

The Sámi

There are about 60-70,000 Sámi people in the world: about 17,000 in Sweden, about 7,500 in Finland and about 2,000 in Russia. There are about 40,000 Sámi people in Norway. Most of them live north of Saltfjellet or in larger cities such as Oslo.

An indigenous people

The Sámi are an indigenous people, which means that the Sámi have lived in the northern parts of Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia for a very long time. They lived there long before the borders between the countries were drawn.

Indigenous peoples often have a distinct culture that is different from the rest of the country where they live. There are many other indigenous peoples in the world. For instance, the Kurds are indigenous to Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

Reindeer racing

Reindeer racing is a popular sport among Sámi people who keep reindeer. In some competitions, the athlete wears skis and holds onto a rope that is pulled by the reindeer. In others, the athlete sits on a sleigh that the reindeer pulls behind it.

Reindeer can run up to 60 km per hour at their fastest.

Reindeer racing championships are held at both the Norwegian and the Nordic level.



Reindeer racing. Photo: V. Belov, Shutterstock

The Sámi People's Day

The Sámi people's national day is February 6.

The date is the same for all Sámi people in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. It commemorates the day that the first Sámi Congress was held, on February 6, 1917 in Trondheim. This was the first time that Sámi people from Norway and Sweden gathered to work toward common Sámi interests.



A Sámi woman dressed in traditional costume, riding a snowmobile – maybe on her way to a Sámi People's Day celebration? Photo: V. Belov, Shutterstock

The Sámi People's Day is an official flag-flying day in Norway, and both the Norwegian and Sámi flags are flown. Celebrations are held in many places in Norway. In Tromsø, they celebrate for a whole week, with activities such as concerts and reindeer racing. The Sámi national anthem is *Sámi soga lávlla*, which means *Song of the Sámi People*.

On the Sámi People's Day, we say: «Lihku beivviin!» in congratulations.

The Sámi flag

The Sámi flag is the same for all Sámi people, in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.



The Sámi flag. Illustration: The hornbill Studio, Shutterstock

The image on the flag is inspired by traditional Sámi folklore, and the Sámi people are depicted as the sons and daughters of the sun. The circle in the flag represents the sun and the moon.

The Sámi Parliament decides how the flag is to be used.

Sámi languages

Sámi is not one language, but a group of eleven different languages. The Sámi languages are related to Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian.

Northern Sámi is the most spoken Sámi language. Sámi people in Norway, Sweden and Finland speak this language. Southern Sámi is no longer commonly spoken in Sámi families. Lule Sámi is doing a bit better, because some children still learn Lule Sámi at home and at school.

«Bures» means Hello in Northern Sámi.

«Lavvo» and «pulk» are Sámi words that have been borrowed into Norwegian.



Lavvo. Photo: V. Belov, Shutterstock

