

Two sides of the same border

The Norwegian-Finnish-Russian border has a rich history, dating back to the 18th century when the border between Sweden (which ruled Finland) and Denmark-Norway was established. In 1751, a treaty was signed between the two countries to define their border, and field investigations and negotiations were conducted between 1738-1751 to finalize the details. Cairns were erected to mark the border, and the Sami people were granted the right to cross the border freely with their reindeer, which they had been doing for centuries.

When Finland became part of the Russian Empire, a new treaty was negotiated in 1816 between Russia and Sweden-Norway to define the border. In 1852, the border between Norway-Finland/Russia was closed, causing trouble for the Sami people who needed access to the Finnish forests for their reindeer to graze during the winter.

Today, the Norway-Finland border is 736 kilometers long and is marked by a concrete cairn on the western tripoint where both countries border Sweden, and a stone cairn on the eastern tripoint where both countries border Russia. Both Norway and Finland are part of the Schengen Area, which allows for legal border crossings without customs declarations or passport checks. A treaty between the two countries gives customs officers the right to carry out clearance and checks for both countries.

Along the land border in forest areas, there is an 8-meter wide clear-cut zone, and nearly half of the border follows the Anarjohka and Tana rivers. The western part of the border goes over treeless mountains, and the eastern end of Norway, which includes the town of Kirkenes, is located between Finland and Russia and extends beyond the Finnish border. Overall, the Norwegian-Finnish-Russian border has a unique and interesting history and continues to serve as an important connection between these neighboring countries.

The border between Norway and Russia consists of a 195-kilometre land border between Sør-Varanger, Norway, and Pechengsky District, Russia, and a 23-kilometre sea border in the Varangerfjord. The Garrison of Sør-Varanger patrols the Norwegian side, while the Border Guard Service of Russia patrols the Russian side. Two-thirds



of the border follows the Pasvik River and the Jakobs River. Despite the lengthy border, there is only one legal crossing point at Storskog in Norway and Borisoglebsky in Russia on the E105 highway, Europe's northernmost road crossing. Other crossing points exist, but they are not open to the public.

Map: The Barents Observer

Border regulations



On the Russian side, a barbed-wired fence with sensors stretches all the way from the Barents Sea and the Gulf of Finland. The fence is placed between 0 and 5 kilometres from the border, and within lies the Border Security Zone. No civilian can access the area.

Russian side of the border. A barbed wire fence defines the Border Security Zone. Photo: Thomas Nilsen, The Barents Observer¹

There are no physical hindrances on the Norwegian side, and civilians can move freely in the border area. It is permitted to operate vessels and fish in the two border rivers.

¹ The Independent Observer (2023) "Norwegian Border Guards". Retrieved from <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/content/norwegian-border-guards> (26.04.2023).

All vessels must be registered; registration plates must be mounted on both sides of the boat, and activities are only permitted in daylight. Still, fishing and boating is only allowed on the Norwegian side of the river; however, in the narrow passages of Pasvikelva, one can travel through on the Russian side as long as you don't stop the boat. Border buoys in the river mark the borderline.²

Barbed-wired fence vs King Crab Safari

The Norwegian border regulations allow the tourist industry to benefit from the unique arctic nature and invite people to visit the border area. "Border Safari" has become an attraction in the border town, Kirkenes:

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Riverboat King Crab E-Bike

Riverboat Safari
King Crab Safari
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Quad Safari

Riverboat Safari to Boris Gleb - an icon of the Norwegian border history. You'll learn that the cultural history of the Laplanders and the Orthodox church are closely connected to the border area. You'll be as close to the border that you can almost touch it!

King Crab Safari by riverboat to Boris Gleb. Meet and eat the King crab from our crab pots. We serve you fresh King Crab with white wine, cloudberry with cream, followed by coffee or tea.

Quad Safari to the Norwegian border at Skafferhullet, a former border crossing point, from where we can observe a Russian dwelling and a Russian chapel. At today's border crossing between Russia & Norway, Storskog, we will have a break with coffee/tea.

Quad Safari to the Pasvik Valley. After starting into the Siberian Taiga Forest we stop at a bear's cave and visit the Hight 96, where we can have a look at the Russian city Nikel. Then will we drive to Svanvik, where we visit the Øvre Pasvik National Park Center, the Svanvik Chapel, and the border river between Norway and Russia.

King Crab Safari Daily

Barentssafari is one of the companies offering unique border experiences to tourists visiting the north of Norway. Illustration: Retrieved from the companies webpage³

² Politiet (2023). "The Norwegian-Russian Border". Retrieved from <https://www.politiet.no/en/english/the-norwegian-russian-border/#Travel-only-allowed-when-daylight> (26.04.2023).

³ <http://www.barentssafari.no/en/home/> (26.04.2023).

As Kirkenes is also the end point of the famous coastal voyage "Hurtigruten," international tourists are a common sight in this small town, making the differences between the two sides of the same border even more significant.

Nevertheless, contrasts are fascinating and trigger people's curiosity, so the thought of the barbed-wired fence on the other side of the border could be what gives the river safari the extra touch. Hence serving multiple purposes.