FINNMARK
– where dreams become reality
Finnmark county is both the northernmost and easternmost county in the country. The county has the largest area and smallest population of all Norwegian counties. Most of the land in Finnmark (95%) was formerly owned by the state; in July 2006 the land was transferred to the Finnmark Property Administration. Nordkapp (North Cape) is traditionally considered to be the northernmost point in Europe; however, Kinarrodden on the Nordkyn peninsula is actually the northernmost point on the mainland. The most easterly point is Hornøya in Vardø municipality. Finnmark borders Troms county, the Arctic Ocean, Barents Sea, Finland and Russia.

The county is divided into 19 municipalities (see map in centre pages). Six of these are designated town municipalities: Alta (received town status in 2001), Sar-Varaeng (municipal centre Kirkenes - received town status in 1998), Nordkapp (municipal centre Honningsvåg - received town status in 1996), Vadsø (1833), Hammerfest (1789) and Vardø (1789). The largest communities in terms of population are Alta, Hammerfest and Kirkenes. The county seat is Vadsø, where the state and county administration is located. Finnmark is synonymous with large distances; however, communications are good. There are several daily flights from Oslo to Kirkenes and Oslo-Alta. There is also a network of flights between the 11 airports in the county.

The Hurtigruten (coastal ship) calls daily at 11 ports in Finnmark and catamarans and buses connect the various communities, in addition to an excellent road network.
The special blue winter light in Finnmark has to be experienced.

Photo: Trond Magne Henriksen

Nature in Finnmark

The magnificent nature in Finnmark is extremely varied and ranges from mountains to oceans, plains, forests and rivers. There are a total of five national parks in the county. Along the coast, the landscape is often Arctic in character and the ocean has a rich birdlife. The peninsulas in the east, especially Varanger, have large barren areas without vegetation, which can rightly be called “stone deserts”. Further to the west, the landscape takes on an alpine character, with peaks, cirques and glaciers.

The fjords remain ice-free during the winter, due to the effect of the Gulf Stream. Here you will find shoreline pastures with Arctic vegetation. These areas attract many species of wetland birds.

In the fjords, there are characteristic mountain birch forests, and alpine plants grow all the way down to the shore, often alongside other typical shoreline plants. The shoreline vegetation is also home to many eastern plant species.

Finnmark has some of the Europe’s finest salmon rivers. In the valleys of Tana, Alta and Pasvik, you will find some of the most important agricultural areas. The world’s most northerly pine forests grow in Stabbursdalen National Park. The pine forests in the upper part of Tana, along Karasjok and Andråchka are part of the vast Finnish forests, whilst the pine forest in Pasvik is part of the Russian taiga.

These are the most important winter areas for moose and the core areas for brown bears.

The Finnmark plain has dry, undulating, hilly terrain with lichen, heather and sparse birch forests, accompanied by wetlands and marshes. In the wetland areas, many species of wading birds, ducks, geese and Whooper Swans gather to nest. The southern lakes are rich in fish such as pike, European whitefish and perch. Arctic char and trout are also widespread throughout the county. The Finnmark plain is also the winter area for reindeer. Finnmark does not have any wild stocks of reindeer.

Because of the climate, there are no snakes or ticks in Finnmark; however, the Finnmark mosquito is infamous. There are mosquitoes in certain areas of the county, especially near wetlands and even more so in inland areas. On the coast, there is generally a breeze in the air, which keeps the mosquitoes at bay.

The mosquito season usually begins at the end of June and diminishes in August. Horseflies are also found in forest areas.

It is true that bears, lynx, wolverines and wolves inhabit Finnmark; however there is no truth in the rumour that they are to be found in everyone’s garden! Another myth is that polar bears wander the streets. The last polar bear that was observed in Finnmark paid a quick visit to Lille-Ekkerøy in Varanger fjord in 1953, before it was shot.

The cloudberry is the county flower.

Photo: Finnmark County municipality
You can find cave/rock paintings in several places in Finnmark – the ones shown are at Hjemmeluft in Alta.

Photo: Petter B. Straumann/Finnmark Rese liv AS

The original and today’s inhabitants

People have lived in Finnmark for over 10 000 years and there are many traces of settlements and grave sites from former times. In Alta there is a World Heritage Centre and the famous rock paintings that are an element of expression of magical and religious rituals.

Norwegian, Sámi, Finnish and Kven

It is difficult to date exactly, however we know that Sámi culture goes back at least 2 000 years. Sápmi (or Sámi land) encompasses four land boundaries; Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway. The majority of Sámi live in Norway. The Sámi languages and dialects have the same origin; however, over time these have developed in different directions.

Finnmark has had a permanent Norwegian population from the 1200s. The first church was consecrated in 1307 in Vardø, around the same time that Vardøhus fort was constructed. Rich fishing resources and excellent markets led to an increase in Norwegian and Northern European immigration.

The immigrants from Finland and Sweden in the 1700 and 1800s, created the Finnish culture that still lives on in Finnmark, especially in the eastern part of the county (Vadsø, Bugøynes). Some still speak the Finnish language, and Finnish family names are common.

The War and reconstruction

The Second World War had a major impact on Finnmark. The Allies bombed large urban areas in Kirkenes, Vadsø and Vardø. In the final phase of the war, extensive areas were razed to the ground. When the Germans were forced to retreat by the advance of the Russian armies in 1944, they resorted to “scorched earth tactics”. More than 10 000 dwellings, schools, hospitals and churches were burned. In addition, most of the fishing fleet was scuppered. Approximately two thirds of the population was forcibly evacuated to the south.

The major battles in the north mainly took place in Nordland and Troms; however, between Kirkenes and Murmansk, the fighting was especially fierce. After major losses on the Litsa front, the German forces retreated and the Russian armies freed Finnmark from occupation. The Russian armies then withdrew from Finnmark, in accordance with agreements with the Norwegian authorities.

The Partisans were Norway’s first specialist troops and were mainly recruited from the Kiberg area and from among other Communist sympathisers in Northern Norway. These entered the Russian northern fleet in 1941–1944. The heroic efforts of the Partisans are regarded as being on a par with those of Linge Company; however, as they served under Russian command, national recognition for their services was not achieved before 1992.

In the spring and summer of 1945, most of those who had been evacuated returned to the north.

The authorities wished to regulate the reconstruction of the county, but only partly succeeded in doing so. There was a general lack of supplies and materials, but the people wanted to return to their home towns and villages, and wished to build new homes where they had previously lived. Most places throughout the county are characterised by typical post-war architecture. Some places were not reconstructed at all after the War.

Finnmark today

After the millennium, the population of Finnmark has, on the whole, declined; however, after 2007 there has been a slight increase. The main reason for the increase is the favourable ratio of births/deaths and immigration.
The Finnmark Race is world famous and generates great enthusiasm throughout the county.

Photo: Reiulf Grannevik

A major factor for the well-being of many in Finnmark is the excellent recreational opportunities. Despite the fact that we live in the far north, we can have warm summer days, especially in inland areas. When the weather is fine, bathing is a popular pastime. The dark season, or the “blue period” lasts from mid-November until the end of January. The temperature can drop to as low as minus 40 Celsius in inner Finnmark.

For the rest of the year there are many opportunities to enjoy nature, such as fishing, hunting, skiing, hiking or berry picking.

In Finnmark hunting is mainly for species such as ptarmigan, hare or moose. The ptarmigan terrain in the county is renowned and each autumn, hunters from all over the country come to take part in the annual ptarmigan hunt. The moose stocks are robust, and there is a great deal of competition for hunting permits.

Finnmark is well-known for its salmon rivers – among them the Tana and Alta river courses. There are more than 60 000 fishing lakes as well as many smaller rivers rich with trout, Arctic char and salmon.
11 airports
11 ports of call for the Hurtigrute
4 230 km of roads

Mean temperature

Normal precipitation

Population: 01.01.2010:

Alta municipality
3 846 km²
Pop. 18 680

Berlevåg municipality
1 122 km²
Pop. 1 044

Båtsfjord municipality
1 431 km²
Pop. 2 070

Gamvik municipality
1 431 km²
Pop. 1 009

Hammerfest municipality
844 km²
Pop. 9 724

Hasvik municipality
535 km²
Pop. 934

Karasjok municipality
5 450 km²
Pop. 2 789

Kautokeino municipality
9 687 km²
Pop. 2 949

Kvalsund municipality
1 850 km²
Pop. 1 026

Lebesby municipality
3 262 km²
Pop. 1 342

Loppa municipality
695 km²
Pop. 1 087

Måsøy municipality
1 255 km²
Pop. 1 267

Nesseby municipality
1 438 km²
Pop. 884

Nordkapp municipality
924 km²
Pop. 3 185

Porsanger municipality
4 901 km²
Pop. 3 991

Sør-Varanger municipality
3 970 km²
Pop. 9 738

Tana municipality
4 045 km²
Pop. 2 912

Vadsø municipality
1 252 km²
Pop. 6 202

Verde municipality
585 km²
Pop. 2 124
Sport

Finnmark has long and diverse sporting traditions. The county has fostered many sporting talents in such diverse sports as skiing, football, handball, swimming and wrestling. In Finnmark there are other types of sport that are perhaps less usual in other parts of the country – snowmobile racing, reindeer driving and dog sledding. The Finnmark Race is Europe’s longest and the world’s northernmost dog sledding race. In eastern Finnmark, where there are expansive, flat plains and the wind is very favourable, kiting is becoming an increasingly popular activity.

Sporting facilities such as swimming/football arenas and floodlit ski trails are all easily accessible and represent an important factor in the well-being of the population during the winter months.

Education

Finnmark has a comprehensive education system, from primary and secondary schools, further education, non-degree colleges, to technical colleges and university colleges. Finnmark University College is located in Alta and offers a wide range of study programs. In Kautokeino, the Sámi Allaskuva/Sámi University College, in cooperation with Tromsø University, offers decentralised studies in a wide range of subjects. Learning through local cooperation with business (LOSA), is a system aimed at students in further education and has a decentralised structure, in which much of the teaching is carried out via video/audio studios.

Health and social sector

In addition to a well-organised health and dental system, Finnmark also has two state hospitals, one in Kirkenes and another in Hammerfest.

There is a specialist medical centre in Karasjok, children’s and adolescent psychiatric institution, as well as addiction treatment centres in several locations.

The county has excellent hospital facilities.
Finnmark has a rich cultural life. Elements of Sámi art and culture make the county unique in a national perspective. Professional artists, amateurs, societies and associations contribute to a wide and varied scope of cultural activities.

The county has many active designers and creators of arts and crafts, and Sámi handicrafts — duodji — has strong traditions.

Finnmark has an active singing and music milieu. Scene Finnmark has professional musicians in various locations throughout the county — these represent an important factor in the cooperation with local artists.

The festival scene in the county is exciting and varied, with approximately 50 festivals taking place throughout the year. Among the most well known are the Sámi Easter Festival in Kautokeino and Karasjok, Midnattsrocken in Lakselv, the Varanger International Jazz Festival and King Crab Festival in Vadsø, Nordkapp Film Festival and Barents Spektakel in Kirkenes.

Revues and amateur theatre have firm roots in the county. Beavvå Sámi theatre has been established in Kautokeino. There are also independent theatres and dance groups throughout Finnmark — for example, the Samovarteatret in Kirkenes, Stellaris Dans/Theater in Hammerfest and Teaterfabriken in Vadsø.

Hålogaland Theatre in Tromsø and the Norwegian National Theatre visit the county annually on tour.
Economic advantages in the north

There are a number of economic advantages in living and working in the far north of the country. Some of these advantages apply to private individuals and others are aimed at companies located in Finnmark or North Troms. This is due to the decision by the Stortinget in 1990 to establish a separate Enterprise Zone for Finnmark and North Troms.

The company-oriented initiatives provide good framework conditions for both established and new companies. Most businesses do not have to pay employer’s national insurance contributions and there is no duty payable on electricity consumption.

The person-oriented initiatives offer special advantages to inhabitants of Finnmark in the form of lower taxes, increased child allowances and annual subsidies on student loans. This particular initiative is considered to be Norway’s best private economic arrangement. At www.finnmark.no you can read more about the economic advantages of living in the north.

Business and employment

Finnmark is extremely rich in resources, both in the ocean and on land. The utilisation and export of the energy and marine resources in the Barents Sea means a great deal in terms of jobs and settlement in the north. Reindeer farming and agriculture are also important industries. The proximity to extremely rich resources and raw materials has contributed to the increase in businesses focusing on branded food products. The fisheries industry is the cornerstone for settlement along the coast of Finnmark. The fishing fleet is varied, with both small craft and larger vessels.

Reindeer farming is of decisive importance for Sámi culture and identity. In Finnmark, more than 2,000 persons are involved in reindeer farming. This number has remained stable, even though the actual number of operating units and number of reindeer has been reduced.

Finnmark is one of Europe’s most exciting travel destinations. Among other places, the North Cape has been an important destination for tourists for hundreds of years. The county’s unique nature and culture offer both opportunities and challenges for the tourism industry, which has as its vision: “Finnmark shall be an attractive year-round destination with a clear and unified profile based on Arctic nature and culture”. Therefore, it has been very important to focus on developing winter tourism, in addition to the main summer season.

Finnmark is regarded as one of Norway’s most important growth areas for the coming decade. This is due to the geographical proximity to rich energy resources. Statoil’s LPG facility just outside of Hammerfest is one of the first installations. Vast amounts of natural gas are brought onshore and cooled in the world’s northernmost and northern Europe’s first export plant for LPG.

There is also major export potential within the fish farming industry, both in the allocation of new licences for salmon farming and in the efforts being made in farming other marine species such as shellfish and whitefish. Mining enterprises are in operation at Bjørnevatn in Sør-Varanger, Stjerneøya in Alta and in Tana. The mines extract ore, nephelene syenite, Alta slate and quartzite. The interest in mineral mining is also great in other areas.
Finnmark’s geographical location close to the Barents Sea, with Russia and the EU country of Finland as its closest neighbours, puts the county in a special position. History shows that the county lies close to an important and strategic military and security-sensitive area. It is now also attractive in respect of its resources. Finnmark, along with the border areas in Finland, Sweden and Russia, is the main geographical area for Sámi people.

The establishment of the Barents Region, the EEA agreement and Finland and Sweden’s entry into the EU has changed important framework conditions. Traditionally, Finnmark county municipality has had an international engagement in the North Calotte and a bilateral cooperation with the administrations in Murmansk and Arkhangelsk.

The cooperation within the Barents Region and participation in the EU INTERREG programmes has contributed to sound and lasting solutions. Finnmark, in a way, controls its own foreign policies and has gained acceptance for this from central authorities.

The northern regions are regions of opportunity. The regional-political work in Finnmark has a strong international dimension, which, among other things, became apparent when Norway and Russia reached an agreement on the so-called demarcation line in the Barents Sea in the spring of 2010.

It is also in this image that the motto “Finnmark – where dreams become reality” is most suitable – both for the community and for the people who wish to live here.