



**Scandinavia and the
Nordic Region**
Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland

Myths and Legends



2023-2024



The Mission of FAME is to foster and perpetuate creativity through multi-cultural arts education. We believe in the value and power of the arts to kindle the imagination, encourage creative thinking and enhance human development.

Our vision is to:

- Empower teachers to nurture artistic creativity.
- Celebrate the artist in every child and develop pathways to explore the arts.
- Understand and appreciate cultures through experiences with indigenous art forms.
- Make the arts enjoyable and a part of everyday life.

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Circle Word Puzzle

NOR-REGION

A	V	P	G	M	L	M	U	S	E	U	M	S	K	N
R	I	U	D	A	I	P	K	N	A	T	U	R	E	K
C	E	F	N	N	L	T	H	G	I	N	D	I	M	F
T	W	F	E	A	L	L	L	L	V	T	R	S	B	O
I	S	I	G	I	E	O	E	O	A	I	N	W	B	R
C	M	N	T	G	H	L	E	R	N	O	I	P	R	E
N	O	S	E	E	A	S	F	F	I	L	C	A	E	S
E	U	R	B	W	M	O	B	T	D	E	S	E	E	T
T	N	A	M	R	M	G	C	E	N	E	S	P	D	S
O	T	L	E	O	E	A	R	S	A	L	M	O	N	K
F	A	O	K	N	R	N	R	L	C	C	R	R	I	I
O	I	P	H	T	E	A	S	M	S	Q	H	U	E	I
L	N	P	T	S	Q	O	N	O	R	T	H	E	R	N
J	S	A	S	E	U	Q	I	T	U	O	B	W	S	G
W	O	L	V	E	R	I	N	E	S	D	R	O	J	F

1. Arctic Circle
2. Attractions
3. Beaches
4. Bergen
5. Boutiques
6. Cormorants
7. Europe
8. Fjords
9. Forests
10. Galleries
11. Illehammer
12. Lofoten Islands
13. Midnight Sun
14. Mountains
15. Museums
16. Nature
17. Northern Lights
18. Norwegian Waffles
19. Oslo (Captial)
20. Polar Bears
21. Puffins
22. Reindeer
23. Salmon
24. Scandinavia
25. Sea Cliffs
26. Seals
27. Skiing
28. Views
29. Wilderness
30. Wolverines

Scandinavia

Scandinavia is a subregion in Northern Europe, with strong historical, cultural and linguistic ties between its constituent peoples. In English usage, Scandinavia most commonly refers to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. It can sometimes also refer more narrowly to the Scandinavian Peninsula (which excludes Denmark but includes part of Finland), or more broadly to include all of Finland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

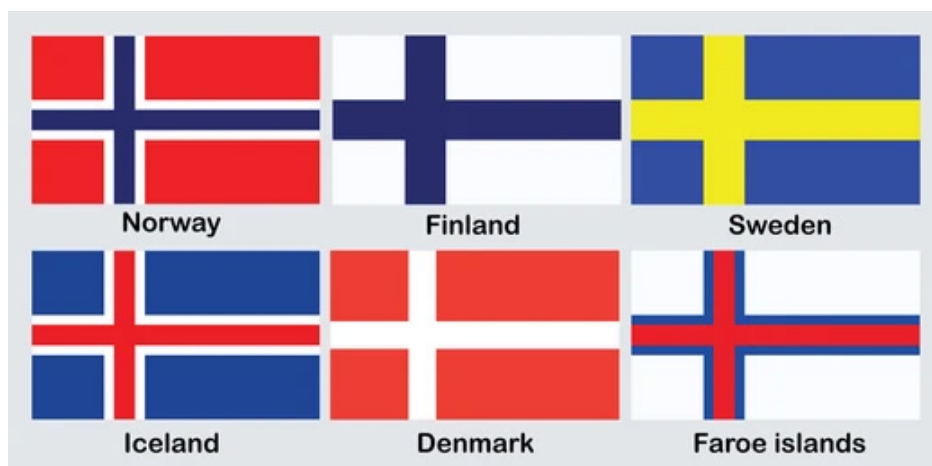


The geography of the region is varied, from the Norwegian fjords in the west and Scandinavian mountains covering parts of Norway and Sweden, to the low and flat areas of Denmark in the south, as well as the archipelagos and lakes in the east. Most of the population in the region live in the more temperate southern regions, with the northern parts having long, cold winters.



The region became notable during the Viking Age, when Scandinavian peoples participated in large-scale raiding, conquest, colonization and trading mostly throughout Europe. They also used their longships for exploration, becoming the first Europeans to reach North America. These exploits saw the establishment of the North Sea Empire which comprised large parts of Scandinavia and Great Britain, though it was relatively short-lived.

In modern times the region has prospered, with the economies of the countries being amongst the strongest in Europe. Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Finland all maintain welfare systems considered to be generous, with the economic and social policies being dubbed the “Nordic model”.



Scandinavian Fun Facts

Scandinavia is the World's Happiest Region.

- Along with their Nordic neighbors, the three countries consistently rank high in the UN's World Happiness Report.

Swedes are Big on Recycling.

- Only a few percent of household waste ends up in landfills. The country runs a big waste-to-energy program to generate heat for homes. The problem is the country burns more waste than it produces, so much so, that it started importing waste from Norway!

Scandinavians Value Work-Life Balance.

- The working week is short in Scandinavia, just 37 hours on average. Most employees receive 4-5 weeks of annual leave. Finally, all the region's nations have generous paternity leave policies.

All Countries use the Nordic Cross.

- The flags of Denmark, Norway and Sweden all share a similar off-center cross design known as the Nordic cross. The colors are different of course, and the Norwegian flag has a slightly more complex design.

The Region is Coffee-Obsessed.

- Nordic coffee culture is not the secret it used to be. Five Nordic countries place in the world's six biggest coffee consumers. The highest Scandinavian country is Norway, which has a per capita consumption average of 22 lbs. every year. In particular, it is known for its lighter roasts that are starting to catch on elsewhere.

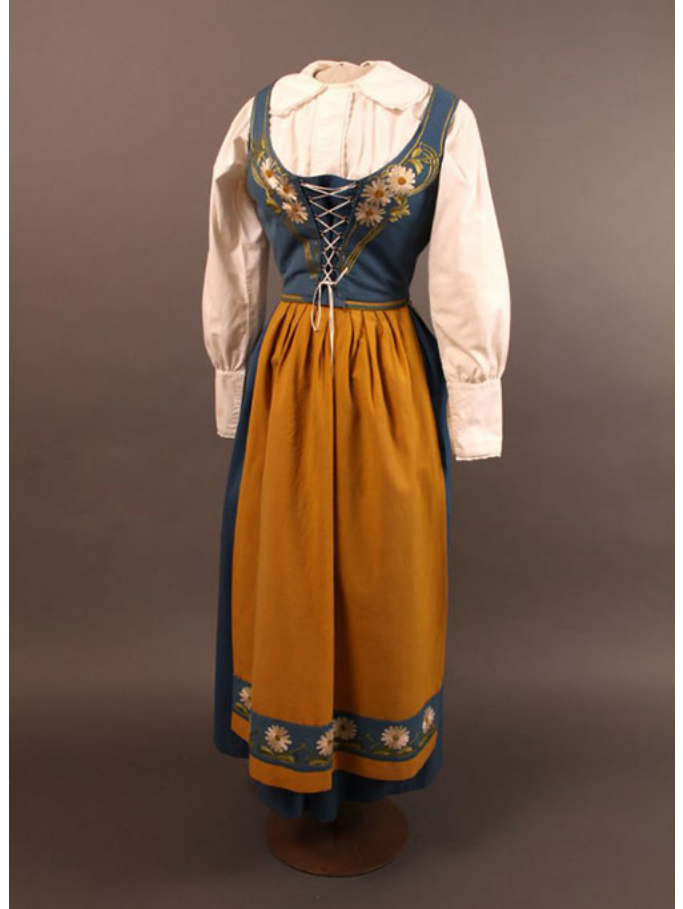


Scandinavian Living

The Nordic countries are famous for their folk culture, including expressions such as music and dance, crafts, farming, folk architecture, costumes, fairytales, folklore and festivals. The Nordic countries were forerunners in creation of open-air museums to commemorate the rural cultural expressions.

Traditional Nordic textiles are wool and flax. Many Nordic provinces have local folk costumes traditionally used by wealthy peasantry for festivities. Some folk costumes can be attributed since the 17th century, and most folk costumes in current use are reconstructions of genuine ones from a certain region (often on parish level), most containing a bit of guesswork. Modern folk costumes have been designed during the 20th and 21st centuries, to represent countries, provinces or towns without a traditional costume. Today, folk costumes can be worn for traditional holidays such as Christmas or Midsummer. They can at times substitute formal dress (white tie).

Scandinavian music is from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands. The most common instrument in Scandinavian music is the **Hardanger fiddle**. Other instruments include the nyckelharpa (a type of keyed fiddle), bagpipes, and accordion.



Scandinavia in Detail

Natural Resources

- Copper
- Gold
- Iron Ore
- Lead
- Silver
- Timber
- Uranium
- Zinc
- Hydropower

Sports

Ice hockey and football are the main sports. Winter sports are also popular, both in the number of participants and in spectators, while floorball gained large popularity in the 1990s amongst participants, spectators grew in the last five years to outnumber other team sports amongst the spectators.

Language

Scandinavian languages, also called North Germanic languages, are a group of Germanic languages consisting of modern standard Danish, Swedish, Norwegian (Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian), Icelandic, and Faroese. These languages are usually divided into East Scandinavian (Danish and Swedish) and West Scandinavian (Norwegian, Icelandic, and Faroese) groups.



Myths and Legends

Nordic folk tales have traces of Nordic paganism, but is also marked by a millenium of Christianity and the Protestant Reformation. The word **saga** is ambiguous; in Old Norse and contemporary Icelandic, it means “history”; in contemporary Swedish it means “fairy tale”. Nordic folk tales have inspired fiction, such as the Hans Christian Andersen’s works, JRR Tolkien’s legendarium, Nordic Noir and Astrid Lindgren’s works.

The Scandinavian Troll

Trolls differ from one story to another, but they’re always large and they’re ugly. Trolls aren’t known for their smarts, they have a reputation for nasty scheming. But, if someone does a favor for them, they show kindness and are quick to come to that person’s aid. According to legend, when Christianity arrived in Scandinavia, it was said that trolls could smell the blood of a Christian man. (Think, “Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman.”) This was a nod of respect to trolls as part of the old, pagan ways.



Dwarves and Elves

Dwarves and elves are probably the most well-known creatures in Scandinavian mythology.

Dwarves, like the ones who lived with Snow

White, are blacksmiths who live in cities

underground. They’re short and have long

flowing beards. Elves on the other hand, are

graceful creatures that are other-worldly. Elves

peacefully inhabit woodlands and meadows,

and are on the side of good. There are some

Scandinavian tales where elves behave badly,

but those are simply elves that have gone wrong.

The most famous of these mystical creatures are

the elves that work for Santa at the North Pole -

they are straight out of Norse mythology.



Myths and Legends

Nisse

The Nisse is a good creature who takes care of the house and barn when a farmer's asleep. (But only if the farmer sets food out for him - the farmer must also take good care of his family, farm and animals.) These beings are associated with Christmas. Farmers leave bowls of porridge or sweets out for him just as we leave cookies and milk for Santa. If the Nisse is happy, he'll leave Christmas presents for the family. A Nisse changes his size, and he can also make himself invisible.



Vittra

The Vittra is a spirit that lives underground, is usually invisible, and even has its own cattle.

They don't meddle in people's affairs, unless they become angry. That happens when they aren't respected, for example when people say "Look out!" when they toss hot water, or go to the bathroom, so the Vittra can move out of the way. When a person builds their home on top of a Vittra's, disturbing their cattle or blocking their roads, they'll make their life miserable. Even today, people have rebuilt, or moved their house, in order not to block a "Vittra-way".

Myths and Legends

Odin

Odin is a powerful, respected god. He's associated with wisdom, healing, death, royalty, the gallows, knowledge, victory, sorcery, poetry and frenzy. We first learn about him from Roman occupation of northern regions in 2 BCE (Before Common Era); he's large during the Viking Age, 8th-11th centuries, CE (Common Era); and he's still a force today. Odin is often accompanied by his animal familiars, ravens and wolves, and he rides an eight-legged horse across the sky and into the underworld. Valhalla is the hall of the slain, a majestic hall in Asgard, and it is ruled over by Odin. Odin is known by many names, and some cannot be unspoken.

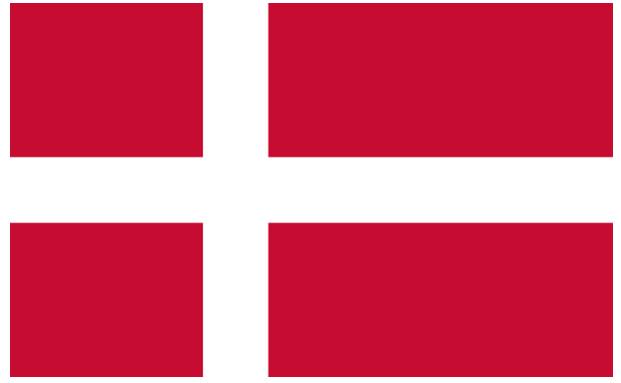


Thor

Thor, a son of Odin, is a hammer-wielding god associated with lightning, thunder, storms, sacred groves, strength, and fertility. He protects mankind. We first learn about him from early Roman occupation, but he reached the height of popularity during the Viking Age. When the fierce Christianization of Scandinavia reached the region, Emblems of Thor's hammer, named Mjolnir, were worn by residents of Norse countries. Also, many people named their children "Thor", as witness to their own identity and to the god's popularity.



Denmark



Denmark is a Nordic constituent country in Northern Europe. It is the most populous and politically central constituent of the Kingdom of Denmark, a constitutionally unitary state that includes the autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands and Greenland in the North Atlantic Ocean. Metropolitan Denmark is the southernmost of the Scandinavian countries, lying south-west and south of Sweden, south of Norway, and north of Germany, with which it shares a short land border, its only land border.



Denmark's geography is characterised by flat, arable land, sandy coasts, low elevation and a temperate climate. It has a population of 5.935 million (February 1, 2023), of which 800,000 live in the capital and largest city, Copenhagen. Denmark exercises hegemonic “powerful” influence in the Danish Realm, devolving powers to handle internal affairs.



The unified Kingdom of Denmark emerged in the 8th Century as a proficient maritime power amid the struggle for control of the Baltic Sea. In 1397, it joined Norway and Sweden to form the Kalmar Union, which persisted until the latter's secession in 1523. The remaining Kingdom of Denmark-Norway endured a series of wars in the 17th century that resulted in further territorial recessions to the Swedish Empire. Following the Napoleonic Wars, Norway was absorbed into Sweden, leaving Denmark with the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland.

Denmark is a highly developed country with a high standard of living. The country performs at or near the top in measures of education, health care, civil liberties, and democratic governance. Denmark is a founding member of NATO “North Atlantic Territory Organization”, the Nordic Council, the OECD “Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development”, the OSCE “Organization for Security and Cooperaton in Europe”, and the United Nations; it is also part of the Schengen Area. Denmark maintains close political, cultural and linguistic ties with its Scandinavian neighbors, with the Danish language being partially mutually intelligible with both Norweigan and Swedish. In 1973, Denmark together with Greenland, but not the Faroes, became a member of what is now the European Union, but negotiated certain opt-outs, such as retaining its own currency, the krone.



Denmark Fun Facts

The Oldest Flag in the World

- First acknowledged in 1219, the Danish flag “Dannebrog” remains the oldest state flag in the world still in use by an independent nation.

Denmark Doesn't have any Mountains!

- Denmark is known around the world for its bike culture, and the fact that the country is quite flat is definitely an advantage in this matter, you never have to bike uphill! There are also more than 7,500 miles of cycle tracks and lanes throughout the country which makes biking in Denmark a safe and respected way to travel. 75% of people continue biking through winter, and there is a Cycling Embassy.

LEGO was Invented by a Dane

- The world-famous LEGO brick was invented by Dane Ole Kirk Christiansen in the town of Billund in 1949. Today, you can visit the original LegoLand and learn about this renowned toy at the Lego House.

Denmark has 444 Islands, but only 76 of them are Inhabited

- Some of the most popular island retreats are the islands of Bornholm, Ærø, Rømø, and Læsø.

You'll Find the 2 Oldest Amusement Parks in Denmark

- Denmark is home to the world's oldest amusement park, Bakken, just a 20 minute train ride from Copenhagen Central Station. The 2nd oldest, Tivoli Gardens, is right next to the same station right in the center of the capital.



Danish Holidays and Traditions

Most of Denmark's holidays are based around the Christian calendar, with Christmas, Easter and the midsummer festival of Saint Hans among the most important. Each of these holidays comes with its own traditions and family gatherings.

Christmas - The Highlight of the Long Danish Winter

Christmas dominates December and much of November in Denmark. Shopping streets and homes are decorated with colorful

Christmas lights, and local bakeries are full of Christmas delicacies like klejner and pebernødder (ginger cookies). There are even special Christmas beers and gløgg - a cup of warmed wine mixed with brandy and dried fruit. Danish Christmas is celebrated in the evening on December 24th, and the country virtually shuts down. Even the city buses stop running between 5:30-10:00 PM so that everyone can enjoy dinner with their families.

Denmark's electrical and gas utilities can measure a spike in usage when people

across the country turn on their ovens to cook the traditional roast duck, roast pork, or roast goose. The traditional side dishes are caramelized potatoes and pickled red cabbage.



Did You Know?

The traditional Christmas dessert in Denmark is risalamande (rice pudding) with hot cherry sauce. A peeled almond is hidden somewhere in the serving bowl, and the lucky person who finds the almond in his or her portion gets a small mandelgave (almond gift).

Danish Holidays and Traditions

Easter and Spring Festivals

Because Easter is a moving holiday, it sometimes falls in March when Denmark is still quite chilly, and sometimes in late April, when the bright Danish spring is already well underway. Whatever the weather, Easter week is the traditional opening of Tivoli, the beloved amusement park in downtown Copenhagen,



which dates from 1843. Danish families usually get together for a big Easter lunch that lasts all afternoon. Traditions such as painting hard-boiled eggs in Easter colors, going on egg hunts, and rolling eggs downhill are popular among children and adults alike.

The spring holiday calendar also includes Whitsunday Pentecost, as well as Great Prayer Day - a holiday celebrated only in Denmark. These are days off work when many shops are closed, but they have few special traditions surrounding them. Most Danes use them as a chance to escape to their summerhouses in the countryside. May 1st, International Worker's Day and June 5th, Danish Constitution Day are both partial holidays in Denmark.

Midsummer Festival of Saint Hans

The height of Danish summer is celebrated on the evening of June 23rd under the name Sankt Hans (Saint Hans), who is known in English as John the Baptist. The festival of Sankt Hans and the celebration of the summer solstice have pagan roots and date back to the days before Christianity came to Denmark. Sankt Hans is generally celebrated with a dinner at home with family and friends followed by a stroll to a community bonfire, often by the beach, in a park or on the shore of one of Denmark's many lakes. There are speeches and as the bonfire burns, the community sings to song "Midsommervisen", written by the Danish poet Holder Drachmann in 1885.

Denmark in Detail

Natural Resources

- Oil
- Natural Gas
- Gravel
- Sand
- Limestone
- Chalk
- Clay
- Salt

Sports

Football is by far the most popular sport in Denmark. Almost 300,000 men, women, boys and girls of all ages and abilities play football in local clubs. The national team has often been very successful in European and World championship tournaments.

Language

Denmark has one official language: Danish. However, there are several minority languages spoken throughout the country, if you include The Faroe Islands and Greenland. Danes are taught English from a very young age and 86% of all Danes speak English as a second language. Other top languages include Greenlandic, German and Swedish.



Myths and Legends

Helhesten

You can hear it before you see it. Since one of Helhesten's front legs is missing, this ghostly horse really makes some noise as it drags its 3 ill-shod legs across the village brosten (paving stones). Let's hope you don't meet it on its nightly church crawl - seeing it is a vassel (omen) of death or disaster.



Lindorm

A lindorm (LENNoarm) is a bit like a drage (dragon), except it can not fly or sprude ild (breathe fire - though it does emit a lot of poison). The lindorm resembles a huge snake that grows fatter all the time from all the mennesker (people) it swallows. It generally appears with a scaly serpentine body, dragon's head and two clawed forelimbs. Lindorm like to coil around kirker (churches) to prevent people from going to church sermon. Most limbed depictions imply lindorms do not walk on their two limbs like a wyvern, but move like a mole lizard: they slither like a snake and use thier arms for traction.

Myths and Legends

Havfolk (Sea People)

Human like creatures (like mermaids) that live in the sea and might have fish-like features such as a fish tail. The women are very beautiful, sing very lovely and may lure men into the water and (not necessarily willful) drown them as they take them into their underwater home. The havfolk may come out of the water and look human, but they will always be wet. The men can transform into a big black or white horse that comes out of the sea at night and rushes along the beach. They may lure you to climb and ride, but will then ride directly back into the sea. Stay away from the sea at night to be safe, and if you hear someone singing at sea, quickly cover your ears with your hands!

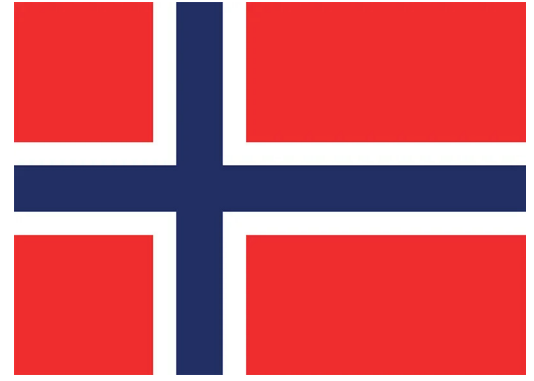


Valykrie

A small silver figurine, found on the Danish island of Funen, is the first known 3D representation of a Valykrie from the Viking Age. Images of armed women interpreted as Valkyries - literally "choosers of the slain", companions of the god Odin, who in Norse mythology are sent to battlefields to fetch warriors fated to die. These foreboders of war rode to the battlefield on horses, wearing helmets and shields; in some accounts they flew through the air and sea. They were associated with fairness, brightness, gold, as well as bloodshed.



Norway



Norway, officially the Kingdom of Norway, is a Nordic country in Northern Europe, the mainland territory of which comprises the western and northernmost portion of the Scandinavian Peninsula. The remote Arctic island of Jan Mayen and the archipelago of Svalbard also form part of Norway. Bouvet Island, located in the Sub-Antarctic, is a dependency of Norway; it also lays claim to the Antarctic territories of Peter I Island and Queen Maud Land. The capital and largest city in Norway is Oslo.



Norway is bordered by Finland and Russia to the northeast and the Skagerrak Strait to the south, on the other side of which are Denmark and the United Kingdom. Norway has an extensive coastline, facing the North Atlantic Ocean and the Barents Sea. The maritime influence dominates Norway's climate, with mild lowland temperatures on the sea coasts; the interior, while colder, is also significantly milder than areas elsewhere in the world on such northerly latitudes. Even during polar night in the north, temperatures above freezing are commonplace on the coastline. The maritime influence brings high rainfall and snowfall to some areas of the country.



The kingdom was established in 872 as a merger of many petty kingdoms and has existed continuously for 1,151 years. From 1537 to 1814, Norway was part of the Kingdom of Denmark-Norway, and from 1814 to 1905, it was in a personal union with the Kingdom of Sweden. The earliest traces of human occupation in Norway are found along the coast, where the huge ice shelf of the last ice age first melted between 11,000 and 8,000 BC. From the eighth to the tenth century, the wider Scandinavian region was the source of Vikings. The looting of the monastery at Lindisfarne in Northeast England in 793 by Norse people has long been regarded as the event which marked the beginning of the Viking Age.

Norwegian Viking explorers discovered Iceland by accident in the ninth century when heading for the Faroe Islands, and eventually came across Vinland, known today as Newfoundland, in Canada. The Vikings from Norway were most active in the northern and western British Isles and eastern North American Isles.

The modern-day Irish cities of Dublin, Limerick and Waterford were founded by Norwegian settlers. Norse traditions were slowly replaced by Christian ones in the late 10th and early 11th centuries.



Norway Fun Facts

Norway Introduced Salmon Sushi to Japan

- While sushi is absolutely a Japanese invention, they did not use salmon in the dish until it was suggested by a Norwegian delegation in the 1980's. Despite the distance between the countries, Japan seemed a natural fit for Norwegian seafood. It took time to happen, as the Japanese were originally concerned with the health impact of eating raw salmon, but they got over that and Norwegian exports haven't looked back and seafood is now one of Norway's biggest industries.

Norway has a Volcano!

- But don't panic, it's nowhere near the country's biggest cities and won't impact Norway's mainland if it were to erupt. That's because Norway's only active volcano is on the island of Jan Mayen in the Norwegian Sea. It's about halfway between Norway and Greenland, north of Iceland and is considered together with Svalbard for administrative purposes by the government.

Norway Gave the World the Cheese Slicer

- The cheese slicer was invented way back in 1925 by Thor Bjorklund and has become a staple of all Scandinavian kitchens, and many others around the world. While a lot of cheese is sold presliced, many people still buy blocks of cheese and use the invention that has changed little in almost 100 years.

Roald Dahl Spoke Norwegian

- Writer Road Dahl may have been born in Wales, but he was the son of Norwegian parents. He was best known for his children's short stories such as The Big Friendly Giant and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

There are 2 Versions of the Norwegian Language

- Or to be more precise, two written variants. Bokmal is used by the vast majority of the country, while Nynorsk is more popular in rural areas, particularly in the western fjord region.



Norwegian Culture

Norway is a country of breathtaking glaciers, fjords, and avid winter sport enthusiasts. The terrain is glaciated with mostly high plateaus and rugged mountains broken by fertile valleys, scattered plains, coastline deeply indented by fjords, and arctic tundra in the north. During the warmer months, Norwegians of all ages love to be outside and hike, fish, and barbecue. In the colder months, some travelers are lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the spectacular Aurora Borealis (The Northern Lights). Norwegians tend to have a strong sense of history and civic engagement and on special occasions, many Norwegians wearing traditional clothing, or bunad. In Norwegian culture, some of the most important values are tolerance, respect and equality



NORWEGIAN BUNADS



Family Dynamic

Norwegian families tend to be small, but relatives often live in the same town. For most Norwegian parents, it's important that their children grow independent, and take responsibility for their own activities and actions. One key principle in Norwegian culture is egalitarianism (that we are all equal). This is reflected in gender relations, age relations and how people address others. Norwegians always address people by their first names, even teachers and elders. Norwegians dress and act informally, and treat each other with the sense of equality, no matter differences in economic class, gender or status. Men and women are considered equal. That means it is expected that they do the same kind of jobs, work just as much, earn the same amount of money, have a shared responsibility in the house and have a shared responsibility for the upbringing of their children.

Norwegian Culture

The Norwegian Diet

Norwegian food is usually a mix of traditional and international cuisine. One of the most popular foods in Norway is fish, but people also eat lots of meat, potatoes, vegetables, milk and cheese, and there are various sweets. Open-faced sandwiches are also popular and are often eaten for breakfast. Dinner is the main meal of the day and a favorite dish is meatballs and potatoes with gravy. Even though Norwegians still appreciate traditional Norwegian dishes, the international cuisine has had a lot of influence the recent decades. “Tacos” for example, are a very typical dish some families will eat during the weekend, quite different from Mexican tacos! The same works for pizzas and pasta. Norwegians eat bread at least two times a day, and sometimes even three times. Breakfast and lunch are usually made up of bread. Most Norwegians will not have any hot meals before dinner.



Norway In Detail

Natural Resources

- Oil
- Natural Gas
- Hydroelectric Power
- Minerals
- Forests

Sports

The most popular sport in Norway is, by far and away, football. While football only comes third by television viewership (after biathlon and cross-country skiing), the sport is the most popular one in terms of active membership, with 8.5 percent of the population playing it!

Language

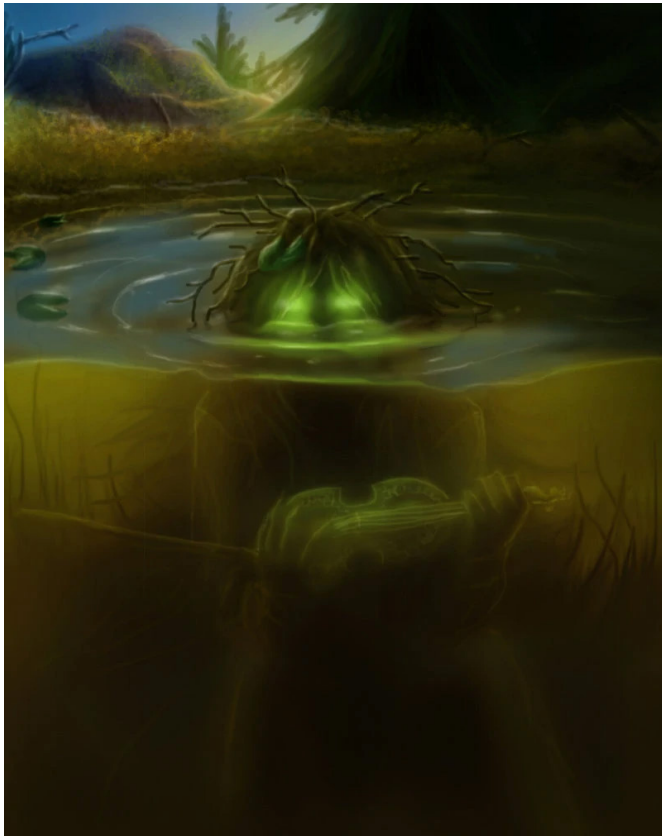
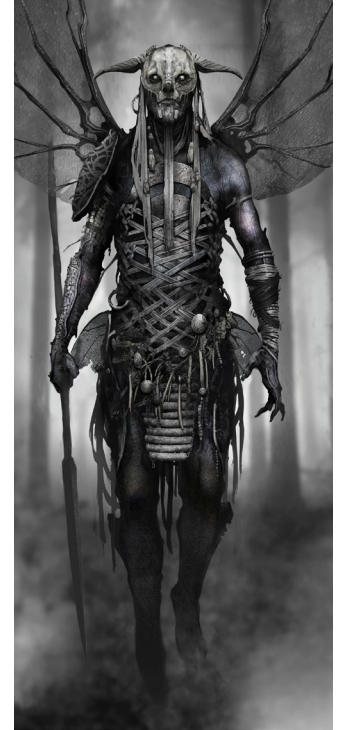
Norway has two official languages: Norwegian and Sami. There are two main dialects of Norwegian: Bokmål and Nynorsk. They're quite different. Most international students choose to learn Bokmål as it's the more widely spoken dialect.



Myths And Legends

Light & Dark Elves

In Norse mythology, there are two contrasting types of elves: the Ljosalfar, which are the light elves and Dokkalfar, which are the dark elves. The light elves live in Alfheimr, which is described as the world of the elves and according to most Norwegian literary sources; the light elves are fairer than the sun to look at. The dark elves on the other hand, have a very dark complexion and they dwell within the earth. The two elf races possess the ability to fly, however, the flying method differs. The dark elves have membrane wings, which they use to fly across their realm, while the light elves have the ability to levitate.



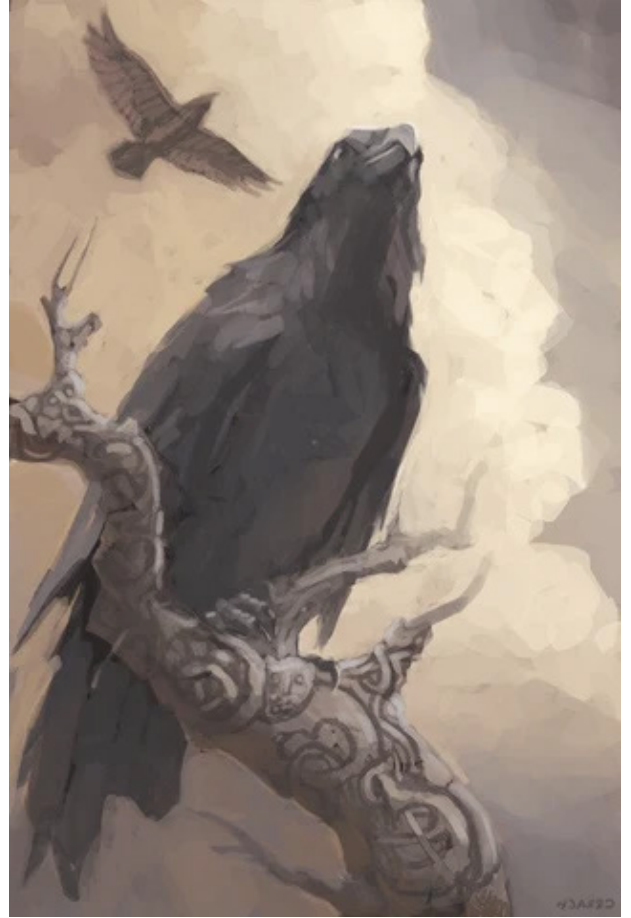
Nøkken

Nøkken is an eerie male creature that dwells in rivers, ponds and lakes. He has been common in Norwegian folklore since Norse time and is a manifestation of the dangers associated to water. He can shift shape and is known to lure people to him and drown them. The only way to protect yourself against Nøkken is to call him by his name. He is especially powerful after sunset.

Myths And Legends

Odin's Ravens

In Norse mythology, Huginn ("thought") and Muninn ("memory" or "mind") are a pair of ravens. Every morning at sunrise the god Odin sends them off to fly throughout all of the nine realms to gather information on what is happening. In the evening they return to Odin in Asgard and tell him everything that they have seen and heard. One of the common symbols of Odin is the raven, some clans in Scandinavia had such a strong connection to him, that they used the raven on their war flag.



Kraken

The Kraken is one of the most fearsome and famous legendary sea monsters to terrorize sailors on the high seas. This beast is often described as a gigantic cephalopod-like creature. It resembles an enormous octopus or giant squid with many strong tentacles. In some Scandinavian stories, the Kraken terrorizes ships and sailors, dragging crews to the bottom of the sea. Other Norse sagas and folk tales say that the Kraken causes whirlpools that capsize ships. Sometimes, Krakens are described as huge, smelly beasts which draw fish to the surface. In all of these tales, Krakens are large and formidable. Official Kraken sightings were first recorded in the waters surrounding Norway, Greenland, and Iceland over 800 years ago.



Sweden



Sweden, formally the Kingdom of Sweden, is a Nordic country located on the Scandinavian Peninsula in Northern Europe. It borders Norway to the west and north, Finland to the east, and is connected to Denmark in the southwest by a bridge–tunnel across the Öresund. At 172,752 square miles, Sweden is the largest Nordic country, the third-largest country in the European Union, and the fifth-largest country in Europe. The capital and largest city is Stockholm.



Nature in Sweden is dominated by forests and many lakes, including some of the largest in Europe. It has an extensive coastline and most of the population lives near a major body of water. The usual conditions are mild for the latitudes with a maritime south, continental centre and subarctic north. Snow cover is variable in the densely populated south, but reliable in higher latitudes. Furthermore, the rain shadow of the Scandes results in quite dry winters and sunny summers in much of the country.



The Swedish Viking Age lasted roughly from the eighth century to the 11th century. It is believed that Swedish Vikings and Gutar mainly travelled east and south, going to Finland, Estonia, the Baltic countries, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, the Black Sea and even as far as Baghdad. Their routes passed through the Dnieper south to Constantinople, on which they carried out numerous raids. The Byzantine Emperor Theophilos noticed their great skills in war, and invited them to serve as his personal bodyguard, known as the Varangian Guard. The Swedish Vikings, called Rus are believed to be the founding fathers of Kievan Rus.

In the middle of the 14th century, Sweden was struck by the Black Death. The population of Sweden and most of Europe was decimated. The population (at the same time) did not reach the numbers of the year 1348 again until the beginning of the 19th century. One third of the population died during the period of 1349–1351. During this period, the Swedish cities began to acquire greater rights and were strongly influenced by German merchants of the Hanseatic League, active especially at Visby. During the 17th century, Sweden emerged as a European great power. Before the emergence of the Swedish Empire, Sweden was a poor and sparsely populated country on the fringe of European civilization, with no significant power or reputation. Sweden rose to prominence on a continental scale during the reign of King Gustavus Adolphus, seizing territories from Russia and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in multiple conflicts, including the Thirty Years' War.

Sweden Fun Facts

Stockholm's Metro Doubles as an Art Gallery

- The Swedish capital city of Stockholm is full of impressive architecture. But one of the most impressive sights is underground! Around 90% of the Stockholm metro stations have been decorated, forming one of the world's most intriguing art galleries. More than 150 artists took part in the project that features mosaics, paintings, graffiti, installations, sculptures and more.

Making Light of Dark Days

- It can be tough living in the North of Sweden in winter when there's less than 5 hours of daylight for months on end. Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression that arises in response to a lack of daylight and affects many people in the far North of Europe. To help combat this, one city in Sweden installed lightboxes in bus stops to allow people waiting for their transport to experience a little extra daylight during the dark days of winter.

Sweden is the Biggest Scandinavian Nation

- In fact, Sweden is the 5th largest country in Europe. The total land area of 173,860 square miles is bigger than both Norway and Denmark. Despite being one of Europe's largest countries, Sweden also has one of the lowest population densities.

63% of Sweden's Population Live in Cities

- That being said, the majority of Swedes live in urban areas. In 2018, 63% of the population lived in one of the 126 urban areas with more than 10,000 inhabitants.

Birthplace of Many Global Companies and Iconic Brands

- A number of prominent design, manufacturing and tech companies were founded in Sweden, including IKEA, Ericsson, H&M, Volvo, Saab, Scania Trucks and Electrolux, to name a few.



Swedish Traditions

Cinnamon Bun Day - October 4th

- Invented in 1999 by the Swedish Home Baking Council (yes, that's a real organization in Sweden), **Kanelbullens Dag** is exactly what it sounds like: the chance to stuff your face with as many delicious pastries as you can fit. Swedish cinnamon buns are less sweet than North American ones and are flecked with "pearl sugar" (large chunks of sugar that look like rock salt) rather than doused with thick frosting. They are available in every cafe and grocery store, but it's always a good idea to make your own!

Waffle Day - March 25th

- **Vaffeldagen** is not just celebrated in Sweden, but Swedes have made it their own by perfecting the art of crispy waffles (like flat ice cream cones), which they top with whipped cream and jam. Waffle irons in Sweden look like four hearts stuck together, producing a beautiful scalloped edge to these tasty treats. The idea behind the holiday is to eat as many waffles as possible, washed down with coffee. That's it. Holidays are pretty simple here.

Valborg - April 30th / May 1st

- If you like fire, this holiday is the one for you. King Carl XVI Gustaf celebrated his birthday on Valborg, and you'll see a lot of Swedish flags around. While it used to be a way of fending off evil spirits, most celebrants now just like lighting things on fire; there are large bonfires in city centers (mostly public parks), but private citizens may have smaller bonfires with their families, especially if they have a lot of garden waste to burn up. Singing choral songs of springtime is very common, also.



Sweden In Detail

Natural Resources

- Copper
- Gold
- Iron Ore
- Hydropower
- Lead
- Silver
- Timber
- Uranium
- Zinc

Sports

The sports with most participants are football, floorball (mix between hockey and soccer), equestrian sports, handball, golf, gymnastics and athletics, while the sports with the largest number of television spectators are football, ice hockey, handball, bandy, golf, motor sport (especially speedway and Formula 1) and athletics.

Language

Sweden is a culturally diverse country, and as such, there are a number of languages spoken within its borders. The three most common languages spoken in Sweden are Swedish, Finnish, and Sami. English is also commonly spoken among Swedes due to the fact that English classes are mandatory for all Swedish students.



Myths And Legends

Heimdall

Called the shining god and whitest skinned of the gods, Heimdall dwelt at the entry to Asgard, where he guarded Bifrost, the rainbow bridge. He required less sleep than a bird, could see 100 leagues, and could hear grass growing in the meadows and wool growing on sheep. Heimdall had keen eyesight and hearing who stood ready to sound the Gjallarhorn at the beginning of Ragnarok.



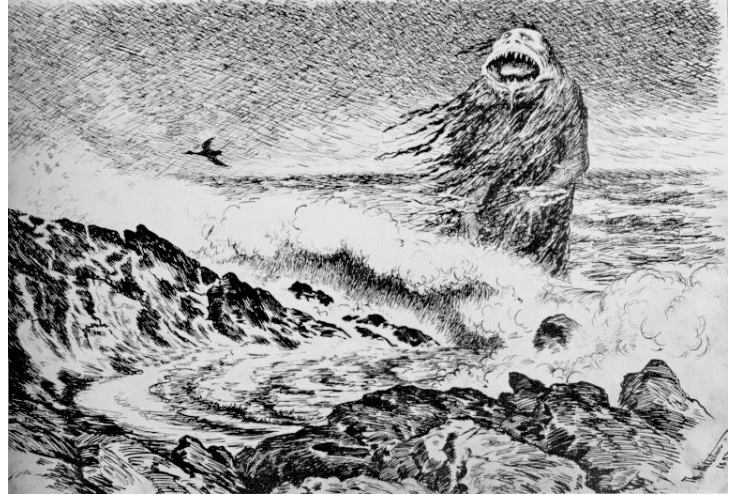
Loki

In Norse mythology Loki is a cunning trickster who has the ability to change his shape and sex. Although his father is the giant Farbauti, he is included among the Aesir (a tribe of gods). Loki is represented as the companion of the great gods Odin and Thor. Loki is considered a trickster god because he is known for being neither fully good nor evil since his main aim was always to create chaos. Loki has also been considered a god of fire. Loki's status in pre-Christian Scandinavia remains somewhat obscure. The medieval sources from which came much of what is known of Loki provide no evidence of a cult, unlike for other Norse deities, and the name Loki does not appear in place-names.

Myths And Legends

Draugr

The draugr or draug is an undead creature from the Scandinavian saga literature and folktales. Commentators extend the term draugr to the undead in medieval literature, even if it is never explicitly referred to as such in the text, and designated them rather as a “haugbui” or an “aptrganga”, literally meaning “again-walker”.

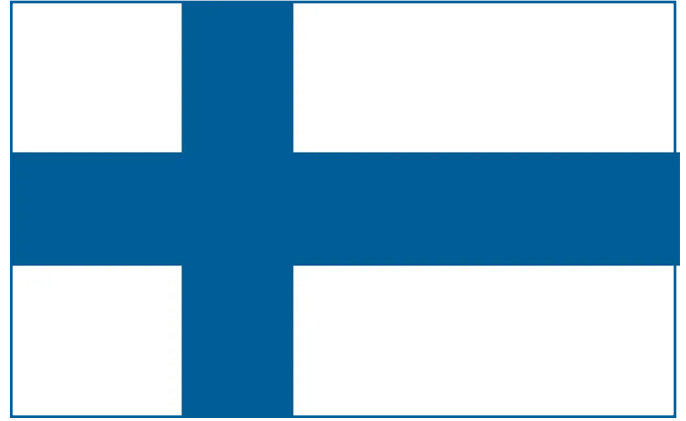


Jörmungandr

Jörmungandr is said to be the middle child of the trickster god Loki and the giantess Angrboda. Jörmungandr, also known as the Midgard Serpent or World Serpent is an unfathomably large sea serpent or worm who dwells in the world sea, encircling the Earth (Midgard) and biting his own tail, an example of an ouroboros. As a result of it surrounding Midgard it is referred to as the World Serpent. When it releases its tail, Ragnarok (the final battle of the world) will begin.



Finland



Finland, officially the Republic of Finland is a Nordic country in Northern Europe. It borders Sweden to the northwest, Norway to the north, Russia to the east, with the Gulf of Bothnia to the west and the Gulf of Finland to the south, across from Estonia. Finland covers an area of 130,678 square miles with a population of over 5.6 million. Helsinki is the capital and largest city. The vast majority of the population are ethnic Finns.



Finland's climate varies from humid continental in the south to the boreal in the north. The land cover is primarily a boreal forest biome, with more than 180,000 recorded lakes. Its largest lake, Saimaa, is the fourth largest in Europe. The Finnish Lakeland is the area with the most lakes in the country; many of the major cities in the area, most notably Tampere, Jyväskylä, and Kuopio are located near the large lakes. The greatest concentration of islands is found in the southwest, in the Archipelago Sea between continental Finland and the main island of Aland.



Finland was first inhabited around 9000 BC after the Last Glacial Period. The Stone Age introduced several different ceramic styles and cultures. The Bronze Age and Iron Age were characterized by contacts with other cultures in Fennoscandia and the Baltic region. From the late 13th century, Finland became a part of Sweden as a consequence of the Northern Crusades. In 1809, as a result of the Finnish War, Finland became part of the Russian Empire as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, during which Finnish art flourished and the idea of independence began to take hold. In 1906, Finland became the first European state to grant universal suffrage, and the first in the world to give all citizens the right to run for public office.

Finland largely remained an agrarian (cultivation) country until the 1950s. After World War II, it rapidly industrialized and developed an advanced economy, while building an extensive welfare state based on the Nordic model; the country soon enjoyed widespread prosperity and a high per capita income. During the Cold War, Finland adopted an official policy of neutrality. Finland joined the European Union in 1995, the Eurozone at its inception in 1999 and NATO in 2023. Finland is a top performer in numerous metrics of national performance, including education, economic competitiveness, civil liberties, quality of life and human development.

Finland Fun Facts

Finland is Ranked #1 as the Happiest Country in the World

- The latest UN report stated that Finland is now the happiest country in the world. The Nordic countries are in general always at the top, but Finland made a big climb this year from number 5 to number 1.

There are More Saunas than Cars

- Heard about the Finnish Sauna tradition? If you have, then you will probably not be as surprised by this fact about Finland, but yes, there are more saunas than cars! Even Burger King in Helsinki has a sauna!

Finland has Free Education, Even at the University Level

- One of the things Finns should really pride themselves with is the fact that they offer free education for students, even at the university level. This also applies to international students from EU/EES. Non EU-nationals can also enjoy free tuition fees if the classes taken are taught in Finnish or Swedish, or doctoral studies in any language.

The Finnish Passport is one of the Best

- Finns can pride themselves on having the fourth-best passport in the world, just behind Germany, Singapore, and Japan. This means that they can visit most of the countries in the world without getting a visa. And the Finnish passport is one of the strongest passports in the world.

Freedom to Roam - The Right to Public Access

- Just like the neighboring Scandinavian countries, you can enjoy the freedom to roam and have the right to public access. This basically means that you can forage mushrooms, berries, and flowers, camp, walk and enjoy nature as long as you don't litter.



Finnish Culture, Customs & Traditions

Finnish culture is a combination of numerous native customs which are represented by their national languages (Germanic Swedish and Uralic Finnish), the sauna, and the European and Nordic traditions. Due to their geographical location and history, Finland was heavily influenced by various communities including the Russians, Swedes, plus numerous Baltic and Finnic people. The Finnish culture is built upon their traditional livelihood and their tradition of egalitarianism. Cultural differences still exist between different regions in the country, mainly the difference in vocabularies and accents.

The People

Finns are the Finnish-speaking people living in Finland. The Finns are divided into smaller subgroups as per their dialect, but the internal migration and urbanization have reduced the importance of the grouping. Their society encourages liberalism and equality. Their traditional religious beliefs were heavily influenced by the Norse and Baltic paganism, which changed during the twelfth century when Christianity arrived in Finland. Currently, about 1.1% of the population worship in the Finnish-Orthodox church while 72.8% belong to Evangelism Lutheran Church.

Festivals and Traditions

The traditions and holidays in Finland are a perfect blend of their pagan customs and Christianity. Their Christmas follows the Christmas trees tradition and Advent calendars. The Finnish Christmas starts on December 23 and ends after December 26. Gifts are given on Christmas Eve, and people eat on Christmas Day which is followed by sauna. A sauna is a dry steam bath that is widely popular in Finland. Saunas have a Proto-Finnish origin which dates back to 7,000 years ago. The purpose of saunas is to bathe while the heat helps with cleansing and opening up of the skin pores.



Finland In Detail

Sports

Ice hockey is the most popular sport in Finland. The Finnish main league, Liiga, has an attendance average of 4,850 people. Finland is also home to some unique and unusual sports, such as swamp football, beer-floating, reindeer racing, and air guitar.

Language

Finnish is a Uralic language of the Finnic branch, spoken by the majority of the population in Finland and by ethnic Finns outside of Finland. Finnish is one of the two official languages of Finland, the other being Swedish.

Natural Resources

- Nickel
- Cobalt
- Silver
- Titanium
- Gold
- Silver
- Copper
- Cadmium
- Zinc
- Chromium



Myths And Legends

Iku-Turso

Iku-Turso is a large sea monster. The legend of Iku-Turso traces back to the 1500s. The exact appearance is not known and depictions of the creature vary, but all accounts describe it as huge in stature and terrifying in demeanor - in fact, it has been compared to the Loch Ness Monster. Iku-Turso is a loner and a recluse and hates to be disturbed by humans.



Will-o'-Wisps

These spirits, sometimes personified in Finnish mythology as the Lempo, usually appear as balls of light hovering over lakes. While they are rumored to lead the way to treasure, they are actually evil spirits who lead people to danger. Even today they are most commonly sighted around Finnish lakes during Midsummer.

Myths And Legends

Ahti

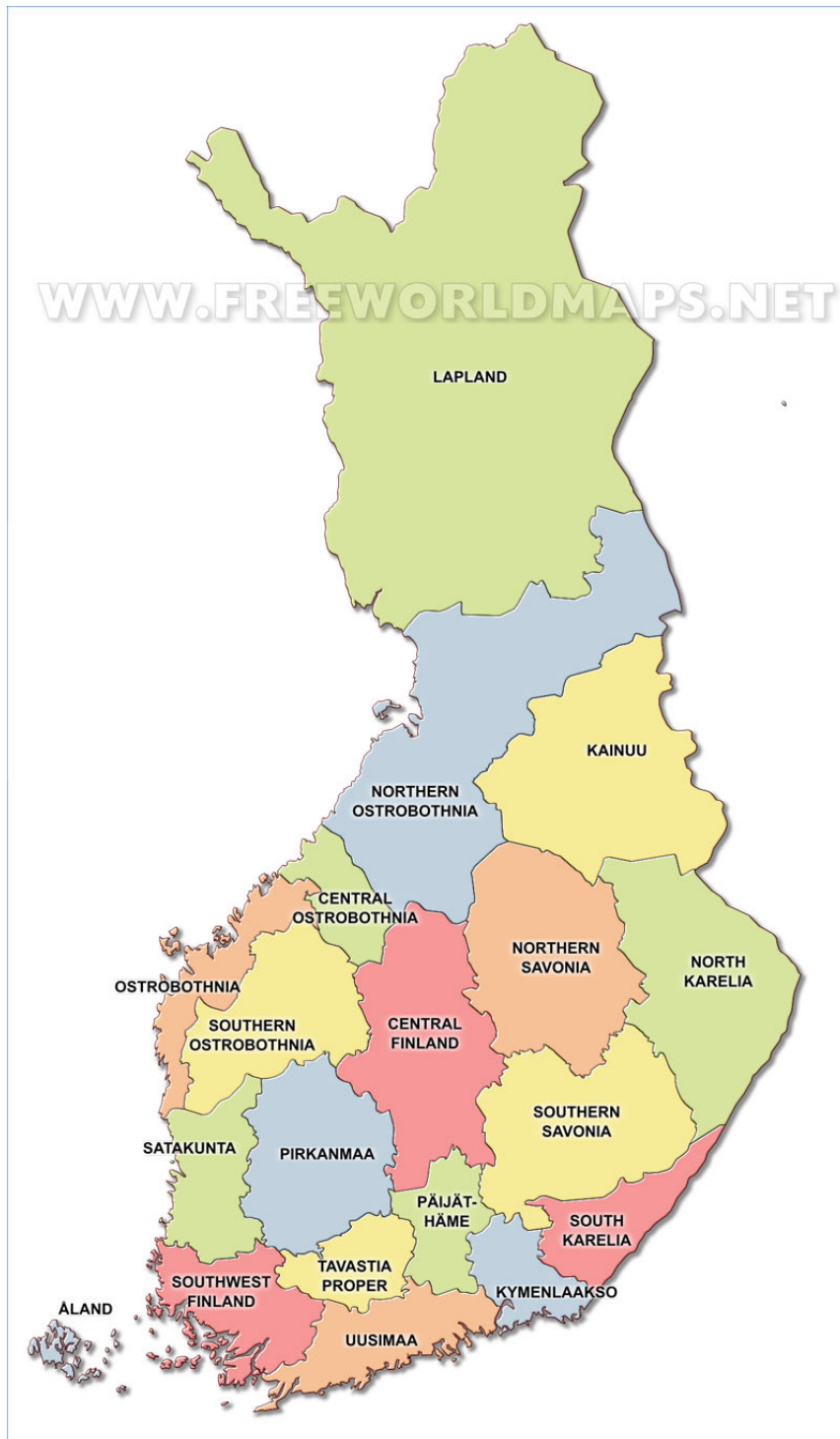
Among Finnish mythical creatures, Ahti is the king of water. Ahti is depicted in art as a bearded, muscular man wielding a trident, similar to the Greek god Poseidon. Fisherman used to pray to Ahti for good fortune on their endeavors. The wife of Ahti is Vellamo, the goddess of water, who is believed to control the winds and storms and is therefore also a favorite of fisherman. Today, the most popular brand of flavored herring in Finland is named after Ahti.



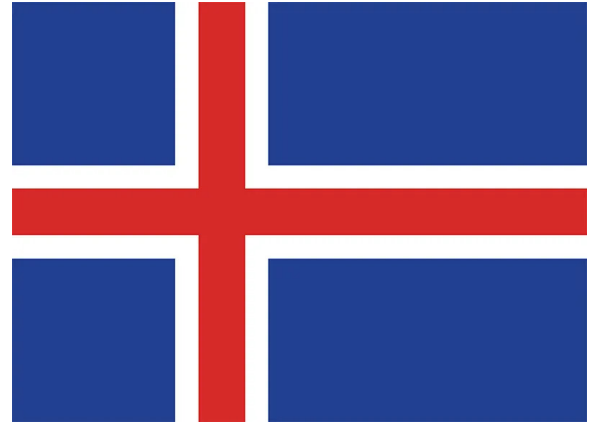
Ukko

Ukko, the god of weather and thunder is one of the most important and powerful gods in Finnish mythology. Ancient Finns considered Ukko their biggest god due to his ability to create rain, which was vitally important for the harvest season. Ukko was also believed to aid with hunting, magic and battle. The Finnish word for thunder, ukkonen, is a nod to Ukko.

In today's usage, the word ukko refers casually to a man; the baby name Ukko has gained popularity in recent years, and several locations with the word ukko in the name exist throughout Finland.



Iceland



Iceland is a Nordic island country in the North Atlantic Ocean and in the Arctic Ocean. Iceland is the most sparsely populated country in Europe. Iceland's capital and largest city is Reykjavik, which is home to about 36% of the population. Iceland is the largest part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge that rises above sea level, and its central volcanic plateau is erupting almost constantly. The interior consists of a plateau characterised by sand and lava fields, mountains, and glaciers, and many glacial rivers flow to the sea through the lowlands.



Iceland is warmed by the Gulf Stream and has a temperate climate, despite a high latitude just outside the Arctic Circle. Its high latitude and marine influence keep summers chilly, and most of its islands have a polar climate. The climate varies between different parts of the island. Generally speaking, the south coast is warmer, wetter and windier than the north. The Central Highlands are the coldest part of the country. Low-lying inland areas in the north are the aridest. Snowfall in winter is more common in the north than in the south.



According to the ancient manuscript Landnamabok, the settlement of Iceland began in 874 AD when the Norwegian chieftain Ingolf Arnarson became the first permanent settler on the island. In the following centuries, Norwegians, and to a lesser extent other Scandinavians, immigrated to Iceland, bringing with them thralls (slaves) of Gaelic origin. The island was governed as an independent commonwealth under the native parliament, the Althing, one of the world's oldest functioning legislative assemblies. Following a period of civil strife, Iceland acceded to Norwegian rule in the 13th century. The establishment of the Kalmar Union in 1397 united the kingdoms of Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Iceland thus followed Norway's integration into that union, coming under Danish rule after Sweden seceded from the union in 1523. The Danish kingdom forcefully introduced Lutheranism to Iceland in 1550.

Until the 20th century, Iceland relied largely on subsistence fishing and agriculture. Industrialization of the fisheries and Marshall Plan aid following World War II brought prosperity, and Iceland became one of the wealthiest and most developed nations in the world. It became part of the European Economic Area in 1994; this further diversified the economy into sectors such as finance, biotechnology and manufacturing.

Iceland Fun Facts

It's the Safest Country in the World

- In Iceland you don't have to worry about violent crimes. That's because the country boasts one of the lowest crime rates in the world. For over a decade now, it has always topped the safest countries list. And did you know that Iceland is the only member of NATO that maintains no standing army?!

Many Icelanders Believe in Elves

- Between 30 and 40% of Icelanders will not deny the existence of elves. Icelandic folklore is still rich with stories about the Huldurfolk, meaning "hidden people", who are said to live in the lava fields.

Iceland is Always Outnumbered

- Iceland has a population of around 375,000 people. If you count all Icelanders that have ever lived since the settlement of Iceland in the late 9th century, the population does not reach one million. If we count all the tourists as well, we've long surpassed one million. Last year alone, Iceland received almost two million travellers. So in any one year, Iceland will probably see five times its own population in tourists.

The Arctic Fox

- Iceland has but one native mammal, and it is the arctic fox. Its thick white coat changes color depending on the season, so it blends into the rugged landscape. This makes it a tricky animal to spot. The other mammals you might see in Iceland, cows, sheep, reindeer, and horses were all brought by settlers. The arctic fox is thought to have arrived on Iceland after the last Ice Age when the sea between Greenland and Scandinavia was frozen over.

You Won't Find a Big Mac

- There are only three countries in Europe that don't have McDonald's and Iceland is one of them. A lone outpost of the US burger chain operated in central Reykjavik for a few years, but the financial crisis saw its demise in 2008.



Icelandic Culture

Iceland is a Nordic country, which means it has strong ties to the ancient Vikings. Icelanders are proud of this heritage and the many customs that come along with it, particularly in terms of the language which still has close ties to the Old Norse language that would have been spoken by early Viking settlers. Aside from their Viking roots, Icelanders have a strong culture of food, literature and the arts. The capital of Reykjavik has galleries, bookstores, theatres and a symphony orchestra. In fact, Icelandic music has become its own genre, combining pop and folk. Taking in a local gig is a wonderful way to embrace the culture and atmosphere of this unique place.



There is a strong food culture in Iceland, although some of the more traditional dishes are an acquired taste. The mainstays of Icelandic cuisine are fresh, locally sourced lamb and fish dishes. Many restaurants specialize in seafood due to Iceland being surrounded by an ocean abundant with all manner of fish and shellfish. Traditional dishes such as Hákarl - fermented shark meat, are no longer in the mainstream and are typically reserved for festivals such as the midwinter festival when it is sampled with Iceland's infamous schnapps, Brennivín.

There are a number of special days in Iceland that celebrate a range of occasions. Bondadagur and Konudagur are Husband's Day and Wife's Day, which is a day to celebrate your spouse with a gift and a meal. Thorraþlot is a day that celebrates the ancient month of Thorri (mid-January to mid-February), where Icelanders will usually attend at least one feast full of delicious foods, including smoked lamb. They will also sing, play games and tell stories.

Iceland In Detail

Natural Resources

- Geothermal Energy
- Hydropower
- Natural Gas
- Petroleum
- Zinc
- Iron Ore

Sports

Popular sports include football, basketball, chess, golf, volleyball, tennis, skiing, snowboarding, but the most popular sport in the country is team handball.

Language

Icelandic is the official language in Iceland. It is an Indo-European language and belongs to the Nordic branch of the Germanic languages.



Myths And Legends

Lagarfljotsormur, The Icelandic Loch Ness Monster

Lake Lagarflot is located in the east of the country. It is actually a river flowing from the Vatnajökull glacier to the ocean. The area is quite isolated and the atmosphere around the lake is mysterious. People who live in the east of the country or those who took a flight to Reykjavik can tell you the story of the monster inhabiting its dark waters. Indeed, like in Scotland, Iceland has its own Loch Ness Monster. He calls himself Lagarfljotsormur, (the name means “the Lagarjot worm”). This monster lives in the east of the country and has been filmed more than once by the locals. There are videos of a strange and moving form in the waters of the lake.



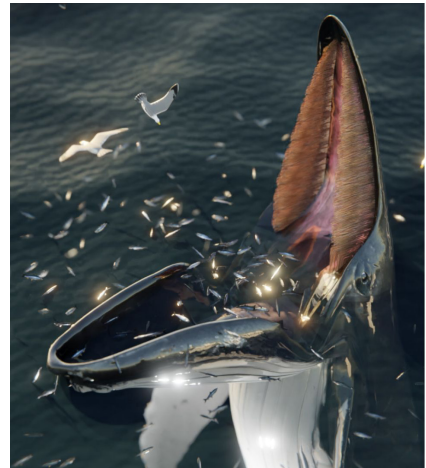
Alfhol

Wherever you are in Iceland - whether in a populated city or the middle of supernatural-seeming wilderness - you're likely to come across alfhol. These are small wooden houses people construct for the benefit of elves, who are safe to live in them. You may even see very small churches, which are created for the purpose of converting the elves to Christianity. These elf homes range from quite simple to quite elaborate, and seeing how many you can spot while you're in Iceland can be an amusing pastime.

Myths And Legends

Hafgufa

Hafgufa is a sea creature, believed to inhabit Iceland's waters (Greenland Sea) and southward towards Helluland. Although it was thought to be a sea monster, research suggests that the stories originated from a specialized feeding technique among whales known as trap-feeding. The hafgufa is mentioned in the mid-13th century Norwegian tract called the King's Mirror. According to the work, this creature uses its own vomit like chumming bait to gather prey fish, and is reported to consume even whales or ships and men, though ships merely sailed through its jaws above water, which appeared to be nothing more than rocks.

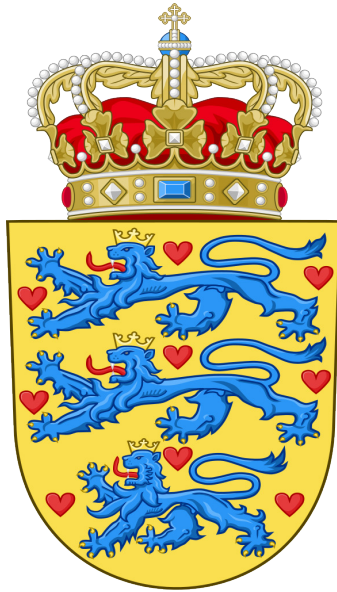


Nykur

The Nykur or Nennir is the water-horse of Iceland. It is found across the island in association with pools, lakes, ponds, rivers, and the sea, and accounts of its misdeeds date as far back as the Book of Settlements. A nykur is a horse, usually grey in color, with reversed hooves. Coat variations include dapple grey and black, but pink, white, yellow and grey with a dark streak on the back have been reported. A nykur can change shape at will; it is said to also appear as a wild, unmilkable cow with reversed hooves, or as a giant salmon or other fish.



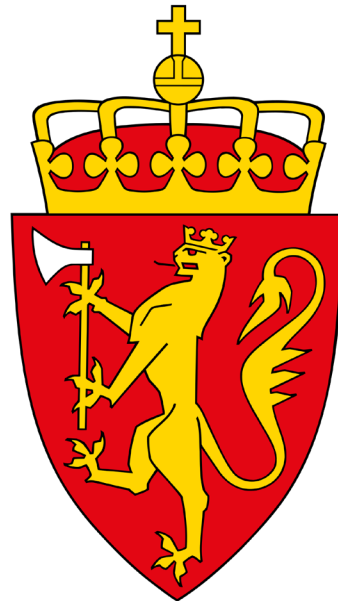
Coat of Arms



Denmark

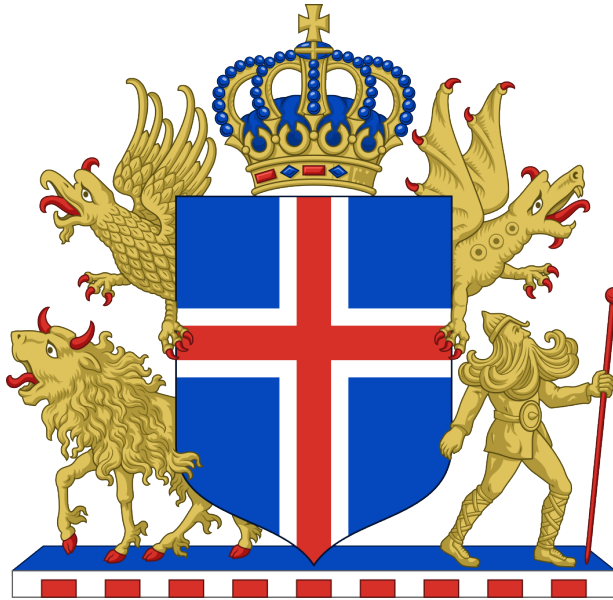


Sweden



Norway

Coat of Arms



Iceland



Finland