

Oslo



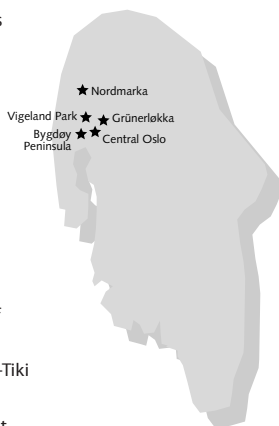
Hemmed by a 'fjord' and kilometres of woodland, Norway's capital is an easy-going city with an eclectic architectural mix of old, new and just plain 1960s that is hard not to like. The perfect size for exploring on foot, the city boasts world-class museums, a lively nightlife and plenty of outdoor activities for the energetic.

Most visitors will find themselves struggling to choose between Oslo's numerous museums, which offer something for almost every taste: a face-to-face with the haunting image of Edvard Munch's *The Scream* at the National Gallery, a chance to stand in the shoes of an Olympic ski-jumper at the Holmenkollen Ski Museum, or a window into history and culture at the unforgettable Viking Ship, Polarship Fram or Folk Museums on Bygdøy. And Oslo is certainly the cosmopolitan heart of Norway, with a rapidly growing café and bar culture, top-notch restaurants, and nightlife options ranging from world-class opera and jazz to indie rock.

But many Oslo residents, being avid hikers, skiers and sailors, will fondly tell you that what they love most about their city is how easy it is to leave the city life behind. Located at the head of the Oslofjord (which actually isn't a fjord, but is pretty anyway), Oslo is one of Europe's largest capitals in terms of area (450 sq km) but smallest population-wise. As a result, it is the only European capital that boasts cycling, hiking, ice-skating, kayaking, sailing and skiing, all within its city limits and a short train ride away.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Walk in the footsteps of Henrik Ibsen down Karl Johans gate for coffee at the **Grand Café** (p110)
- Eat ice cream as you stroll with the locals in the **city centre** (p93) and wave a Norwegian flag on 17 May, Norway's **national day** (p108)
- Pick summer blueberries and go winter skiing in Oslo's **Nordmarka** (p105)
- Come up with ways to cheat security at the **Munch Museum** (p103) then start the afternoon in one of **Grünerløkka's cafés or bars** (p112) and find yourself still there early the next morning
- Reconsider parenthood while looking at the works of Gustav Vigeland at **Vigeland Park** (p99)
- Examine the ships and charts of the Viking Ship, Kon-Tiki and Polership Fram Museums on **Bygdøy** (p101)
- Enjoy an impromptu dinner of shrimp on the docks at **Aker Brygge** (p112)



■ POPULATION: 548,000

■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: FJELLSJØKAMPEN 812M

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 Hardråda (Harald Hard-Ruler; see p32), 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; see p98) 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.

ORIENTATION

Oslo's central train station (Oslo Sentralstasjon or Oslo S) sits at the eastern end of the city centre, with the Galleri Oslo Bus Terminal not far away to the northeast. From Oslo S the 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, as are the majority of hotels and pensions. Many of the sights outside the centre, including Vigeland Park and the Munch Museum, are just a short bus or tram ride away. The Bygdøy Peninsula is a mere 10-minute ferry ride across the harbour.

Maps

The tourist offices distribute a detailed and free city plan. Unless you're heading out to the suburbs, it should be sufficient. On the reverse side is a map of the T-bane (metro) system and an inset covering Holmenkollen.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Ark Bokhandel (Map pp96-7; ☎ 22 47 32 00; www.ark.no; Øvre Slottsgate 23-25; ☹ closed Sun) Good English-language and stationery section; branches around town.

Nomaden (Map pp96-7; ☎ 23 13 14 15; www.nomaden.no; Uranienborgveien 4; ☹ closed Sun) Travel books, maps and gear.

Norli (Map pp96-7; ☎ 22 00 43 00; www.norli.no; Universitetsgata 20-24; ☹ closed Sun) Largest bookshop in Norway.

Ringstrøms Bookshop (Map pp96-7; ☎ 22 20 00 13; www.ringstrom-antikvariat.no; Ullevålsveien 1; ☹ closed Sun) Secondhand and antiquarian books and CDs.

Tronsmo (Map pp96-7; ☎ 22 99 03 99; www.tronsmo.no; Kristian Augusts gate 19; ☹ closed Sun) Alternative bookshop with feminist, gay, lesbian and political works.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 113)

Fire (☎ 110)

Police (Map pp96-7; ☎ 112; Hammersborggata 10)

Internet Access

Arctic Internet Café (Map pp96-7; ☎ 22 17 19 40; Oslo S; per 30/60min Nkr35/60; ☹ 8am-midnight)

Deichmanske Bibliotek (Municipal Library; Map pp96-7; ☎ 22 43 29 00; Arne Garborgs plass; free access limited to an hr, unlimited wi-fi; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat Jun-Aug; 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat Sep-May)

IT-Palasset (Map p93; ☎ 22 46 21 12; www.it-palasset.no; Majorstua T-bane, Sørkedalsveien 1; per hr Nkr60; ☹ 10am-midnight Mon-Fri, 11am-midnight Sat & Sun)

Use-It (Map pp96-7; ☎ 22 41 51 32; Møllergata 3; free access; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat Jun-Aug; shorter hrs rest-of-year)

WI-FI ACCESS

Free wi-fi is popular in many of Oslo's cafés; the tourist office keeps a list of options. Most ask that you buy something before logging on.

Kaffe & Krem (Map pp96-7; ☎ 22 83 25 10; Haakon VII gate)

Nobel Peace Center (Map pp96-7; ☎ 48 30 10 00; Aker Brygge) At an important sight.

QBA (Map p93; ☎ 22 35 24 60; Olaf Ryes plass 4; Grünerløkka)

Tea Lounge (Map p93; Thorvold Meyersgate 33; Grünerløkka) A bar we recommend.