

Norway, with its 4.7 million inhabitants, boasts the highest Winter Olympics medal count globally, including being the first nation to achieve 100 gold medals and surpassing 300 medals by 2010. This success is deeply rooted in a national passion for winter sports, with cross-country, ski jumping, and downhill skiing being common weekend and holiday activities. The nation even transports snow to mountain areas when lower altitudes melt, and ice skating thrives where snow is scarce. A network of 2,500 lit ski tracks facilitates winter sports, even during short daylight hours. Norway's skiing history stretches back millennia, evidenced by Stone Age carvings, and skis were once crucial transportation and hunting tools. The sport's popularization began around the mid-1880s, driven by pioneers like Sondre Norheim, inventor of the Telemark skis, which enhanced maneuverability. International recognition surged through polar explorers like Amundsen and Nansen, who used skis to reach the South and North Poles respectively. Today, Norway hosts numerous cross-country skiing events, open to both athletes and recreational participants, emphasizing enjoyment alongside competition. Biathlon, a combination of skiing and shooting, introduced in 1960, has also yielded numerous Norwegian Olympic medals, alongside achievements in Alpine and freestyle skiing. While speed skating's popularity has diminished compared to cross-country, ski jumping, and Alpine skiing, Norway maintains top-tier speed skaters. The pervasive winter sports culture, with Norwegians embracing outdoor activities even in the darkest months, likely contributes significantly to their remarkable Olympic dominance.