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Itineraries

Norway in Microcosm

Even with only a week to spare, you can still see the best that Norway has to offer. This itinerary begins with Oslo’s considerable charms, traverses the drama of Norway’s high country and precipitous fjords, and ends up in beautiful Bergen. This journey can just as easily be done in reverse.

After a couple of days exploring the fine galleries and museums of Oslo, take the scenic Oslo–Bergen railway, one of the most spectacular rail journeys on earth. From Oslo, the line climbs gently through forests, plateaus and ski centres to the beautifully desolate Hardangervidda Plateau, home to Norway’s largest herd of wild reindeer and numerous hiking trails. At Myrdal, take the Flåmsbana railway down to Flåm, from where fjord cruises head up the incomparable Nærøyfjord. Travel via Gudvangen, sleep overnight in Stalheim, and then continue on to Voss, where thrill-seekers love the easily accessible activities on offer. Trains then carry you on to Bergen, arguably Norway’s prettiest city – wander its historic wooden waterfront, climb the surrounding mountains for sweeping views or soak up the atmosphere of the bars and restaurants that so distinguish this cosmopolitan city.
The coastline between Trondheim and the Lofoten Islands takes you across the Arctic Circle along a shoreline fissured with deep inlets, shadowed by countless offshore islands and populated by quiet fishing villages. You’ll need a car to make the most of this route; also consider the Hurtigruten coastal ferry for a leg or two.

Begin in Trondheim and linger for a couple of days in one of Norway’s most agreeable cities. Heading north, via Hell, stop off in Stiklestad, a site of great historical significance for Norwegians. Overnight here or continue on Rørvik, where a fascinating multimedia display is the perfect introduction to coastal life.

The Rv17 travels north to picturesque Brønnøysund, and don’t miss the offshore detour to the fascinating, Unesco World Heritage–listed island of Vega; count on a couple of nights in Brønnøysund and Vega. Back on the mainland, the extraordinary Kystriksveien coastal route hugs the coastline. A candidate for Norway’s most spectacular drive, this road passes an estimated 14,000 islands. It can be slow going with all the ferries and inlet-hugging stretches of road, but it is unquestionably worth it. The entire route could be done in a couple of days, but four or five is far more enjoyable. Factor in time as well for a detour to the Saltfjellet-Svartisen National Park, home to Norway’s second-largest icefield and accessible glacier tongues. The most beautiful section of the Kystriksveien route is between Sandnessjøen and Storvik, and it’s along this section that you’ll cross the Arctic Circle.

The primary appeal of Bodø is as the gateway (by ferry) to the Lofoten Islands. Unlike any other landscape in Norway, the Lofoten could easily occupy a week of your time, although it can be experienced much more rapidly for those in a hurry – make three days a minimum. All of the islands and villages are worth visiting, but on no account miss Nusfjord and Å, a charmingly preserved village at the southern tip of Moskenesøy. Like Lofoten but with far fewer visitors, Vesterålen is wild and beautiful and worth two days, including summer whale-watching off Andenes, before you head on to your journey’s end at Narvik.
Few natural attractions have come to define a country quite like the Norway’s fjords. This meandering route through Norway’s fjord country, with a detour up and over the roof of Norway, is one of Europe’s most beautiful. You’ll need your own vehicle. Take as long as you can.

Begin in the far south, in Stavanger. After a day or two, take a day trip to Lysefjord, including the hike up to the signature lookout of Preikestolen (Pulpit Rock). A long day’s drive north brings you to Hardangerfjord, and a string of villages you’ll never want to leave, among them Utne and Eidfjord. Overnight in the latter, then continue on to Flåm; if you’ve still enough left in the tank, make for far lovelier Aurland for a couple of nights surrounded by extraordinary views. Wind your way north to pretty Solvorn on Lustrafjord, climb up and over the Sognefjellet Road through Jotunheimen National Park, then overnight in Lom, with its perfectly sited stave church. Then it’s on to peerless Geirangerfjorden, up another breathtaking mountain road, the Trollstigen, down to Åndalsnes and then follow the coast to quiet and lovely Ålesund.

Bergen is one of northern Europe’s most popular short-break trips, with good reason. While there’s more than enough to keep you occupied for five days in Bergen itself, the city’s hinterland might entice you to consider a two-night excursion to see what all the fuss is about out in the fjords.

Bergen is the reason you came here and you’ve a busy time ahead of you if you hope to pack it all into two very full days of museums, wining and dining, shopping and simply wandering the postcard-perfect streets.

Although ranging beyond Bergen can be done using public transport, we recommend renting a car and driving on your third day through Norheimsund, the peaceful gateway to the stirring panoramas of the Hardangerfjord network. Pause in Øystese long enough to enjoy an unlikely contemporary-art fix, then overnight in dramatic Eidfjord. The next morning, after a detour to Kjeåsen Farm, drive to gorgeous Ulvik for extraordinary views, stop for lunch in Voss, then drive to Stalheim for more spectacular views. Go for a hike in the morning, then drive back to Bergen in time for your flight home.
The high country of central Norway is simply spectacular and, provided you’re willing to rent a car for part of the time, it offers some unparalleled opportunities to explore the region’s quiet back roads; serious cyclists could also follow many of the same routes.

After a couple of days in Oslo, it’s a short trip to Lillehammer, which hosted the 1994 Winter Olympics and remains one of central Norway’s most pleasing spots; it has a wealth of Olympic sites and a lovely setting. Continuing north after a night in Lillehammer, Ringebu has one of Norway’s prettiest stave churches. Having a car enables you to take the quiet Rv27, which draws near to the precipitous massifs of the Rondane National Park, before continuing northeast to Unesco World Heritage–listed Røros, one of Norway’s most enchanting villages, with painted timber houses and old-world charm. After one or two nights in Røros, it’s an easy detour north to Trondheim, a delightful coastal city with a stunning cathedral, a large student population and an engaging cultural scene; it’s worth a two- or three-night stay.

The mystique of the extreme north has drawn explorers for centuries. Here is a horizonless world seemingly without end, a frozen wilderness that inspires the awe reserved for the great empty places of our earth. If you’re really lucky, you might see a polar bear.

Tromsø is a university town par excellence. Its Polar Museum captures the spirit of Arctic exploration, its Arctic Cathedral wonderfully evokes the landscapes of the north, while the surrounding peaks host a wealth of summer and winter activities. You could also visit lovely Senja from here. Next head east for the rock carvings of Alta, then Nordkapp: as far north as you can go in Norway without setting out to sea. Then head inland to Karasjok and Kautokeino, to the heartland of the Sami people. No exploration of the Arctic North would be complete without Svalbard. Return to Tromsø and catch a flight deep into the polar regions, where the Svalbard archipelago is one of Europe’s last great wildernesses. Allow at least five days to tap into the many activities that get you out into the wilderness.
Map Legend

**Sights**
- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

**Activities, Courses & Tours**
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

**Sleeping**
- Sleeping
- Camping
- Hut/Shelter

**Eating**
- Eating

**Drinking & Nightlife**
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

**Entertainment**
- Entertainment

**Shopping**
- Shopping

**Information**
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

**Geographic**
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

**Population**
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

**Transport**
- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- S-Bahn/Subway station
- Taxi
- T-bane/Tunnelbana station
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Tube station
- U-Bahn/Underground station
- Other Transport

**Routes**
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

**Boundaries**
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

**Hydrography**
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

**Areas**
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

*Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book*
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

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Anthony is a freelance writer and photographer who specialises in the Arctic, Spain, east and southern Africa, and the Middle East. When he’s not writing for Lonely Planet, Anthony writes about and photographs Spain, Africa and the Middle East for newspapers and magazines in Australia, the UK and US. Anthony continues to travel the world in search of stories.

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Oliver Berry is a writer and photographer from Cornwall. He has worked for Lonely Planet for more than a decade, covering destinations from Cornwall to the Cook Islands, and has worked on more than 30 guidebooks. He is also a regular contributor to many newspapers and magazines, including Lonely Planet Traveller. His writing has won several awards, including The Guardian Young Travel Writer of the Year and the TNT Magazine People’s Choice Award. His latest work is published at www.oliverberry.com.

Donna Wheeler
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Donna has written guidebooks for Lonely Planet for more than 10 years, including Italy, Norway, Belgium, Africa, Tunisia, Algeria, France, Austria and Australia. She became a travel writer after various careers as a commissioning editor, creative director, digital producer and content strategist. Born and bred in Sydney, Australia, Donna fell in love with Melbourne’s moody blue-stone streets as a teenage art student. She has divided her time between there and her beloved place of birth for more than two decades, along with residential stints in Turin, Paris, Bordeaux, New York, London and rural Ireland. Donna travels widely (and deeply) in Europe, North Africa, the US and Asia.