

Welcome to Norway

Norway is a once-in-a-lifetime destination and the essence of its appeal is remarkably simple: this is one of the most beautiful countries on earth.

Stirring Landscapes

The drama of Norway's natural world is difficult to overstate. Impossibly steep-sided fjords of extraordinary beauty cut gashes from a jagged coastline deep into the interior. The fjords' fame is wholly merited, but this is also a land of glaciers, grand and glorious, snaking down from icefields that rank among Europe's largest. Elsewhere, the mountainous terrain of Norway's interior resembles the ramparts of so many natural fortresses, and yields to rocky coastal islands that rise improbably from the waters like apparitions. And then, of course, there's the primeval appeal of the Arctic. Such landforms provide a backdrop for some of Europe's most charismatic wildlife – polar bears (in Svalbard), reindeer and musk oxen to name just three – and the setting for many a picturesque wooden village.

Scandinavian Sophistication

The counterpoint to so much natural beauty is found in Norway's vibrant cultural life. Norwegian cities are cosmopolitan and brimful of architecture that showcases the famous Scandinavian flair for design through the ages. At the same time, a busy calendar of festivals, many of international renown, are worth planning your trip around.

The Call of the Wild

In Norway, nature is very much an active pursuit, and Norwegians' passion for exploring their natural world has created one of Europe's most exciting and varied adventure-tourism destinations. Some activities may only be for the young, energetic and fearless, but most – such as world-class hiking, cycling and white-water rafting in summer; dog-sledding, skiing and snowmobiling in winter – can be enjoyed by anyone of reasonable fitness. On our travels we've encountered 93-year-old snowmobilers and whole families racing down rapids. Whether you're here in summer when the possibilities seem endless, or in winter for the soul-stirring spectacle of the northern lights, these activities are an exhilarating means of getting close to nature.

Worth the Expense

If one topic above all others dominates conversations among travellers to Norway, it's the formidable cost of travel here. Make no mistake: Norway is one of the most expensive countries on earth, which is yet another reason why saving up to come here is akin to planning the trip of a lifetime. But is it worth it? Absolutely: Norway will pay you back with never-to-be-forgotten experiences many times over.



Why I Love Norway

By Anthony Ham, Coordinating Author

The first time I stood on the waterfront at Aurland and contemplated the fjords, not long after having passed among the peaks of Jotunheimen National Park, I was utterly convinced that there was no more beautiful country anywhere on earth. On my many Norwegian journeys since then, in winter and in summer, I've never lost that feeling. Even more than the fjords and the high country, I now find myself drawn to the gravitas of Svalbard, to the perfect juxtaposition of water, rock and human habitation in the Lofoten Islands, and to the far horizons and Sami encampments of Norway's Arctic North.

For more about our authors, see page 448.

Above: Farms beside Sognefjorden (p210)