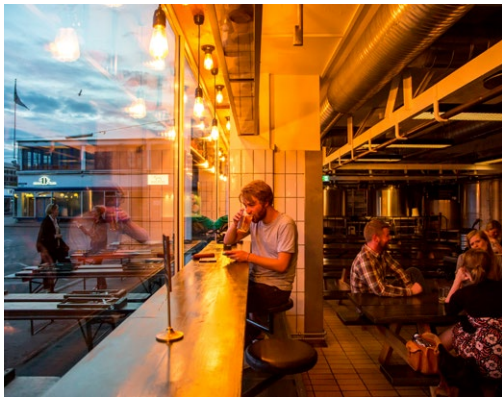




Meanwhile, we hop from rock to rock along a waterfall, cross a field of ferns and clamber over rocks further up. Unfortunately, the sun refuses to appear. Only the mountains on the horizon are kissed by some sunlight.

PIONEERS IN STYLE

It's only been just over a week since my regular travelling companion Kees and I visited some of the hippest cities in the world, two thousand kilometres south of here. Same continent, same culture, but completely different from the emptiness we are surrounded by now. Even on a road trip, when you see the landscape change as you look out the window of your car or train, the transition feels abrupt. Copenhagen is a gathering place for style trendsetters. The Nørrebro and Vesterbro neighbourhoods have served as examples for many urban makeovers around the world, from dangerous and seemingly without a future



to hip and lively. Colourful in both the façades of the houses and in the people who live behind them. The Meatpacking District in Kødbyen is another centre of good taste. Where rough men in white coats used to process meat, you now find Michelin-starred restaurants, burger bars, and breweries that are world-famous among beer connoisseurs. Further on is Christiania, the famous Freetown within the borders of Copenhagen, where you once stepped into a completely different world. And even the brightly coloured row of warehouses in Nyhavn doesn't really feel like a tourist trap because of the décor of the shops and restaurants. In a Scandinavian city, you can't go wrong. Do street food markets sometimes feel interchangeable? Not the one in Reffen. There, you can sit by the water in the evening sun, feet dangling over the edge of the quay, and let the day slowly slip away.

It's no different in Gothenburg, Sweden. A terrace in the city centre looks like a shop window for COS, Acne or Samsøe Samsøe. Everyone sits there, stylishly civilised with a bottle of rosé on the table and a bit of chit-chat. 'I don't know anyone in northern Sweden,' says Fanny, a young woman sitting with a group of friends at a large wooden picnic table until late in the evening. Like the rest of her group, she is in her mid-twenties and has never been to the north of her country. That goes for almost everyone. Only Gustav, one of her friends, has been with his parents to go fishing. Fanny: 'People in the north speak with a different accent, I even find it difficult to understand. We may live in the same country, but it is a world of difference.' The rest agree. Northerners are reserved, is the unanimous conclusion. A stiff bunch. And once you're past Boden and Kiruna, deep in Lapland, it becomes empty. Really empty. You might not meet anyone for a long time.

But before that happens, Stockholm awaits. A repeat performance when it comes to art and trendy restaurants. The Moderna Museet on the island of Skeppsholmen, centrally located in Stockholm,



offers a preview of what is to come. Imagination runs wild. Here, the design is sleek and sometimes futuristic, but further north, that imagination is found in completely different things. In the sun that will never set and endless forests full of spruce and pine. A night train journey to Boden separates us from a new step into nothingness.

SPINNING COMPASS

It is twelve past midnight, and the sun has just set. I am sitting outside and have just applied some mosquito repellent – you're lost without it. The mosquitoes in northern Sweden are numerous and relentless. They fly in swarms, crawl under your trouser legs, into your neck, onto your nose and even into your hair, leaving your scalp itching for days. If you leave your car window open, they will immediately fly in and you won't be able to get them out. They feed on your blood and give you itchy bumps, frustration, and despair in return. Being locked in a room full of mosquitoes would be an extremely effective method of torture.

Everywhere we've been so far, the reaction has been more or less the same when we told people about our trip. Eyes a little wider, voices an octave higher. You're going to do what? The North Cape? You mean the northernmost tip of Norway? Where the land ends and it never gets dark in summer? Then we got some advice, which sounded more like warnings. Three aspects kept coming up. The light, which at some point never switches off. The mosquitoes, which you can do nothing about except accept their existence. And the emptiness. Here in Boden, I'm starting to understand what all those people were talking about. For the first time on this trip, all these elements come together. After a stopover in Gävle, about an hour and a half by train north of Stockholm, we then waited for the night train to the north. The railway runs northwards for the full length of the Gulf of Bothnia. Along the way, there is little more than forest and water, and occasionally the glistening roof of a house or farm.





There seems to be no real transition from city to countryside in Sweden. Even the cities in the south – Malmö, Gothenburg, Norrköping, Stockholm – loom out of a bright green landscape of forest and meadows. It's everything. Or nothing. At the Boden campsite, where we have a small cottage for the night, it feels like the end of the afternoon. Two kids race past on a scooter. Laughter can be heard from the campers around us, and the sky is turning a steel blue. Yet it is just after midnight. I am tired, but I cannot sleep. What doesn't help is that nature is much more beautiful at night than during the day. The light is softer, the water completely still. As if nature is gently laid out, waiting to be kissed awake in a few hours, like Snow White.

The sun may have just set, but in fifty minutes, it will rise again. Leaving not even enough time for twilight to show itself. As we are heading further north, this is the last sunset for now. How do you live with constant light? The people here say they are used to it. Not only are the days of the year longer, but your own days also have no end. In summer, it's not unusual to continue until midnight after dinner. Working, sitting outside, walking, or whatever. As long as you get your seven to eight hours of sleep, you'll be fine. Moreover, I'm assured that light gives you more energy. Yet there is also a pitfall. Because of that continuous light, they said, you're always switched on. Until it can become too much at times. The daily cycle as we know it no longer applies. You can't even use the sun as a guide anymore, because it no longer sets. It's like holding a magnet to a compass, with the sun spinning in circles in the sky.

THE PARADOX OF THE NORTH

Beyond Kiruna, the landscape finally changes. The forests and lakes give way to a rugged, mountainous landscape. The train to Narvik winds its way steadily through it. The border between Sweden and Norway is crossed silently. After Narvik, the railway ends. In a rental car we start our last leg, which is where we go for our walk with Marie.

The few hundred kilometres we still have to cover wind along fjords that cut deep into the land. Sometimes you can see the road you'll be driving on an hour and a half later on the other side of the water. We decide to make as few stops as possible, so we don't lose too much time. We manage to keep this up at first, but with difficulty. The landscape is simply too beautiful. The mountains are so green that just looking at them feels refreshing. The water seems to be every shade of blue. From tropical to deep and dark, it even seems almost dense, as if you'd bounce back if you jumped in.



