

NORDIC SUMMER BLISS

A pilgrimage of peace through nature, culture & never-ending light



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ASHIFUL ISLAM
The Nordic summer stretches time -- golden evenings linger, and under the glow of the Midnight Sun, every moment feels both eternal and fleeting. Nature speaks here: birch trees whisper in the breeze, and glacier-fed rivers carve silver paths through the land. With endless daylight, life feels boundless.

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It is a blended programme for students from different universities in the Nordic region. The concept was unique -- learning through movement, reflection, and dialogue, while immersed in nature.

Though I've travelled across Europe, this felt different. It was raw, real, and deeply human. Our course coordinator, Jack Shephar, shared a detailed schedule, packing list, and weather expectations. As I packed my hiking shoes, waterproof jacket, and a heart full of curiosity, I sensed this 580-kilometre hike through forests, fjords, and cultural sites would explore more than landscapes; it would explore peace itself.

We connected via a WhatsApp group, sharing travel updates, tips, and excitement. Our meeting point was Östersund, a charming lakeside town. After arriving on the night train, I checked into our hostel and later joined the group at Mid Sweden University. We were 17 students from 9 countries. Introductions turned into friendships over a welcome dinner that set the tone for the journey ahead.

On Day 1, we walked 18km through forests, rivers, and historic battlefields. We had our first group discussion beside 6,000-year-old rock carvings that whispered tales of early Nordic civilisations. The quiet countryside helped us rediscover forgotten sounds -- the rustle of trees, flowing water, and bird chirpings -- and how deeply they can soothe the mind.

We had lunch at a riverside home hosted by a couple passionate about history. We spent the night at a horse ranch, dining on a balcony with a postcard perfect view.

Our days followed a rhythm: breakfast at hostels, packed lunches, and evening dinners at new stays.

On Day 2, a 25 km stretch took us through forests once walked by Swedish and Norwegian troops. In Bleckäsen, we paused at a monument built to mark a rare event -- two warring sides choosing peace over bloodshed. It reminded us that peace is always a choice.

We stopped in a handmade chocolate factory for lunch and toured it to learn how this small factory

contributed to the community. Soon, the hike became a walking conversation. Our conversations covered everything from protest movements and democratic interference to trade embargoes and conflict resolution.

As we neared Åre, the terrain changed. Mountains came into view, the air got crisper. Jack led a discussion on limits and possibilities of hospitality -- a fitting topic for a town known for its warm welcome.

We spent a free evening exploring restaurants and watching the European Cup in a sports bar, bonding over football and mocktails.

Saturday brought our final major hike -- 18 km to Norway via Tännforsen, Sweden's largest waterfall. Crossing the border felt surreal

-- an invisible line dividing two countries with deep historical roots. Coordinator Dimitri guided a discussion on borders and their implications around the world. A small lake marked the division between countries, crossed by a simple bridge. In the peaceful Nordic region, there are no border checks or tension.

In Sul, nestled by the lake that separates Sweden and Norway, we had lunch before a short bus ride to Stiklestad, the site of King Olaf II's fall in 1030. We reflected on WWII memorials and modern conflicts. A quiet moment gripped us as we discussed the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

The final 11 km to Trondheim felt symbolic -- each step a connection to history, nature, and each other. As

Nidaros Cathedral's spires appeared, emotion welled up. This was the northernmost pilgrimage destination on Earth. Inside, we received our diplomas, but the true reward was the transformation within.

Trondheim's coastal beauty was breathtaking -- sea, mountains, and lush greenery everywhere. An instructor, Suniva, sang a Viking song as we crossed the coast, and a museum visit deepened our understanding of Nordic heritage. That evening, we celebrated with a cultural night filled with songs, dances, and food.

Leaving Trondheim felt like waking from a dream. The trail had brought peace of mind, and now, after the end of it, we were returning to life's daily chaos. Yet, something had shifted within us. I'll never forget the views from the windows -- adorned with pottery and family photos -- of the houses we passed during the trail.

In a world full of noise, walking in silence, having honest conversations, and syncing with nature feels transforming. This journey taught me that peace isn't just a destination -- it's a daily choice, created step by step.

If you're longing for a transformative experience blending history, nature, and inner peace, consider a Nordic summer walk. With the right documents and a solid plan, getting a Schengen visa isn't too difficult. A week-long trip typically costs between BDT 120,000-150,000, excluding flights and visa fees.

Let your steps lead you to peace -- one footfall at a time.

