

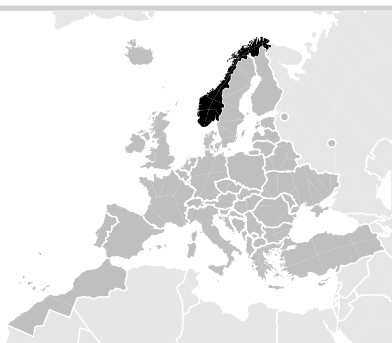
Norway

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bergen** For a picturesque coastal locale and charming wooden buildings, you can't beat this lively city and its proximity to fjords (p877)
- **Lofoten Islands** Hike spectacular mountain-islands rising from fishing villages so postcard-perfect that they look fake (p885)
- **Best journey** The Oslo–Bergen train boggles eyeballs as it rushes past snowy plateaus, spectacular fjords and spotless wilderness (p877)
- **Off the beaten track** Hike from Fjærland's farm valley to blue-ice glacier, and admire the fjord below (p882)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 385,200 sq km
- **Budget** Nkr500 per day (excluding transport costs)
- **Capital** Oslo
- **Country code** ☎ 47
- **Famous for** canned fish, Vikings, whaling
- **Languages** Norwegian and Sami
- **Money** Norwegian krone (Nkr);
A\$1 = Nkr4.92; C\$1 = Nkr5.58; €1 = Nkr8.84;
¥100 = Nkr6.94; NZ\$1 = Nkr3.85;
UK£1 = Nkr9.96; US\$1 = Nkr6.57
- **Phrases** *Hei* (hello), *takk* (thanks), *ya* (yes), *nei* (no), *stengt* (closed)



- **Population** 4.7 million
- **Visas** not required for most visitors for stays up to 90 days.

NORWAY

TRAVEL HINTS

Pack booze before arrival. Student ID equals big discounts on transport and attractions. Bring hip clothes. Buy *minipris* (p866) rail tickets.

ROAMING

Train from Oslo to Bergen, stopping to ski in Geilo. Ogle fjords. Head for Trondheim. Take Hurtigruten to Lofoten, then Tromsø.

There's a reason why 19th-century landscape painters obsessed over Norway: at almost every corner staggeringly beautiful wilderness lurked to overwhelm their artistic sensibilities. Today that wilderness, various and downright sublime, remains shockingly intact, offering terrain for some of the world's most scenic skiing and hiking. Enjoy fjords, glaciers and mountains, all linked by a massive network of trails, dotted with scenic huts that provide some of Norway's cheapest lodging. Along the way, Europe's most expensive country will compel you to eat a lot of fish. Much of Norway lies above the Arctic Circle, home to the Midnight Sun's ceaseless light, the Polar Night's gloomy darkness or the ghost-like, swirling aurora borealis. Set amid these phenomena are Lofoten's remote fishing villages and Tromsø, a lively university town that makes a convenient polar gateway. A country of just 4.7 million people, Norway's few cities

are picturesque with districts of old wooden buildings, harbours of fishing boats and plenty of cafes, whose outdoor terraces fill with overeager Norwegians from the moment winter ends. Oslo and Bergen are the biggest cities, and each enjoys esoteric museums (think Viking ships and leprosy), lively nightlife and public transport that takes you straight into the wilderness.

HISTORY

Norway's greatest impact on world history was during the Viking Age, usually dated from the plundering of England's Lindisfarne monastery by Nordic pirates in 793. Over the next century, the Vikings made raids throughout Europe. The Viking leader Harald Hårfagre (Fairhair) unified Norway in 872. Their power ended when Alexander III, King of Scots, defeated a Viking force at the Battle of Largs in 1263.

In 1397 Norway was absorbed into a union with Denmark that lasted over 400 years. Denmark's defeat in the Napoleonic Wars caused it to cede Norway to Sweden in January 1814. Tired of forced unions, on 17 May 1814 a defiant Norway adopted its own constitution. In 1884 a parliamentary government was introduced and a growing nationalist movement eventually led to peaceful secession from Sweden in 1905.

Norway stayed neutral during WWI. It was attacked by the Nazis on 9 April 1940. King Håkon established a government in exile in England and placed most of Norway's merchant fleet under the command of the Allies. Although Norway remained occupied until the end of the war, it had an active resistance movement. The royal family returned in June 1945.

Norway joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960, but has since been reluctant to forge closer bonds with other European nations. During 1994, a national referendum on joining the EU was held and rejected. Norway has led many contemporary environmental initiatives, such as the creation of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault (2008) and the recently declared goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030, largely by purchasing offsets from developing countries. In 1993 Norway resumed commercial whaling in defiance of an international ban. The government, which supports the protection of threatened species, contends that minke whales, with an estimated population of 100,000, can sustain a limited harvest. For more information, see the websites of the **International Whaling Commission** (www.iwcoffice.org), **World Wide Fund for Nature** (www.wwf.org) and **Greenpeace** (www.greenpeace.org).

THE CULTURE

With only 4,700,000 people, Norway has one of the lowest population densities in Europe and one of the world's highest standards of living. The largest cities are Oslo with 550,000 residents, then Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger.

Most Norwegians are of Nordic origin, thought to have descended from central and northern European tribes who migrated northwards around 8000 years ago. In addition, there are about 40,000 Sami (formerly known as Lapps), the indigenous people of Norway's far north who make up the country's largest ethnic minority. Many still live a traditional nomadic life, herding reindeer in Finnmark.

SPORT

'Ski' is a Norwegian word and Norway makes a credible claim to having invented the sport. Other spectator sports include speed skating and football (soccer). Empathetic winter visitors will experience displaced vertigo as they witness ski jumping at, amongst other places, Holmenkollen (p869).

ARTS

Norway's best known artists include Edvard Munch, landscape painter JC Dahl, classical composer Edvard Grieg, sculptor Gustav Vigeland and playwright Henrik Ibsen.

Norway's stave churches are some of the oldest wooden buildings on Earth. Named for their vertical supporting posts, these structures are distinguished by dragon-headed gables resembling ornately carved prows of Viking ships. Other significant architectural features in the country include the romantic 'dragon style', found in some historic hotels, and art nouveau, best observed in Ålesund.

Norwegians Sigrid Undset and Knud Hamsun (a Nazi collaborator) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1928 and 1920, respectively. Undset is best known for *Kristin Lavransdottir*, while Hamsun won the Nobel Prize for *The Growth of the Soil*. Angar Mykle's *Lasso Round the Moon* (1954) might be the best book you've never read. Per Petterson's haunting *Out*