

NORTHERN NORWAY TROMSØ

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Human settlement in Tromsø dates back more than 10,000 years, while the local Sámi culture is at least 2,000 years old.

Enjoying the high life

The cable car takes you 1,382ft up to Mount Storsteinen, giving you a fantastic view across the city island and surrounding mountains.



The Perspektivet Museum is housed in one of the city's most beautiful wooden buildings, which was built by merchant Daniel Mack in 1838.

Buzzing arctic city that hardly ever sleeps

With its youthful vibe, cultural highlights and cool polar activities, Tromsø is the place to be. By **Polly Evans**

Tromsø is the buzzing hub of Norway's far north although, thanks to the Gulf Stream, it's not usually all that cold. Even in January, the average temperature here is a not-very-scary -4.4°C.

Given the city's location 280 miles north of the Arctic Circle the sun doesn't rise here from mid-November to mid-January, though a dusky blue twilight permeates the streets for at least a few hours each day even in the depths of winter.

Located on the island of Tromsøya off Norway's coast and surrounded by mountains and sea, Tromsø lays claim to a couple of notable "most northerlys".

It's home, for example, to the world's most northerly university, whose students inject energy into a city famous for its youthful vibe. They probably also contribute to the success of the Mack Brewery, which claims to be the world's most northerly; as well as the world's most northerly Burger King.

CITY LIFE

It may be dark in winter, but this is a city that doesn't do much sleeping. Tromsø is known for its lively café culture, especially among the painted wooden buildings of the pedestrianised Storgata Street.

Tromsø's array of high-quality restaurants draw residents (who number some 60,000, not counting the students) and visitors alike. Many specialise in local products, including Emmas Drømmekjøkken, whose menu features gourmet dishes made with far-northern ingredients. Fish fresh from the ocean is easy to come by but, should you tire of Norwegian fare, Tromsø has pasta, pizza and Thai restaurants, too.

As for Tromsø's pulsating festival scene, the Insomnia Music Festival kicks off the winter in October with a steamy blast of electronic and techno.

Mid-January sees the arrival of the Tromsø International

Perfect package

Experience the Northern Lights at the luxurious Lyngen Lodge on the banks of the Lyngen fjord, 2 hrs 45 mins by road from Tromsø.

In a secluded spot far from light pollution, the witness the Lights from the lodge's large panoramic viewing platform from which you can enjoy a 360-degree view over the Lyngen Fjord and Alps, which stretch more than 100 km.

The pine lodge has eight ensuite bedrooms, a dining room serving locally sourced cuisine, lounge with open fire, library/seminar room, sauna and outdoor hot tub.

A three-night full-board stay includes dog-sledding, snowshoeing and an expert presentation on aurora facts and Northern Lights photography. Price per person: 7,695 NOK (approx £826).

● To book, e-mail: info@lyngnelodge.com or call 0047 47 62 78 53 quoting promotion code: LyngenLodgeAurora

Film Festival: in 2012 more than 50,000 tickets were sold, making this Norway's biggest film festival. In addition to indoor venues across the city, a snow screen is set up in the main square.

Also in January comes the Nordlysfestivalen – a music festival featuring opera, jazz, chamber and choral music.

As the major city of Norway's north, Tromsø is energetic in promoting the International Day of the Sámi People on February 6 each year. The week-long celebration features a market in the town square selling Sámi handicrafts, Sámi language lessons in the library, Sámi concerts and exhibitions, lasso-throwing contests and reindeer racing down the main street.

SIGHTSEEING IN TROMSØ

If the weather's being unkind to you, Tromsø has a wide range of indoor attractions. One of the city's most popular sights is the glass-fronted Arctic Cathedral.

Dedicated in 1965, it was the creation of architect Jan Inge Hovig, while the dazzling glass mosaic on the cathedral's eastern side was designed by Victor Sparre.

Those wanting more in the way of Norwegian art will be keen to visit the Art Museum of Northern Norway, whose exhibits date from the early 19th century to the present, and the Tromsø Gallery of Contemporary Art.

For history buffs the Polar Museum celebrates the grit and derring-do of Norwegian polar explorers such as Roald Amundsen (who first negotiated the Northwest Passage and then beat Scott to the South Pole) and Fridtjof Nansen. There are also exhibitions about the whaling industry and notable individuals such as trapper Henry Rudi, who killed 713 polar bears.

The history of Tromsø is covered by the Perspektivet Museum, while the Tromsø University Museum covers



northern culture, history and wildlife. Its Aurora Explained exhibition relates the science behind the Northern Lights as well as creating a genuine aurora inside a plasma chamber.

The science theme is continued at the Science Centre of Northern Norway, which gives educational displays on arctic-related topics from energy and climate to the

Northern Lights. The museum has a planetarium theatre with daily films about the aurora, astronomy and sea creatures of the dinosaur age. Modern-day marine beasts can be seen at Polaria, where bearded seals reside in the aquarium.

For panoramic views across the city, Tromsø's cable car departs every 30 minutes throughout the year. It's only a four-minute trip, but from the

top you can see over the city's roofs to the surrounding islands and fjords – simply spectacular.

Where to stay? Clarion Hotel Bryggen is one of Northern Norway's most stylish hotels. It enjoys a quayside location in the heart of Tromsø with views of the inner harbour, the Arctic Cathedral and Mount Tromsdalstindens and provides easy access to everything

The art of arctic glass-blowing

Watch the world's northernmost glass-blowers at the Blåst Glass Blowing Hut, housed in the same building as the Mack Brewery in Storgata Street.



A Sámi lavvo is a temporary dwelling which has a design similar to a Native American tipi but is less vertical and more stable in high winds.

Big foot

Historians believe that snowshoes were invented around 4,000 to 6,000 years ago, and evolved to mimic the oversized feet of arctic animals.



The husky is intelligent, good-natured and born to run – making it the ideal animal for dog-sledding across the snowy landscapes of the north.



Tromsø has to offer and the Airport Express Bus stops 100m from the hotel's entrance.

IN SEARCH OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Tromsø sits right beneath the auroral oval – the ring around the North Pole inside which the Lights exhibit. Aurora viewing is therefore big business in the town during the winter months.

The best time of day to see the aurora around Tromsø is between 6pm and midnight; the sky must be dark and clear of cloud, and for optimum viewing conditions you need to travel outside the city so that your view is not obscured by artificial light. Your best bet, then, is to take an excursion.

Arctic Guide Service (www.arcticguideservice.com/tromsoproducts.html) offers a Northern Lights chase by bus. Leaving every evening at 6.30pm from the Rica Ishavshotel, your expert driver and guide take you wherever the chances to admire the aurora are best.

Other options include a cruise aboard the catamaran MB Havcruise. Your hosts provide a Norwegian fish dinner and motor just 30 minutes out of Tromsø to an ocean location that's excellent for Lights viewing.

Back on land, there are various road trips that head out in search of the Lights. With Guide Gunnar you can choose to snowshoe during your trip, or include dinner, or a night in a Sámi *lavvo*.

Professional photographer and astronomy enthusiast Kjetil Skogli takes small groups and his itineraries are flexible and adventurous. Keen photographers might also consider a trip with Creative Vacations. The tour includes a photography workshop and tripod loan.

Northern delights: clockwise from left, Tromsø has a colourful café culture; aurora borealis lights up the sky above the city; the glass-fronted Arctic Cathedral

Only small groups are catered for, so everyone from beginners to more advanced photographers can benefit from instruction.

For a cultural twist with your light show, you can take a trip to a Sámi lavvo where coffee and cake are served.

Active aurora-hunters might like to try dog-sledding beneath the stars – and, hopefully, the aurora. Arctic Adventure Tours and Tromsø Villmarkssenter both offer night-time mushing trips, while Lyngsfjord Adventure leads evening dog-sled excursions as well as snowmobiling, reindeer-sledding and snowshoeing beneath the stars.

You can also spend the night at Lyngsfjord's camp, either in a Sámi lavvo or a cabin. All three companies include transfers to and from central Tromsø.

With Tromsø Adventure you have to spend the night out of town; activities include snowmobiling, huskies, reindeer and perhaps even the Northern Lights.

For experienced off-piste skiers, Lyngen Lodge (www.lyngenlodge.com) offers six-day ski touring holidays on the Lyngen Peninsula and surrounding islands led by qualified UIAGM guides. After skiing untracked snow each day, you'll return to the comfort of the luxurious lodge for fine dining and relaxation. Other activities on offer include dog and horse sledding, snowshoeing, sea safaris and photography courses (also see "Perfect package" panel, far left). Far away from city lights, Lyngen Lodge is also beautifully positioned to experience the aurora borealis.

For more information, go to www.visitnorway.co.uk www.northernnorway.com and www.visittromso.no/en

Light show from a private cabin



On the shores of Kattfjord, 18 miles west of Tromsø, sit the six log cabins of Lauklines Kystferie. Each has three bedrooms and all mod cons including WiFi, satellite TV and dishwasher – but it's not for these that visitors come. This is prime Northern Lights viewing territory.

Watch them from the privacy of your terrace, or choose from a number of excursions: an evening cruise around the local fishing villages; dog-sledding and snowmobile outings; or a Jeep trip during which a guide relates the legends surrounding the aurora.

As for how to fill the daylight hours, there are cross-country skiing and snowshoeing outings while kick sleds and toboggans are available for hire and you can go snorkelling in the Barents Sea. Later in the season, from March to April, angling aficionados can go in search of skrei (spawning cod).

Local suppliers will deliver meals to your cabin, or there's the quayside restaurant Sjøtun Brygge, which specialises in local fare. Your group can also book exclusive use of the sauna followed by an invigorating roll in the snow. You might even get to see the aurora dancing overhead.

For more information or to book, visit www.lauklines.no

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