

Arctic Sweden 'Skiing the Kungsladen', by Charlie Fisher

Our trip to the Abisko national park has been on my wish list for several years, and so when we had a very disappointing winter here in Germany and in the alps, I decided to take my two teenagers beyond the arctic circle, where snow conditions ought to be reliable. Nevertheless we were shocked to see so little white landscape from the plane on the way up to Kiruna (time commitments prevented us from taking the overnight train from Stockholm).

Whereas many people choose to take the Abisko Kebnekaise route and depart from there via Nikkoluokta, we instead left our luggage and civvies in Abisko youth hostel, and skied to Kebnekaise and back over 11 days. All STF huts were booked in advance and when the weather disrupted our plans, the wardens spoke with each other so that the bookings all remained valid – a great system.

We also hired our entire skiing kit from Abisko, to avoid having to coordinate transport for skis and boots. The package gives an option on full or half skins - we opted for the latter as we were not expecting to attempt any steeper mountains.



Setting off with about 15kg each on our backs was hard at first, uphill through the woods – both my kids are used only to unburdened track skiing. We needed the first day to get used to it, but as the second day produced a big storm, we were only in action again on the third day.

Thereafter we headed south along the main route, reaching Kebnekaise on day 6, only to find that there was hardly any snow, and skiers and snowmobiles alike were having to search out the thinnest strips of snow to reach the hotel.

We were told that those going on down to Nikkoluokta were having to walk part of the way, between two snowmobiles coming from opposite directions.



The journey back to Abisko was in part identical, but we built in two detours. The absolute highlight of the trip was Nallo and the valleys we skied in and out. Nallo was easily our favourite hut. And at the end of the trip we went West to Unna Allakas, right on the Norwegian border. From there our last day was a big one, 39km due North along the border - and a big mistake, as the afternoon was spent in the company of hundreds of snowmobiles (the route being both in Sweden, where snowmobiles are allowed, and outside the national park). An extra day returning to Abisko would have been more sensible.

What would we do differently next time?

We would avoid Kebnekaise altogether, our wish for a bit of luxury was dampened by the somewhat shabby feel of the place – and hut saunas mean you can get a decent scrub. Also Kebnekaise is so much lower down that snow cover will be an issue. Instead we would either spend more time in the central huts such as Tjälka and Nallo, and explore from there. Another option is to head out further south as some groups did. And yet another option would be to head across into Norway, finishing near Narvik or at one of the stations to get the train back to Abisko. And finally, I would also be interested to try the trip sharing a pulk, as this would give more options on food (hut supplies were limited for vegetarians). All in all, Abisko is definitely an option for an Easter trip (when Norwegian huts are full, and the Swedes are winding down after a busy March).

Charlie Fischer – April 2025