



FJORDS, FROZEN LAKES, AND POWDER SCANDINAVIA

From prehistoric skiing hunters and Vikings to state-of-the-art resorts and a thriving snowboard scene, Scandinavia has it all.

The Scandinavian Mountains, or Scandes, a line of relatively young mountains that span the west side of the peninsula, are extremely well known to residents of these winter sports-obsessed nations but often overlooked by visitors from outside the region. In Europe, it is the Alps that routinely draw the headlines. Yet these 200-plus ski resorts have much to offer snow sport enthusiasts, including the claim to an authentic ski heritage that kickstarted the sport toward its modern iteration.

Carvings depicting humans walking and hunting on skis have been found in Norway dating back to 4000–3000 BCE, while preserved ancient wooden skis have been found in peat bogs from the same time period showing that the Indigenous Sami people have been skiing for several thousand years.

The Vikings are known to have used wooden skis to travel around efficiently while hunting, fur trapping, collecting wood, and socializing during long frigid winters, where the snowfall was heavy and the blizzards howling. Archaeologists frequently found skis in Viking graves, and the Norse god Ullr, stepson of Thor, was described as a skillful skier in mythic texts dating to 1220.

Early skis would sometimes be used as singles, or as a pair with one ski covered in fur for traction, and they would be attached by a loop of birch twine at the front. A huge leap in ski design took place in 1860 when a poor farmer called Sondre Norheim, who was living in Morgedal

in Norway's Telemark region, decided to attach a second loop of twine to hold his heel in place. This created a far more stable binding with which steeper slopes could be tackled. And as he showed off his skills around the country, a nascent ski culture began to form.

Trysil, now Norway's largest ski resort, set in dense spruce forest around the peak of Trysilfjellet 3,174 feet (1,132 meters) claims to have created the world's first ski club in 1861, and the first ski race a year later. But it wasn't until 1960 that the first ski lifts were built; it now boasts 31 lifts and 68 slopes.

What Trysil and other ski resorts in the Scandes lack in altitude (the highest peak, Kebnekaise in Sweden is just 6,880 feet/2,097 meters) they usually make up for in snowfall thanks to their high latitude, with good snow generally lasting from November to late April.

At Trysil and Åre, pronounced "aura," Sweden's biggest resort, the resort architecture tends to be more functional than ornate, but it still has its own stark beauty with modern amenities and efficient lift systems. And the natural landscapes of the region, including frozen lakes, fjords, and snowy forests make for a stunning backdrop out on the slopes.

One of the purest mountain experiences can be found at Folgefonna in Norway, where three separate glacier plateaus meet, providing a rare chance to see these fragile and sadly disappearing wonders up close. A national park since 2005, its place in snowboarding folklore comes courtesy of the Norwegian snowboard legend Terje Haakonsen, who first rode there in the 1980s. Since the mid-1990s, the resort has hosted a summer freestyle camp, where riders can hone their tricks in the snowpark. It has cemented a regional snowboard culture, where snowboard stars of the future can improve their chops and further shape the scene.

Winter sports are in this region's DNA. Scandinavia as a whole is seventh in the all-time Winter Olympic medal rankings, with Norway winning more medals than any other country in the world. From the Sami people and the Vikings to the Olympic stars, recreational skiers, and snowboarders of today—Scandinavia's passion for the sport and amazing terrain make it a premiere destination for snow sport enthusiasts.