



Oslo

POPULATION 0.59 MILLION

Includes ➔

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Activities	65
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Sleeping.....	67
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Entertainment	73
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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Hos Thea (p70)
- ➔ Fauna (p70)
- ➔ Punjab Tandoori (p71)
- ➔ Mathallen Oslo (p72)
- ➔ The Kasbah (p72)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Ellingsens Pensjonat (p68)
- ➔ The Thief (p68)
- ➔ Hotel Folketeateret (p68)
- ➔ Grand Central (p68)
- ➔ Oslo Vandrerhjem Central (p67)

Why Go?

To the rest of the world, Norway is where Mother Nature has created one of her finest works of art. Against such a wonderful natural canvas, it's easy to forget that man can also be artistic, and many a visitor has been left surprised to discover that Oslo is home to world-class museums and galleries rivalling anywhere else on the European art trail.

But even here Mother Nature has managed to make her mark, and Oslo is fringed with forests, hills and lakes awash with opportunities for hiking, cycling, skiing and boating.

Add to this mix a thriving cafe and bar culture, top-notch restaurants, nightlife options ranging from opera to indie rock, and a large and visible immigrant community who add their own colourful touch to the city and the result is a thoroughly intoxicating place in which to forget about the fjords for a while.

When to Go

Oslo

°C/°F Temp

40/104 —

20/68 —

0/32 —

-20/-4 —

Rainfall inches/mm

— 12/300

— 8/200

— 4/100

— 0

Apr–May Spring flowers fill the parks and National Day (17 May) brings crowds.

Jul The days are long, the sights are open and there's a packed cultural calendar.

Dec The first snow falls and Christmas markets and concerts bring seasonal magic.

History

The name Oslo is derived from the words *Ás*, the Old Norse name for the Norse Godhead, and *lo*, meaning 'pasture', yielding roughly 'the fields of the gods'.

The city was originally founded in 1049 by King Harald Hardråde (Harald Hard-Ruler), whose son Olav Kyrre (Olav the Peaceful) set up a cathedral and a corresponding bishopric here. In the late 13th century, King Håkon V created a military presence by building the Akershus Festning (Akershus Fortress) in the hope of deterring the Swedish threat from the east. After the mid-14th-century bubonic plague wiped out half of the country's population, Norway united with Denmark, and from 1397 to 1624 Norwegian politics and defence were handled from Copenhagen. Oslo slipped into obscurity, and in 1624 it burned to the ground. It was resurrected by King Christian IV, who rebuilt it on a more easily defended site and renamed it Christiania, after his humble self.

For three centuries, the city held on as a seat of defence. In 1814 the framers of Norway's first constitution designated it the official capital of the new realm, but their efforts were effectively nullified by Sweden, which had other ideas about Norway's future and unified the two countries under Swedish rule. In 1905, when that union was dissolved and Norway became a separate kingdom, the stage was set for Christiania to flourish as the capital of modern Norway. It reverted to its original name, Oslo, in 1925 and the city has never looked back.

Sights

Oslo's main street, Karl Johans gate, forms a ceremonial axis westward through the heart of the city to the Royal Palace. Most sights, including the harbour front and Akershus Festning, are within a 15-minute walk of Karl Johans gate.

Whether you're artistic or literary, a peacenik or a history enthusiast, an explorer or an athlete, chances are there is a museum in Oslo tailor-made for you. Most are clustered around the city centre, on Bygdøy Peninsula or near Vigeland Park.

Central Oslo

★ Oslo Opera House

(Den Norske Opera & Ballett; Map p56; ☎ 21 42 21 21; www.operaaen.no; Kirsten Flagstads plass 1;

ARCHITECTURE

admission to foyer free; ☺ foyer 10am-9pm Mon-Fri, 11am-9pm Sat, noon-9pm Sun) Hoping to transform the city into a world-class cultural centre, the city leaders have embarked on a massive waterfront redevelopment project (which is scheduled to last until 2020), the centrepiece of which is the magnificent Opera House, a creation which is fast becoming one of the iconic modern buildings of Scandinavia.

Designed by Oslo-based architectural firm Snøhetta and costing around €500 million to build, the Opera House, which opened in 2008, has been designed to resemble a glacier floating in the waters off Oslo. It's a subtle building that at first doesn't look all that impressive, but give it time and it will leave you spellbound. Impressive at any time, it's probably at its most magical in the winter when snow provides it with a gleaming coat and the surrounding harbour fills with sparkling sheets of ice.

Before venturing inside be sure to walk up onto the roof, which was designed to act as a 'carpet' of sloping angles and flat surfaces. It's a symbolism that obviously works because Norwegians love to sprawl out across it on sunny days and sunbathe. Also, don't miss 'playing' the musical rods that sit both up on the roof and near the entrance. Floating just offshore of the Opera House is Monica Bonvicini's *She Lies*, a three-dimensional interpretation of Caspar David Friedrich's 1823-24 painting *Das Eismeer* (The Sea of Ice). As the tides rush in and out of the harbour, the steel and glass sculpture spins and twists, creating a constantly changing perspective for the viewer.

The main entrance to the Opera House is purposely small and unimpressive, which serves only to add to the sense of vastness that greets you on entering the main foyer (the windows alone are 15m high and flood the foyer with light). Aside from the windows, the other dominating feature of the foyer is the Wave Wall. Made of strips of golden oak, the wall curves up through the centre of the foyer and provides access to the upper levels of the building. Opposite the wave wall, green lights create playful patterns on the wall (and make the toilets and coat room they hide the most artistic you will ever visit!).

Also in the foyer is a **restaurant** (Map p56; Kirsten Flagstads plass 1, Oslo Opera House; mains