



THE TOWN OF MORA AND NORDIC SKIING // An hour and a half straight north of Minneapolis on Highway 65

Embrace the ski season

Grab your wool mittens and Dale of Norway sweaters — in a few weeks Minnesota's cherished Vasaloppet racers hit the starting gates. Yes, it's that time again and this year I decided I needed to learn more about it. Even though my grandmother's grandparents immigrated from Mora, Sweden, and our family homeland is part of the original Vasaloppet, I didn't know much about it — or why it's here.

In 1520 Sweden was under Denmark's rule. Gustav Ericsson Vasa gathered a group in Stockholm to start a rebellion

but escaped just as most of them were killed. He fled for his life on cross-country skis and headed for Mora. More people joined him and they won back the country. Vasa was named King of Sweden in 1523. Four hundred years later, in 1922, the first commemorative race, the Vasaloppet (Vasa race) was held on land where he skied. Today it's the oldest, longest and largest cross-country ski race in the world.

Eventually a lot of those Swedes came over here. And they brought their traditions with them: lefse, lutefisk, Swedish fiddle, Dala horses, IKEA and cross-country skiing. Mora, Minnesota got its own Vasaloppet in 1972. This winter's racing weekend is Feb. 8–10. Up to 8,000 people enter — and you can too. Register by Feb. 9 online at vasaloppet.us.

But if you don't want to race, Mora's Vasaloppet Nordic Skiing Center is a great starting point for an excursion any day of the week. Designed by Duluth architect David Salmela, the center's Scandinavian-inspired architecture houses changing rooms, ski waxing areas, a kitchen



The waxing room is complete with benches, tools and irons.

PHOTO BY
LINDA KOUTSKY

and even a sauna. Ten kilometers of groomed trails are ready right out the door. We met people doing both skate and classic-style skiing. It's free, it's beautiful and it's worth the drive. The Center is just

north of town on highway 65, watch for signs. Open daily 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

While you're in town, don't miss the world's largest Swedish Dala horse. Located on Union Street by the county fair-

grounds, the painted red horse stands 25 feet tall.

For more diversions, follow the Weekend Tourist on Twitter (@WeekendTourist)

LUNCH TIP

You know the food's small-town good when the cafe is attached to a bait shop! Stop in the near-historic Sportsmen's Cafe for breakfast all day or great homemade sandwiches.