



# Understand Norway

## **NORWAY TODAY.....366**

More comfortable perhaps than any other people on earth, Norwegians are looking afresh at what it means to be Norwegian.

## **HISTORY .....368**

Join us on a journey through the adventures of the Vikings, the struggle for independence and Norway's fabulous oil wealth.

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## **NORWAY'S LANDSCAPE.....385**

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Few countries can match Norway's diversity of protected areas and here we cover the best the country has to offer.

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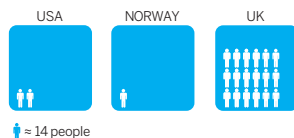
Learn why Norway punches above its weight in the arts world and discover the secrets of stave churches and beyond.

## **NORWEGIAN CUISINE..... 416**

Everything you need to know about one of Europe's least-known cuisines.



## population per sq km



# Norway Today

## Crisis? What Crisis?

Ask most Norwegians how their country has weathered the global financial crisis and you're likely to be met with a guilty smile. Yes, growth rates stalled as world oil prices fell and the economy even contracted in 2009. And yet, the impact upon ordinary Norwegians has been minimal – unemployment in 2009 was just 3.2%, prices rose in the same period by an eminently reasonable 2.1% and the government's generous system of social welfare and other benefits remained intact. As a consequence, the average Norwegian has largely been insulated from the world's worst economic crisis in decades.

## Independent & Apart

With such stability and prosperity at home, it's Norway's relationship with the rest of the world that dominates many public debates. For one thing, Norway continues to agonise over whether it should join the European Union (EU). Government-supported referenda on membership in 1972 and again in 1994 were narrowly defeated. And Norway looks increasingly likely to remain on the outside of the EU looking in. After a near 50-50 split for many years, opinion has hardened against membership – a series of opinion polls in mid-2010 found that just 25% of Norwegians favoured membership, with around two-thirds opposed. For now, the resistance to anyone else telling Norwegians how to live their lives – fostered during centuries of foreign occupation – seems to be winning the day.

## Struggle for the Soul of Norway

When it comes to its hard-won national identity, Norway stands at something of a crossroads. Centuries of hardship forged a strong sense of self-reliance, while the fabulous oil wealth of the late 20th century nurtured

» Population: 4.67 million (2010)

» GDP per capita (2009): US\$58,809

» Maternity/paternity leave on full pay: 46/10 weeks

» Life expectancy: 79.95 years

## Top Books

**The Ice Museum** (Joanna Kavenna) Vividly captures our fascination with the Arctic North.

**Rowing to Latitude** (Jill Fredston) A journey by row boat along the length of Norway's coast.

**Isles of the North** (Ian Mitchell) A boat journey into the fjords, with musings on Norway's place among modern nations.

**Fellowship of Ghosts** (Paul Watkins) Follows the author's solo foot journeys through Norway's high country.

## Conversations

» **Too many immigrants?** From 1.5% to 11.4% of the population in the past four decades.

» **Oil wealth** How to act as one of the world's richest countries?

» **The environment** Leading environmental activist versus leading producer of fossil fuels.