

# History

Norway may have become the epitome of a modern, peaceful country, but its history is soaked in blood. How one led to the other is one of world history's great epics. It is a story peopled with picaresque characters and always revolving around recurring grand themes – a battle against the hostile elements, the advanced and adventurous spirit of the Vikings, the undercurrent of Christianity and the perennial struggle to be taken seriously as a sovereign, independent country.

## DARKNESS & ICE

Some of the most lasting impressions travellers carry with them after visiting Norway – a land of snow and ice, a bountiful coast, extreme climatic conditions and a thinly populated land – have been present here since the dawn of Scandinavian civilisation. Indeed, the human presence in Norway was for thousands of years overshadowed by Norway's geography and climate, which have strong claims to being the most enduring personalities of Norwegian history.

During the last ice age, Norway was barely inhabitable. If Norway was less than hospitable, it was a paradise compared to northern Russia at the time and, as the ice began to melt, it was from the east that the first major, lasting migration to Norway took place when, around 11,000 years ago, the Komsa, who would later become the Sami (p42), arrived in Norway's Arctic north.

As the climate warmed and Norway became increasingly habitable, migrations of the Nøstvet-Økser people of central Europe began arriving along the southern Norwegian coast, drawn by relatively plentiful fishing, sealing and hunting. Wild reindeer also followed the retreating ice, moving north into the still-ice-bound interior, and the hunters that followed them were the first humans to traverse the Norwegian high country. Their presence was, however, restricted to itinerant, seasonal camps and there remained few human footholds in an otherwise empty land dominated by glaciers and frozen wastes.

Over the millennia that followed, settled cultures began to take root, to the extent that during the later years of the Roman Empire, Rome provided Norway with fabric, iron implements and pottery. The iron tools allowed farmland to be cleared of trees, larger boats were built with the aid of iron axes and a cooling climate saw the establishment of more permanent structures built from stone and turf. By the 5th century Norwegians had learned how to smelt their own iron from ore found in the southern Norwegian bogs. Norway's endless struggle to tame its wild landscape had begun.

Little is known about the nomadic, hunter-gatherer Nøstvet-Økser people who were most likely tall, blonde-haired, blue-eyed and spoke a Germanic language, the predecessor of modern Scandinavian languages.

## HERE COME THE VIKINGS

Few historical people have captured the imagination quite like the Vikings. Immortalised in modern cartoons (*Asterix* and *Hägar the Horrible* to name just a few) and considered the most feared predators of ancient Europe, the Vikings may have disappeared from history, but as a seafaring nation with its face turned towards distant lands, they remain very much the forerunners of modern Norway. But who were these ancient warriors who took to their longboats and dominated Europe for five centuries?

## Conquest & Expansion

Under pressure from shrinking agricultural land caused by a growing population, settlers from Norway began arriving along the coast of the British Isles in the 780s. When the boats returned home to Norway with enticing trade goods and tales of poorly defended coastlines, the Vikings began laying plans to conquer the world. The first Viking raid took place on St Cuthbert's monastery on the island of Lindisfarne in 793. Soon the Vikings were spreading across Britain, Ireland and the rest of Europe with war on their minds and returning home with slaves (*thrall*) in their formidable, low Norse longboats.

The Vikings attacked in great fleets, terrorising, murdering, enslaving, assimilating or displacing local populations. Coastal regions of Britain, Ireland, France (Normandy was named for these 'Northmen'), Russia (as far east as the river Volga), Moorish Spain (Seville was raided in 844), and the Middle East (they even reached Baghdad) all came under the Viking sway. Well-defended Constantinople (Istanbul) proved a bridge too far – the Vikings attacked six times but never took the city. Such rare setbacks notwithstanding, the Viking raids transformed Scandinavia from an obscure backwater on Europe's northern fringe to an all-powerful empire.

For all of their destruction elsewhere, Vikings belonged very much to the shores from which they set out or sheltered on their raids. Viking raids increased standards of living at home. Emigration freed up farmland and fostered the emergence of a new merchant class, while captured slaves provided farm labour. Norwegian farmers also crossed the Atlantic to settle the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland during the 9th and 10th centuries. The world, it seemed, belonged to the Vikings.

The word 'Viking' derives from *vik*, an Old Norse word that referred to a bay or cove, a reference to Vikings' anchorages during and after raids.

Explore North ([www.explorenorth.com/vikings.html](http://www.explorenorth.com/vikings.html)) is the ultimate site for wannabe Vikings, with extensive links to Viking history and sagas, Norse gods, Norse mythology and a delicious smattering of conspiracy theories.

## THE VIKING FOOTPRINT

Traces of the Viking presence in Norway can still be seen at Tønsberg (p129), Kaupang (Larvik; p132), Spangereid (see the boxed text, p146), Eidfjord (p216), Kinsarvik (p218), Haugesund (p220), Karmøy Island (p221), Balestrand (p240), Giske (p266) and Leka (p289). And two of the best Viking museums are the Viking Ship Museum (p102) in Oslo and the Lofotr Viking Museum (p318).

## TIMELINE

12,000 BC

The last ice age thaws and Norway takes on its present physical form with a new body of water separating the country from the rest of northern Europe.

9000 BC

The hunting culture of the Komsa, the forerunner of the Sami, arrives in northern Scandinavia and establishes the first permanent settlements in Norway's Arctic north, where they remain to this day.

2500 BC

The wonderfully named Battle-Axe, Boat-Axe and Funnel-Beaker people, named after the stone tools they used, enter southern Norway from Sweden. They traded amber for metals, particularly bronze, from mainland Europe.

AD 787

The earliest account of Norse seafaring appears in the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle for 787*, describing how three ships came to Britain, piloted by sailors who were described as Northmen.

793

The dawn of the Viking age comes when Vikings plunder St Cuthbert's monastery on the island of Lindisfarne, off the coast of Northumberland in Britain.

872

Harald Hårfagre (Harald Fair-Hair) fights his fellow Viking chieftains in the Battle of Hafsfjord and unites Norway for the first time. Some 20,000 people flee to Iceland.

## Harald Fair-Hair

Harald Hårfagre (Harald Fair-Hair), son of Svarta-Hvaldan (Halvdan the Black), was more than the latest in a long line of great Viking names. While most Viking chieftains made their name in foreign conquest, Harald Fair-Hair was doing something that no other leader had managed before – he united the disparate warring tribes of the Viking nation.

Harald's greatest moment came in 872 at Hafsfjord near Haugesund when he emerged victorious from one of world history's few civil wars to be decided at sea. When the dust settled, Norway had become a single country.

The reign of Harald Hårfagre was such an odd and entertaining time that it was recorded for posterity in the *Heimskringla*, the Norwegian kings' saga, by Icelander Snorre Sturluson. According to Snorre, Harald's unification of Norway was inspired by a woman who taunted the king by refusing to have relations with a man whose kingdom wasn't even as large as tiny Denmark. Through a series of confederations and trade agreements, he extended his rule as far north as what is now Trøndelag. His foreign policies were equally canny, and he even sent one of his sons, Håkon, to be reared in the court of King Athelstan of England. There is no record of whether the woman in question was sufficiently impressed. Harald died of plague at Avaldsnes on Karmøy Island (p221) around 930.

The king who unified the country could do little about his own family, however. He married 10 wives and fathered a surfeit of heirs, thereby creating serious squabbles over succession. The one who rose above them all was Erik, his last child and only son with Ragnhild the Mighty, daughter of the Danish King Erik of Jutland. The ruthless Erik eliminated all of his legitimate brothers except Håkon (who was safe in England). Erik, whose reign was characterised by considerable ineptitude, then proceeded to squander his father's hard-won Norwegian confederation. When Håkon returned from England to sort out the mess as King Håkon den Gode (Håkon the Good), Erik was forced to flee to Britain where he took over the throne of York as King Erik Blood-Axe.

## Christianity & the Viking Decline

The Vikings gave Norwegians their love of the sea and it was during the late Viking period that they bequeathed to them another of their most enduring national traits – strong roots in Christianity – although this overturning of the Viking pantheon of gods did not come without a struggle.

King Håkon the Good, who had been baptised a Christian during his English upbringing, brought the new faith (as well as missionaries and a bishop) with him upon his return to Norway. Despite some early success, most Vikings remained loyal to Thor, Odin and Freyr. Although the missionaries were eventually able to replace the names of the gods with those of Catholic saints, the pagan practice of blood sacrifice continued una-

bated. When Håkon the Good was defeated and killed in 960, Norwegian Christianity all but disappeared.

Christianity in Norway was revived during the reign of King Olav Tryggvason (Olav I). Like any good Viking, Olav decided that only force would work to convert his countrymen to the 'truth'. Unfortunately for the king, his intended wife, Queen Sigrid of Sweden, refused to convert. Olav cancelled the marriage contract and Sigrid married the pagan king, Svein Forkbeard of Denmark. Together they orchestrated Olav's death in a great Baltic sea-battle, then took Norway as their own.

So ferocious were the Vikings that the word berserk comes from 'bare sark', which means 'bare shirt' and refers to the way that ancient, bare-chested Norsemen used to fight.

*A History of the Vikings*, by Gwyn Jones, has been critically acclaimed for its comprehensive details of the Viking era, with vivid accounts of Viking exploits.

According to some linguists, Viking gods gave their names to the days of the week in English – Tuesday (Tyr's Day), Wednesday (Odin's Day), Thursday (Thor's Day) and Friday (Freyr's Day).

*The Prose Edda: Norse Mythology*, by Snorre Sturluson, is the ultimate source of Norse mythology through the sagas first penned in the 10th century.

## THE KEYS TO WORLD DOMINATION

Like so many successful empires that would follow them onto the world stage, the Vikings' success was built upon the twin pillars of tradition and innovation. For the Vikings this was manifested in a fanatical belief that the gods were on their side, and on a mastery of the seas that relied on technology centuries ahead of its time.

The main god that provided strength to the Viking cause was Odin (Oðinn), the 'All-Father' who was married to Frigg. Together they gave birth to a son, Thor (Þór), the God of Thunder. Why did this matter? Put simply, Vikings believed that if they died on the battlefield, the all-powerful Odin would take them to a paradise by the name of Valhalla where Viking men could fight all day and then be served by beautiful women.

Not surprisingly, it was considered far better for a Viking to die on the battlefield than in bed of old age and Vikings brought a reckless abandon to their battles that was extremely difficult for enemies to overcome – to die or to come away with loot, the Vikings seemed to say, was more or less the same. Equally unsurprising was the fact that the essential Viking values that emerged from their unique world-view embodied a disregard for death, strength, skill in weapons, heroic courage and personal sacrifice.

But the Vikings were as much the sophisticates of the ancient world as they were its fearless warriors. Viking ships were revolutionary, fast, manoeuvrable vessels capable of withstanding torrid and often long ocean journeys. Longboats were over 30m long, had a solid keel, flexible hull, large, square sails and could travel at up to 12 knots (24km/h); they enabled the Vikings to launch and maintain a conquest that would go largely unchallenged for 200 years.

Perhaps the most curious aspect of Viking voyages, however, was the navigational tool they employed to travel through uncharted territory. Norse sagas mention a mysterious device known as a *solarsteinn*, (sunstone), which allowed navigation even when the sky was overcast or the sun was below the horizon and celestial navigation was impossible.

It is now generally agreed that the *solarsteinn* was a crystal of cordierite, which is found around Scandinavia and has natural polarising qualities. When observed from below and rotated, light passing through the crystal is polarised blue when the long axis is pointed toward the source of the sunlight. Even today, jet planes flying over polar regions, where magnetic compasses are unsuitable, use a sky compass that determines the position of the sun by filtering sunlight through an artificial polarising lens.

995

Olav II builds Norway's first Christian church at Møsterhamn on the island of Bømlo, in the Hardanger region, marking the spread of Christianity throughout western Norway.

997

Trondheim is founded at the mouth of the Nid River and, as the first major settlement in the country; it becomes the first capital of the fledgling kingdom.

c 1000

Almost five centuries before Columbus, Leifur Eiríksson, son of Eiríkur Rauðe (Eric the Red), explores the North American coast, which he names Vinland, meaning the 'land of wine'.

1024

Olav II founds the Church of Norway and establishes it as Norway's state religion throughout his realm, a situation that continues right to this day.

1030

After being sent into exile by King Canute (Knut) of Denmark in 1028, King Olav II returns, only to be killed during a popular farmers' uprising in Trøndelag at the Battle of Stiklestad.

1049

Harald III (Harald Hardråde, or Harald 'Hard-Ruler'), half-brother of St Olav, founds Oslo (Christiania) and uses it as a base to launch far-ranging raids across the Mediterranean.

*Heroes of The North: Stories From Norwegian Chronicle*, by F Scarlett Potter, reads like a who's who of the ancient Norwegian world, with names such as Harald Fair-Hair and St Olav peppering the text.

Den Kongelige Norske Sankt Olavs Orden ([www.saintolav.com](http://www.saintolav.com)) has everything you ever wanted to know (and many things you didn't) about St Olav; the 'History of Norway' section is good for understanding the history of the Norwegian monarchy.

Christianity was finally cemented in Norway by King Olav Haraldsson, Olav II, who was also converted in England. Olav II and his Viking hordes allied themselves with King Ethelred and managed to save London from a Danish attack under King Svein Forkbeard by destroying London Bridge (from whence we derive the song '*London Bridge is Falling Down*'). Succeeding where his namesake had failed, Olav II spread Christianity with considerable success. In 1023 Olav built a stone cross in Voss (p210), where it still stands, and in 1024 he founded the Church of Norway. After an invasion by King Canute (Knut) of Denmark in 1028, Olav II died during the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030. For Christians, this amounted to martyrdom and the king was canonised as a saint; the great Nidaros Cathedral (p276) in Trondheim stands as a memorial to St Olav and, until the Protestant Reformation, the cathedral served as a destination for pilgrims from all over Europe (see the boxed text, p280). His most lasting legacy, however, was having forged a lasting identity for Norway as an independent kingdom.

Of the kings who followed, none distinguished themselves quite as infamously as Harald III (Harald Hardråde, or Harald 'Hard-Ruler'), half-brother of St Olav. Harald III raided throughout the Mediterranean, but it was a last hurrah for the Vikings. When he was killed during an ill-conceived raid in England in 1066, the Viking air of invincibility was broken. Snorre Sturluson's *King Harald's Saga* loosely follows the events of Harald's life.

## NO LONGER INDEPENDENT

The Vikings may have been fast disappearing into history, but Viking expansionism, along with the coming of Christianity, planted the seeds – of success, of decline – for what was to come. As Norway's sphere of international influence shrank, Norway's neighbours began to close in, leaving this one-time world power having to fight for its independence.

## Trouble Abroad, Trouble at Home

In 1107 Sigurd I led an expedition of 60 ships to the Holy Land. Three years later, he captured Sidon, in modern-day Lebanon. But by this stage foreign conquest had become a smokescreen for serious internal problems. Sigurd died in 1130 and the rest of the century was fraught with brutal civil wars over succession to the throne. The victorious King Sverre, a churchman-turned-warrior, paved the way for Norway's so-called 'Golden Age', which saw Bergen claim the title of national capital, driven by Norway's perennial ties to foreign lands and, in particular, trade between coastal towns and the German-based Hanseatic League (see p192). Perhaps drawn by Norway's economic boom, Greenland and Iceland voluntarily joined the Kingdom of Norway in 1261 and 1262, respectively.

But Norway's role as a world power was on the wane and Norway was turning inward. Håkon V built brick and stone forts, one at Vardø to

protect the north from the Russians, and another at Akershus, in 1308, to defend Oslo harbour. The transfer of the national capital from Bergen to Christiania (to become Oslo) soon followed. When Håkon V's grandson Magnus united Norway with Sweden in 1319, Norway began a decline that would last for 200 years. Once-great Norway had become just another province of its neighbours.

In August 1349 the Black Death arrived in Norway on board an English ship via Bergen. The bubonic plague would eventually kill one-third of Europe's population. In Norway, land fell out of cultivation, towns were ruined, trading activities faltered and the national coffers decreased by 65%. In Norway, as much as 80% of the nobility perished. Because their peasant workforce had also been decimated, the survivors were forced to return to the land, forever changing the Norwegian power-base and planting the seeds for an egalitarianism that continues to define Norway to this day.

By 1387 Norway had lost control of Iceland and 10 years later, Queen Margaret of Denmark formed the Kalmar Union of Sweden, Denmark and Norway, with Eric of Pomerania as king. Margaret's neglect of Norway continued into the 15th century, when trade links with Iceland were broken and the Greenland colonies mysteriously disappeared without trace.

In 1469 Orkney and Shetland were pawned – supposedly a temporary measure – to the Scottish Crown by the Danish-Norwegian King Christian I, who had to raise money for his daughter's dowry. Just three years later the Scots annexed both island groups.

Buffeted by these winds of change Norway had become a shadow of its former self. The only apparent constant was the country's staunch Christian faith. But even in the country's faith there were fundamental changes afoot. In 1537, the Reformation replaced the incumbent Catholic faith with Lutheran Protestantism and the transformation of the Norway of the Vikings was all but complete.

## Denmark & Sweden – The Enemy

Talk to many Norwegians and you're likely to find that there's no love lost between them and their neighbours, Denmark and Sweden. Here's why.

A series of disputes between the Danish Union and the Swedish crown were played out on Norwegian soil. First came the Seven Years War (1563–70), followed by the Kalmar War (1611–14). Trondheim, for example, was repeatedly captured and recaptured by both sides and during the Kalmar War an invasion of Norway was mounted from Scotland (see the boxed text, p180).

In two further wars during the mid-17th century Norway lost a good portion of its territory to Sweden. The Great Nordic War with the expanding Swedish Empire was fought in the early 18th century and in 1716 the Swedes occupied Christiania (Oslo). The Swedes were finally defeated in 1720, ending over 150 years of warfare.

*The History of Norway – From the Ice Age to Today*, by Øvind Stenersen and Ivar Libæk, provides more than enough historical detail for most travellers and is available at larger bookshops in Norway.

The mystery behind the disappearance of the Greenland colonies is examined in Jared Diamond's *Collapse*.

*Sweden and Visions of Norway: Politics and Culture 1814–1905*, by H Arnold Barton, offers a detailed analysis of the enmity and uneasy neighbourliness between Norway and Sweden in the pivotal 19th century.

1066

The Viking age draws to a close after Harald III dies at the hands of King Harold of England at the Battle of Stamford Bridge during an unsuccessful incursion into England in 1066.

1261

Greenland joins the Kingdom of Norway, followed a year later by Iceland, reflecting Norway's growing influence over the affairs of Europe's far north.

1319

Magnus, the successor to Norway's Håkon V, becomes King of Sweden and unites Sweden and Norway. This ends Norwegian independence and the royal line of Harald Fair-Hair and begins two centuries of decline.

1369

Bubonic plague (the Black Death) arrives in Bergen and quickly spreads throughout the country, forever altering Norway's social fabric.

1469

The Orkney and Shetland islands, along with the Isle of Man, are sold to the Scots, bringing to an end centuries of Norwegian expansion.

1537

The Reformation that sweeps across Europe and causes the separation between the Catholic and Protestant churches reaches Norway, whereafter the incumbent Catholic faith is replaced with Lutheran Protestantism.

Despite attempts to re-establish trade with Greenland through the formation of Norwegian trading companies in Bergen in 1720, Danish trade restrictions scuppered the nascent economic independence. As a consequence, Norway was ill-equipped to weather the so-called 'Little Ice Age', from 1738 to 1742. The failure of crops ensured a period of famine and the death of one-third of Norwegian cattle, not to mention thousands of people.

During the Napoleonic Wars, Britain blockaded Norway, causing the Danes to surrender on 14 January 1814. The subsequent Treaty of Kiel presented Norway to Sweden in a 'Union of the Crowns'. Tired of having their territory divided up by foreign kings, a contingent of farmers, businesspeople and politicians gathered at Eidsvoll Verk in April 1814 to draft a new constitution and elect a new Norwegian king. Sweden forced the new king, Christian Frederik, to yield and accept the Swedish choice of monarch, Karl Johan. War was averted by a compromise that provided for devolved Swedish power. Norway's constitution hadn't lasted long, but it did suggest that Norwegians had had enough.

## INDEPENDENT NORWAY

Norway may have spent much of the previous centuries as a subservient vassal to foreign occupiers and its days as a world power had long ago ended, but not all was doom and gloom. It took almost a century after their first constitution, not to mention nine centuries after Harald Fair-Hair first unified the country, but Norwegians were determined to once and for all become masters of their own destiny.

### A Confident Start

During the 19th century, perhaps buoyed by the spirit of the 1814 constitution, Norwegians began to rediscover a sense of their own, independent cultural identity. This nascent cultural revival was most evident in a flowering of musical and artistic expression led by poet and playwright Henrik Ibsen (p50), composer Edvard Grieg (p50) and artist Edvard Munch (p51). Language also began to play its part with the development of a unique Norwegian dialect known as *landsmål* (or *Nynorsk*). Norway's first railway, from Oslo to Eidsvoll, was completed in 1854 and Norway began looking at increased international trade, particularly tied to its burgeoning fishing and whaling industries in the Arctic north.

Norway was still extremely poor – between 1825 and 1925, over 750,000 Norwegians re-settled in the USA and Canada – but the wave of national identity would not be stopped.

In 1905 a constitutional referendum was held. As expected, virtually no-one in Norway favoured continued union with Sweden. The Swedish king, Oskar II, was forced to recognise Norwegian sovereignty, abdicate and re-instate a Norwegian constitutional monarchy, with Haakon VII on the

throne. His descendants rule Norway to this day with decisions on succession remaining under the authority of the *storting* (parliament). Oslo was declared the national capital of the Kingdom of Norway.

Newly independent Norway quickly set about showing the world that it was a worthy international citizen. In 1911 the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen reached the South Pole. Two years later Norwegian women became among the first in Europe to be given the vote. Hydroelectric projects sprang up all around the country and prosperous new industries emerged to drive the increasingly healthy export economy.

Having emerged from WWI largely unscathed – Norway was neutral, although some Norwegian merchant vessels were sunk by the Germans – Norway grew in confidence. In 1920 the *storting* voted to join the newly formed League of Nations, a move that was opposed only by the Communist-inspired Labour Party, an increasingly militant and revolutionary party that dominated the *storting* by 1927. The 1920s also brought new innovations, including the development of factory ships, which allowed processing of whales at sea and caused an increase in whaling activities, especially around Svalbard and in the Antarctic; for more information on whaling, see p76.

Trouble, however, lay just around the corner. The Great Depression of the late 1920s and beyond almost brought Norway to its knees. By December 1932 there was 42% unemployment and farmers were hit especially hard by the economic downturn.

### Norway at War

Norway had chosen a bad time to begin asserting its independence. The clouds of war were gathering in Europe and although Norway had been spared the ravages of WWI, it could not escape for long.

By the early 1930s Fascism had begun to spread throughout Europe. Unlike during WWI, Norway found itself swept up in the violent convulsions sweeping Europe. In 1933 the former Norwegian defence minister Vidkun Quisling formed a Norwegian fascist party, the *Nasjonal Samling*. The Germans invaded Norway on 9 April 1940, prompting King Håkon and the royal family to flee into exile (see the boxed text, p170), while British, French, Polish and Norwegian forces fought a desperate rearguard action. For further insights into the Norwegian resistance to the Nazi occupation, see the boxed text, p100.

Six southern towns were burnt out and despite some Allied gains the British, who were out on a limb, abandoned Arctic Norway to its fate. In Oslo, the Germans established a puppet government under Vidkun Quisling, whose name thereafter entered the lexicon as a byword for those collaborators who betray their country.

Having spent centuries fighting for a country to call their own, the Norwegians didn't take lightly to German occupation. In particular, the Norwegian resistance network distinguished itself in sabotaging German

The first Allied victory of WWII occurred in late May 1940 in Norway, when a British naval force re-took Narvik and won control over this strategic iron ore port. It fell again to the Germans on 9 June.

*War and Innocence: A Young Girl's Life in Occupied Norway*, by Hanna Aasvik Helmersen, is an open-eyed account of Norway during WWII as seen through the eyes of an eight-year-old girl.

*Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy*, by Toril Moi, is ideal for those looking for the Norwegian context of Norway's favourite playwright and the times in which he lived.

1720

After almost 150 years of conflict on Norwegian soil (the Seven Years' War, the Kalmar War and the Great Nordic War) Sweden is finally defeated, although Danish and Swedish influence over Norway's affairs remains strong.

1814

After Denmark's defeat in the Napoleonic Wars, Norway is presented to Sweden in the so-called 'Union of the Crowns'. Disgruntled Norwegians draft their first constitution, an event still celebrated as Norway's first act of independence.

1905

Norwegians voted overwhelmingly for independence and against union with Sweden. Norway becomes independent with its own constitutional monarchy presided over by King Haakon VII. This royal line continues to occupy the Norwegian throne.

1911

Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen becomes the first person to reach the South Pole, highlighting a period of famous Norwegian explorers going to the ends of the earth.

1920

Norwegian territory is extended for the first time in centuries with the signing of the Svalbard Treaty. In the same year Norway's *storting* (parliament) votes to join the newly formed League of Nations.

1940

On 9 April Nazi Germany invades Norway, greeted by the fascist Defence Minister Vidkun Quisling. King Håkon and the royal family flee into exile, first to the UK and then Washington, DC, where they remained throughout the war.



designs, often through the assistance of daring Shetland fishermen who smuggled arms across the sea to western Norway. Among the most memorable acts of defiance was the famous commando assault of February 1943 on the heavy water plant at Vemork, which was involved in the German development of an atomic bomb (see the boxed text, p153).

The Germans exacted bitter revenge on the local populace and among the civilian casualties were 630 Norwegian Jews who were sent to central European concentration camps. Serbian and Russian prisoners of war were coerced into slave labour on construction projects in Norway, and many perished from the cold and an inadequate diet. The high number of worker fatalities during the construction of the Arctic Highway through the Saltfjell inspired its nickname, the *blodveien* (blood road).

Finmark suffered particularly heavy destruction and casualties during the war. In Altafjorden and elsewhere, the Germans constructed submarine bases, which were used to attack convoys headed for Murmansk and Arkhangelsk in Russia, so as to disrupt the supply of armaments to the Russians.

In early 1945, with the Germans facing an escalating two-front war and seeking to delay the Russian advance into Finmark, the German forces adopted a scorched-earth policy and devastated northern Norway, burning fields, forests, towns and villages. Shortly after the German surrender of Norway, Quisling was executed by firing squad and other collaborators were sent off to prison.

### The Oil Years

Although there were initial fears in the post-war years that Norway would join the Eastern Bloc of Communist countries under the Soviet orbit – the Communist party made strong gains in post-war elections and even took part in coalition governments – the Iron Curtain remained firmly in place at the Russian border. More than that, Norway made a clear statement of intent in 1946 when it became a founding member of the UN. Ever conscious of its proximity to Russia, the country also abandoned its neutrality by joining NATO in 1949. Letting bygones be bygones, Norway joined with other Scandinavian countries to form the Nordic Council in 1952.

There was just one problem: Norway was broke and in desperate need of money for reconstruction, particularly in the Arctic north. At first, it appeared that the increasingly prosperous merchant navy and whaling fleet would provide a partial solution. Norway struggled through (post-war rationing continued until 1952) as best it could.

That would soon change in the most dramatic way possible. Oil was discovered in the North Sea in the late 1960s and the economy boomed, transforming Norway from one of Europe's poorest countries to one of its richest; for more information on Norway's oil bounty, see the boxed text, p41.

Since oil transformed the Norwegian economy, successive socialist governments (and short-lived conservative ones) have used the windfalls (alongside

For its size, Norway plays a disproportionately important role in international conflict resolution (pushing UN treaties to ban land mines, for example) and it has become an effective mediator in the Middle East and Sri Lanka.

*Norway: Elites on Trial*, by Knut Heidar, may be a bit dry and academic but it remains one of the finest and most detailed descriptions of modern Norway, with an emphasis on its evolving relationship with the EU.

### WHERE IS NORWAY NOW?

Stable, comfortably wealthy and a respected international citizen, Norway nonetheless stands at an important crossroads in its history. For one thing, Norway continues to agonise over whether it should join the European Union (EU) and, casting an eye over Norwegian history, it's not difficult to understand why Norwegians remain wary of forming unions of any kind with other countries. Having narrowly voted against membership in 1972 and again in 1994 despite Norwegian governments pressing for a 'yes' vote, Norway remains on the outside looking in. As a result, Norwegians neither receive the benefits of membership (government estimates suggest that Norway loses US\$180 million a year by not joining), nor are they fulfilling their responsibilities. You'll meet Norwegians who bristle with indignation at the mere thought that directives on daily life should be made from Brussels (or anywhere else for that matter), even as many – particularly urban-dwellers and southerners – recognise that Norway cannot remain forever isolated. Recent polls suggest that a slim majority of Norwegians supports joining.

Immigration (see p45) is another issue that dominates Norwegian political debates. Norway has been transformed from a nation of emigrants to one where 8.9% of Norway's people were born overseas. The uneasiness that this demographic transformation has brought threatens to revolutionise Norway's political landscape. Although the Labour Party remains in power as it has for much of Norway's independent history, albeit in a red-green alliance with the Socialist Left and Centre Party since 2005, there are signs that the political baseline is shifting right. In the 2005 elections, the (Progress Party) *Fremskrittspartiet* won 22% of the vote after advocating a crackdown on immigration and opposing EU membership. As a result, many Norwegians worry that other elements of Norway's famed tolerance and egalitarianism may be under threat. There are also fears that if Norway is to remain competitive in the international economy, the famously relaxed lifestyle of Norwegians may need to change; one recent study showed that Norwegians on average work less than 160 days per year.

And then there's oil, the black gold that made modern Norway possible. With a rapidly rising oil fund for future generations soaring beyond US\$300 billion (see the boxed text, p41), and with abundant reserves of natural gas, Norway has fewer reasons than most oil producers to worry about the days when the oil runs out. Even so, Norwegians, as they will freely tell you, feel decidedly guilty about their wealth and worry that their laudable attempts to be model environmental citizens will be forever undermined by exporting so much oil. Some of that guilt is assuaged by the fact that Norway is also one of the largest per capita donors of foreign aid, but all the uncertainty over Norway's place in the world is frequently enough to cast a shadow over the normally sunny dispositions of Norwegians. Perhaps the concerns stem from the fact that for the first time since Viking days, Norway is confronting such issues from a position of considerable strength and independence.

high income taxes and service fees) to foster one of the most extensive social welfare systems in history, with free medical care and higher education, as well as generous pension and unemployment benefits. It adds up to what the government claims is the 'most egalitarian social democracy in Western Europe'.

1945

On 7 May the last foreign troops on Norwegian soil, the Russians, withdraw from Arctic Norway, leaving Norwegians to pick up the pieces after the devastation wrought across the country by the retreating German army.

1946

Norway becomes a founding member of the UN. This membership would later provide a platform for Norwegian foreign policy with Norway an important mediator in numerous international conflicts, including the Middle East and Sri Lanka.

1949

Norway joins NATO and aligns itself with the USA despite fears in the West that left-leaning Norway would turn towards the Soviet Union.

Late 1960s

Oil is discovered, transforming Norway from the poor man of northern Europe into one of the richest countries in the world. Oil revenues have provided the basis for an all-encompassing system of social welfare and generous foreign aid.

1994

Norwegians vote against joining the European Union (EU). The 'no' vote (52%) draws on the concerns of traditional family farms, fishing interests and the perceived loss of national sovereignty that membership would supposedly bring.

2005

A 'red-green' coalition wins parliamentary elections, overturning a conservative-led coalition government that had won power in 2001.

# The Culture

## THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

Norwegians are at once fiercely independent and keen to engage with the world and this can lead to contradictions. For example, you may come across staunch environmentalists who take pride in their government's controversial stance on commercial whaling, seeing threats not to the animals but to a traditional Norwegian industry and Norwegian freedom of action. You'll find even more who agonise over whether Norway should join the EU, fearful of the sovereignty they will lose, yet aware that they have a responsibility to engage with their neighbours to the south and east. But above all else you'll find Norwegians who speak numerous languages, have travelled widely and who love nothing more than to welcome visitors to their country.

Norwegians love the great outdoors and they take very seriously the ancient law of *allemansretten* (literally 'every man's right'), whereby public access to wild areas is guaranteed, even in long, dark winters when they take to the wilderness on cross-country skis. That's not to say they don't welcome summer – they do, they almost worship it, aware that it may only last for two months. Norwegians are generally good-natured, but in summer they positively glow with infectious good humour.

A strong egalitarian streak runs through Norwegian society as does an awareness of the country's history. Ostentatious displays of wealth are frowned upon, partly because many older Norwegians remember a time when life was a struggle and the country was poor. Although some complain that the old ways of community and solidarity are disappearing, most Norwegians agree with international assessments that Norway is easily the world's most livable country.

## LIFESTYLE

Norway consistently comes first on the UN Human Development Index, which ranks countries according to a range of quality-of-life indicators.

### Work & Family Life

If government support for the family is your yardstick, Norway may be the best country in the world in which to have a family. In the early 1970s the foundation of Norway's family welfare system was to provide 'a mother's wage', protecting a woman's right to remain at home without relying on her husband's income. Such measures remain in place, but the focus has broadened and now includes everything from paid leave (Norwegians are entitled to five weeks a year) to heavily subsidised childcare.

### THE ECONOMICS OF CHILDBIRTH IN NORWAY

**Paid maternity leave** A compulsory six-week minimum, with full-pay provisions extending to 42 weeks (the longest in Europe) or 12 months on 80% pay.

**Paid paternity leave** A four-week minimum (soon to be increased to five weeks); if the weeks aren't taken, the weeks are lost to both parents.

**Further leave entitlements** Each parent is entitled to an additional one-year's unpaid, job-protected leave (civil servants get three) or to work part-time on full pay for up to two years.

**Government grants for children** Government grants of over Nkr33,000 upon the birth of a child and family allowance income-support during the child's life.

### LUXURY PROBLEMS

Scarcity has a long history in Norway: it drove the Vikings to pillage, immigrants to set sail for America and left Munch in such an existential funk that he painted *The Scream*. But with the discovery of oil in 1969 Norwegians went from penny-poor to flush overnight, quite the predicament for a country of committed egalitarians.

So how has this newfound wealth affected the country? Here two members of the older generation remark on the changes they've noticed in the past 50 years. Kate Waagaard, born in 1935, comes from Nes i Ådal, in the Valdres district north of Oslo; and Finn Skoien, born in 1936, is from Hønefoss, also in Valdres.

**Are things better?** Well, more money is certainly being spent. The quality of life has improved and there are higher living standards and low unemployment. And Norwegians use a lot more money than we used to – building more cabins, going on vacations, eat out more – but prices are going up too. (Finn)

People are more open with their money and have a lot more to show. When I first went to England after the war, I went to pick berries for the summer. That was a big trip for me, but today people take exotic trips to places like the Maldives. (Kate)

**What are a few everyday changes you've noticed?** Cars. A four-wheel drive was a rarity. Not anymore. Rowboats have been replaced by Riva speedboats (US\$500,000 and up). (Finn)

A *hytte* (a cabin or hut) is now a large, multibathroom cabin, complete with all amenities. Telephone service has improved! It used to take years to get a phone installed. (Kate)

*As told to Kari Lundgren*

Perhaps because of these unparalleled levels of support, Norway has one of the highest fertility rates in the Western world (1.81 children per family). Another side effect is that the Norwegian workplace is extremely child-friendly. As one Norwegian mother told the BBC in 2006, 'There's just a completely different level of acceptance among employers here. It's not uncommon to put a telephone conference on hold, because you can hear a baby crying in the background.'

There have nonetheless been changes in family demographics in recent years, with the average age (28.6) of first-time mothers increasing, a decline in marriage rates (5.5 per 1000 people), a rise in de facto relationships (almost 50% of children are born outside wedlock), and an increase in the numbers of single mothers (around one-quarter of children grow up in single-parent households).

These new realities, most of which are protected under the welfare system, have begun a perceptible shift away from the traditional nuclear family, which has always provided the bedrock of Norwegian society. Partly this change is because of the greater choice that rising Norwegian incomes (US\$54,465 per capita in 2006, the second-highest in the world) have enabled, and partly because of a decline in churchgoing among the young. Perhaps the most noticeable impact has been not upon immediate family units – which have diversified rather than been replaced, and the double-income-two-kids model remains the norm – but on traditional, extended families whereby the requirement to care for elderly relatives seems to have transferred from family members to the state.

Norway has an ageing population, an official retirement age of 67, pensions guaranteed for the remainder of a person's life and an average life expectancy nudging close to 80 years. It does, however, have an advantage over other countries wondering how they'll meet their pension obligations as the pool of taxpayers shrinks: the Government Pension Fund (see the boxed text, p41).

## Education

Education is compulsory (and has been since 1889!), with the public system heavily funded and private schools actively discouraged. Students at secondary level can choose between traditional academic programmes and vocational training. Many also choose to study in cities other than their home town, contributing to a situation wherein children leave home and become relatively independent much earlier than in most southern European countries. Education, including university studies, is free.

Conscious efforts have been undertaken to preserve Sami traditional culture (p42) – Sami students take cultural studies and can do some coursework in the Sami language. Non-Norwegian speakers also have access to subsidised special education programmes.

There are six main universities, in Oslo (the oldest), Bergen, Trondheim, Tromsø, Ås and Stavanger. There are also around 40 regional and specialist colleges.

## Traditional Culture

Apart from vestiges in remote rural areas, Norway's cultural traditions are visible only in the country's excellent folk museums (see the boxed text, p42) or during folk performances (such as in Bergen; see p207).

One of the most enduring elements is the *bunad*, the elaborate regional folk costumes. Each district has developed its own unique designs, which exhibit varying degrees of colour and originality. Although they remained in everyday use until after WWII in traditional regions such as Setesdalen and parts of Telemark, they're now something of a novelty and are dusted off mainly for weddings and other celebrations.

The intricate embroidery work on these lovely creations was traditionally performed by shepherdesses and milkmaids while tending their livestock. Nowadays, these elaborate costumes are produced only by a few serious seamstresses and embroiderers, and the purchase of a *bunad* represents a major financial commitment. The Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo features displays of these memorable costumes, but the best place to observe them is in Oslo during the 17 May National Day celebrations, when men and women from all over the country turn up in the traditional dress of their regions.

## ECONOMY

Norway's economy is one of Europe's star performers. Annual growth rarely drops much below 3%, while high world oil prices, massive trade and budget surpluses, a negligible unemployment rate and the absence of external debt suggest that the economic good times are here to stay.

It wasn't always thus. Norway at the end of the 19th century was one of Europe's poorest countries and grim economic conditions led to the unprecedented wave of emigration from Norway to the USA (see p46). The situation gradually improved, although in 1950 Norwegian income levels (now second only to Luxembourg) were half those of the USA and ranked below Argentina and Venezuela. It was not until the late 1960s, when oil was discovered, that Norway's economy began to experience stellar growth. For an insight into how that change has been experienced by ordinary Norwegians, see the boxed text, p39.

Norway is the world's third-largest oil exporter and oil accounts for 36% of Norwegian government revenues; agriculture, fisheries, hydroelectric power and tourism are other important industries. What that means for a government ruling over Norway's almost five million Norwegians is an unprecedented ability to look after its citizens with massive spending on

Although the marginal income tax rate is 28%, in practical terms this becomes around 36% for middle-income earners and 49.3% for high-income earners

## SAVING FOR A RAINY DAY

Most countries with significant oil reserves look with concern towards the day when the oil runs out. Not so Norway.

Suddenly flush with oil money in the 1970s, Norway's government began by developing the country's infrastructure, after which the profits were used to pay off the country's debt, an aim achieved in 1995. Thus it was that in 1996, the government established the Norwegian Petroleum Fund. The aim? To safeguard the wellbeing of future generations of Norwegians, more specifically by putting aside enough money to pay for the health and pension costs of Norway's ageing population. The reserve fund, whose name was changed in 2006 to the Government Pension Fund, is now the largest public fund in Europe with a value of over US\$300 billion. Some estimates suggest that the fund will swell to US\$900 billion (US\$180,000 for every Norwegian) within a decade.

But this is not just any investment fund. For a start, the fund's managers may only invest outside Norway, a measure designed to avoid overheating the local economy. As such Norway has become one of the largest investors in the world. 'We basically own a slice of the world,' was how Henrik Syse, head of the fund's corporate governance department at Norwegian central bank, described it to the *International Herald Tribune* (IHT) in 2007.

The fund's managers are also bound by a strict ethical code when choosing where to invest. Companies (such as Wal-Mart) and countries (eg Myanmar) accused of human rights violations have been excluded from the fund as have mining and other companies accused of severe environmental damage. Discussing the policy of socially responsible investing, Gro Nystuen, a human rights lawyer who oversees the ethics council that vets the investments, told the IHT that 'Norwegians feel bad about having all this money. Our job is to make the Norwegian people feel less guilty.'

However, for all the government's efforts to ensure that Norway's oil wealth secures the country's future, an increasing number of Norwegians has begun to question whether some of the money should be used *now* to improve Norway's often ageing infrastructure, especially roads and an overburdened health system. According to Bernt Aardal, research director at the Institute for Social Research in Oslo, the growing concern stems from 'the dissatisfaction of increasing expectations. There are always unsolved problems in a society. And as the money pile grows, the tolerance for living with these problems gets smaller.'

Further, the success of the Fremskrittspartiet has given many food for thought. As the only party to criticise the handling of the oil fund, the Fremskrittspartiet (which is also known for its anti-immigration stance) won almost a quarter of the vote and became the second-largest party in parliament after the 2005 elections.

health, education and public welfare, not to mention an abundance of jobs in a perpetually booming economy.

## POPULATION

Norway has one of the lowest population densities in Europe (around 12 people per square kilometre, compared to 246 in the UK). Although still true to its roots as a rural society of remote and rural farmsteads, there's an irreversible trend of urbanisation underway and 47.3% of the population now live in urban areas (compared with 23.4% in 1975); this figure is expected to rise to 55.9% by 2015.

## Nordic

Most of Norway's population is considered to be of Nordic stock; these people are thought to have descended from central and northern European tribes who migrated northward about 8000 years ago (see p28). The Nordic physical stereotype – a tall sturdy frame, light hair and blue eyes – does have some basis in fact with nearly 70% of Norwegians having blue eyes, a greater number than anywhere else in the world outside Scandinavia.

### NORWAY'S TOP FOLK MUSEUMS

- Maihaugen** (p165), Lillehammer  
**Norwegian Folk Museum** (p102), Oslo  
**Setesdalmuseet** (p160), Setesdalen  
**Hardanger Folk Museum** (p219), Utne  
**Romsdalen Museum** (p267), Molde  
**Sverresborg Trøndelag Folk Museum** (p277), Trondheim

### Sami

Norway's 40,000 indigenous Sami people (formerly known as Lapps) are the country's largest ethnic minority and can reasonably claim to be Norway's longest-standing residents. Now primarily inhabiting the far northern region of Finnmark (scattered groups live in Nordland, Trøndelag and other regions of central Norway), this hardy, formerly nomadic people has for centuries occupied northern Scandinavia and northwestern Russia. The total population of around 60,000 Sami forms an ethnic minority in four countries – Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (see the map, above). The Sami refer to their traditional lands as Sápmi or Samiland.

Reindeer herding, once the mainstay of the Sami economy, was successfully modernised in the 1980s and 1990s and is now a major capital earner. In addition to reindeer herding, modern Sami engage in fishing, agriculture, trade, small industry and the production of handicrafts. For more information on Sami culture, see the boxed text, p357, and consider visiting the Sami museums of Vájjat Sámi Musea and Ceavccageage (p356), between Tana Bru and Vadsø, as well as the Sápmi Park and Sami National Museum (p368) in Karasjok. To find out more about modern Sami music see p52.

### POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

The first session of the Norwegian Sami Parliament (see the boxed text, p44 and p368) was held in 1989. The primary task of the parliament, which convenes in Karasjok and whose 43 representatives are elected from Sami communities all over Norway every four years, is to protect Sami language and culture.

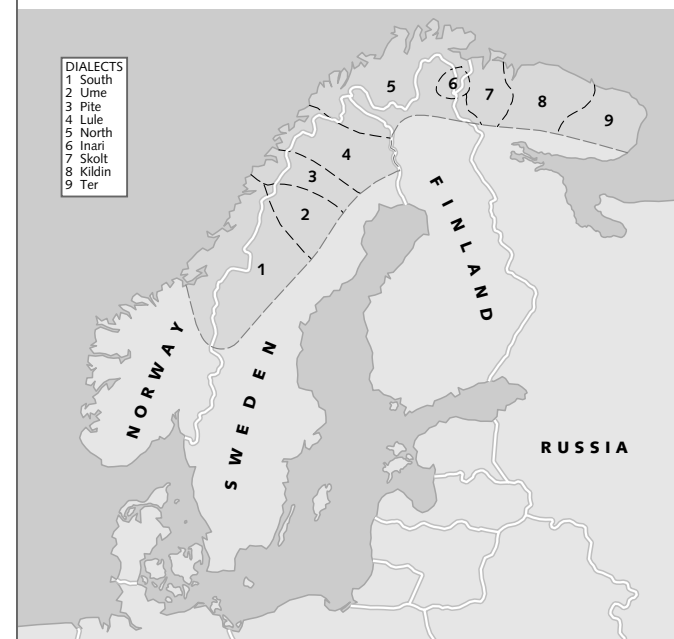
The Norwegian Sami also belong to the **Saami Council** ([www.saamicouncil.net](http://www.saamicouncil.net)), which was founded in 1956 to foster cooperation between political organisations in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. In Tromsø in 1980, the Saami Council's political programme adopted the following principles:

We, the Sami, are one people, whose fellowship must not be divided by national boundaries. We have our own history, tradition, culture and language. We have inherited from our forebears a right to territories, water and our own economic activities. We have an inalienable right to preserve and develop our own economic activities and our communities, in accordance with our own circumstances and we will together safeguard our territories, natural resources and national heritage for future generations.

The Norwegian Sami also participate in the **Arctic Council** ([www.arctic-council.org/saami.html](http://www.arctic-council.org/saami.html)) and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), which encourages solidarity and promotes information exchange between indigenous peoples in the various member countries. The **Nordic Sami Institute** (☎ 78 48 80 00; [www.nsi.no](http://www.nsi.no)) at Kautokeino was established in 1974 and seeks to

A 2007 study found that Norway has more per-capita millionaires – 55,000 or one in every 85 Norwegians – than any other country in the world.

### SAMI CULTURAL AREA & DIALECTS



To be officially considered Sami, a person must speak Sami as their first language, consider themselves a member of the Sami community and live in accordance with that society, or have a parent who satisfies either condition.

promote Sami language, culture and education, as well as promote research, economic activities and environmental protection. It's funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

### SAMI RELIGION

Historically, Sami religious traditions were characterised mainly by a relationship to nature and its inherent god-like archetypes. In sites of special power, particularly prominent rock formations, people made offerings to their gods and ancestors to ensure success in hunting or other endeavours. Intervention and healing were affected by shamanic specialists, who used drums and small figures to launch themselves onto out-of-body journeys to the ends of the Earth in search of answers. As with nearly all indigenous peoples in the northern hemisphere, the bear, as the most powerful creature in nature, was considered a sacred animal.

Historically, another crucial element in the religious tradition was the singing of the *joik* (also spelt *yoik*; literally 'song of the plains'). So powerful and significant was this personal mantra that the early Christian missionaries considered it a threat to their efforts and banned it as sinful. Although most modern Sami profess Christianity, elements of the old religion are making a comeback.

### SPORT

Skiing is etched deep in the Norwegian soul, not least because for thousands of years skis were the only practical means of winter transport in much of Norway. Not surprisingly, Norway is a leading winter-sports country. At the 1998 Winter Olympics, Norway finished second on the medal table,



### THE SAMI'S HISTORICAL STRUGGLE

Although it's believed that the Sami migrated to Norway from Siberia, the oldest written reference to the Sami was penned by the Roman historian Tacitus in AD 98. In AD 555 the Greek Procopius referred to Scandinavia as Thule (the 'furthest north'), and its peoples as *skridfinns*, who hunted, herded reindeer and travelled about on skis. The medieval Icelandic sagas confirm trading between Nordic peoples and the Sami; and the trader Ottar, who 'lived further north than any other Norseman', served in the court of English king Alfred the Great and wrote extensively about his native country and its indigenous peoples.

During medieval times, the Sami people lived by hunting and trapping in small communities or bands known as *siida*. While the 17th- and 18th-century colonisation of the north by Nordic farmers presented conflicts with this system, many of the newcomers found that the Sami way of life was better suited to the local conditions and adopted their dress, diet, customs and traditions.

Around 1850, with Sami traditions coming under increasing threat from missionary activity, reforms were introduced, restricting the use of the Sami language in schools. From 1902 it became illegal to sell land to any person who couldn't speak Norwegian; this policy was practised zealously. However, there was an about-turn after WWII when official policy began promoting internal multiculturalism. By the 1960s the Sami's right to preserve and develop their own cultural values and language were enshrined across all government spectra. Increasingly, official policy viewed the Sami as Norwegian subjects but also an ethnic minority and separate people. Their legal status improved considerably and the government formed two committees: the Samekulturutvalget to deal with Sami cultural issues; and the Samerettsutvalget to determine the legal aspects of Sami status and resource ownership.

In 1988 the Norwegian government passed an enlightened constitutional amendment stating: 'It is the responsibility of the authorities of the State to create conditions enabling the Sami people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life.' It also provided for the creation of an elected 39-member Sami parliament, **Sameting** ([www.samediggi.no](http://www.samediggi.no)), to serve as an advisory body to bring Sami issues to the national parliament (similar bodies also exist in Finland and Sweden).

In early 1990 the government passed the Sami Language Act, which gave the Sami language and Norwegian equal status. Later the same year, Norway ratified the International Labour Organisation proposition No 169, which guaranteed the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples.

Although Sami rights are supported by most parties across the political spectrum, the Sami's struggle continues. The right-wing Fremskrittspartiet, which won 22.1% of the vote in 2005, has called for the Sami parliament to be abolished.

matching its 1994 medal tally when it was the host nation. The success turned to domination in 2002 when Norway topped the medal table, but no-one quite knows what happened in Torino in 2006, when Norway trailed in 13th with just two gold medals. As you can imagine, the sudden decline was reported as close to a national tragedy. Among Norway's enduring Olympic legends are: Sonja Henie, the Olympic figure skating gold medalist who won gold in 1928, 1932 and 1936; speed-skater Johann Koss who won three gold medals at the Viking Ship Arena in Hamar in 1994; and cross-country skier Bjoern Daeqli who, at the 1998 Olympics, won his seventh gold medal, making him the most successful athlete in Winter Olympics history.

In winter, big ski-jumping events normally take place at Holmenkollen (p106) near Oslo, and other winter events occur at the Olympic venues in Hamar (p169) and Lillehammer (p163).

Football is another hugely popular winter sport. After briefly climbing to 2nd in FIFA ranking in 1993, the Norwegian men's football (soccer) team had, by July 2007, fallen to 35th. The failure to qualify for the 2002 and 2006

World Cups has cast a pall of gloom over the sport in Norway. Ole Gunnar Solskjær, Tore Andre Flo and John Carew are among Norway's most famous football exports, while Trondheim's Rosenberg won the domestic league 13 consecutive years from 1992 until 2004, and again in 2006.

The Norwegian women's national team has strutted the world stage with much greater success, clinching the Women's World Cup in 1995 and the gold medal at the Sydney Olympics in 2000; it now ranks fourth in the world rankings. Their best-known players were Heidi Stoere, who played 151 times for Norway between 1980 and 1997; and Bente Nordby, the goalkeeper who saved US superstar Mia Hamm's penalty en route to a famous tournament victory.

### MULTICULTURALISM

Norway has become an increasingly multicultural society in recent years, even as Norway's complicated approach to immigration sends out numerous conflicting messages (see p37). Immigration is strictly controlled and only bona fide refugees (ie those who have been granted refugee status with the UN elsewhere), not asylum seekers, are admitted. While there's an argument to be made that the policy is, especially given Norway's wealth, mean-spirited and geared towards maintaining social homogeneity, it's also true that few nations contribute as much money to foreign aid and refugee programmes as does Norway.

Such strategies notwithstanding, Norway was at last count home to 415,000 immigrants, or 8.9% of the population (compared to 1.4% in 1950). More than half of Norway's immigrants come from non-Western countries, especially Pakistan, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Turkey. In 2006 alone a record 45,800 immigrants arrived in Norway, a 30% increase from 2005. One-quarter of all immigrants have settled in Oslo, which is easily Norway's most multicultural city with 20% of its population born outside Norway; nowhere is this more evident than in Oslo's Grønland district, behind the Oslo S train station.

Although many non-Western immigrants came to Norway as refugees, a subtle shift has occurred from refugee-driven immigration to more family-reunion and labour immigrants (especially from Poland); this phenomenon has partly been driven by the often-acute labour shortages caused by Norway's almost nonexistent unemployment.

As in many European countries, Norway is involved in an often anguished debate over the country's cultural mix, with most Norwegians torn between traditional notions of fairness and the perception of a rapidly changing society. Norway's first racially motivated murder occurred in 2001 when a mixed-race youth was stabbed to death outside his Oslo home; 40,000 Norwegians took to the Oslo streets to protest. There was more hand-wringing in 2004 when the Norwegian prime minister Kjell Magne Bondevik rejected a plan to turn empty, disused churches into mosques, claiming that it was not 'the most natural' solution. In 2005 the Fremskrittspartiet, which advocates far stricter limits on immigration, became the second-largest party in the Norwegian parliament; its characterisation of immigrants as responsible for increasing crime rates was denounced as xenophobic by all other political parties.

Other survey results are less clear, with a recent poll showing that 41% of Norwegians agreed with the statement that 'most immigrants abuse the system of social benefits', even as 63% thought that 'most immigrants enrich the cultural life in Norway' and 86% said that 'all immigrants in Norway should have the same opportunities to have a job as Norwegians'.

The word 'slalom' derives from the Norwegian words *sla* 'slopes' or 'slope track', which originally referred to a Nordic ski competition that wove over hill and dale, dodging thickets!

### A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION

The unofficial voice of Norwegian American culture is the radio show *A Prairie Home Companion (PHC)*. First broadcast in 1974 in the heavily ethnic-Norwegian state of Minnesota, it's now one of the most popular shows on the US National Public Radio network and a two-hour Saturday evening ritual for some three million listeners in Norway, equal to two-thirds of the population of Norway!

Comedic sound effects and interludes of old-time and folk music frame skits with characters such as Guy Noir Private Eye and the cultured cowboys Dusty and Lefty; faux advertisements pitch Bertha's Kitty Boutique (for persons who care about cats) and the Ketchup Advisory Board. The annual joke show teems with titters about Norwegians and *PHC* is not above occasional excretory humour.

The show's Norwegian heart is the weekly news from Lake Wobegon (also a classic book by the same name), a tiny, fictional town in Minnesota's wind- and snow-swept north, where 'all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average'. Taciturn Norwegian bachelor farmers observe the world from the Chatterbox Café, and locals ice-fish, eat *lutefisk* (dried cod) and fill the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility. The town's best-known landmark is the Tomb of the Unknown Norwegian, and its leading civic organisation is the Sons of Knute. *PHC's* Norwegian-ness is all the more remarkable given that its host, originator and chief writer, Garrison Keillor, is of Scottish descent.

For the latest news from Lake Wobegon, check out <http://prairiehome.publicradio.org/>.

### Emigration from Norway

No discussion of multiculturalism would be complete without mentioning Norwegian emigration (800,000 to the USA and Canada alone in the 19th and early 20th centuries). Across the world you'll find people with Norwegian ancestry, with particularly high concentrations in Minnesota and surrounding US states. If your story is a part of Norway's history, check out **Cyndi's List** ([www.cyndylist.com/norway.htm](http://www.cyndylist.com/norway.htm)), a website loaded with links for tracing your Norwegian heritage.

Other sources of help include the **Norwegian Emigrant Museum** (p169; Norsk Utvandremuseum; ☎ 62 57 48 50; [www.museumsnett.no/emigrantmuseum](http://www.museumsnett.no/emigrantmuseum)) in Hamar and the **Norwegian Emigration Centre** (p223; ☎ 51 53 88 60; [www.emigrationcenter.com](http://www.emigrationcenter.com)) in Stavanger; the latter has a full list of links on its 'Contacts' page.

### RELIGION

Around 83% of the Norwegian population nominally belongs to the Church of Norway, with the remainder (mostly in Oslo) comprising other Christian denominations, including around 40,000 Catholics, as well as 75,000 Muslims (85% of whom live in Oslo) and 1500 Jews.

For information on the Sami religion, see p43 and for a discussion of the growing numbers of Muslims in Norway, see p45.

### Christianity

Christianity in Norway dates back thousands of years and one of the country's earliest kings, Olav II was canonised by the Catholic Church. However, modern Norwegian Christianity has been most influenced by German reformer Martin Luther, whose doctrines were adopted in Norway in 1537.

Today the Church of Norway is the national denomination of Protestant Evangelical Lutheranism and the Norwegian constitution states: 'All inhabitants of the Realm shall have the right to free exercise of their religion. The Evangelical-Lutheran religion shall remain the official religion of the State. The inhabitants professing it are bound to bring up their children in the same.' So much for complete freedom of religion!

Norway has one of the highest percentages of well-educated immigrants in the world: 40% have received higher education, with little difference between Western and non-Western immigrants.

Similar to the UK, the King of Norway is also the official head of the Church. This power was dramatically exercised in 1961, when King Olav V appointed the country's first woman priest and again in 1993, when King Harald V sanctioned the first female bishop. In the 1970s a bishop and quite a few priests quit after the *storting* (parliament), with royal sanction, passed a liberal abortion law.

While the average Norwegian attends church about twice a year and the organisation funds missions around the world, as many as 5000 Norwegians leave the official church annually, most of them advocating a separation of church and state.

### WOMEN IN NORWAY

According to the UN's Gender-Related Development Index, Norway is the best place in the world to be a woman. In addition to a raft of beneficial social welfare provisions (see p38), Norway has a female labour force participation rate of nearly 80%, well above the EU and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average (60%); some 79% of married women with children under the age of six work in paid employment, although more than half of these work part-time. In the 1993 election all three party leaders were women, and, after the 2005 elections 37.9% of national MPs were women, the fifth-highest in the world after Rwanda (48.8%), Sweden (47.3%), Costa Rica (38.6%) and Finland (38%). Norwegian women have an average life expectancy of 82.46 years, one of the highest in the world.

Despite such positive statistics, there remain areas where Norwegian women are far from equal with their male counterparts. Women's real annual incomes (US\$33,034) still lag behind those of men (US\$43,950) even though equal pay is mandated by law under gender equality legislation.

In March 2002 the government announced that 40% of board members of companies would have to be women, although the law has yet to have much impact with women still constituting just 9% of board members in public stock companies; less than 25% of senior leadership positions in universities are held by women and just 23% of executive managers in Norway are female. Domestic violence also remains a serious problem; in 2004 a study suggested that one in six adult Norwegian women had suffered some form of domestic violence.

When it comes to immigrant women in Norway, the government has been faced with a new set of controversies, especially relating to female circumcision. In 2007 Norway announced that it would stop families from travelling abroad if officials believe that the purpose of the trip is to circumcise a female family member. The move received considerable support in Norway after it was revealed that at least 185 girls from Norway had been circumcised in a Somali village.

### ARTS

For detailed coverage of Norwegian architecture, see p78.

### Literature

#### MEDIEVAL NORSE LITERATURE

Norwegian literature dates over a thousand years to the sagas of the Vikings. The two mainstays of the genre are skaldic poetry (*skalds* – the metaphoric and alliterative works of Norwegian court poets in the 9th and 10th centuries) and *eddic* poetry (named after the *Edda*, the most important collection of medieval Icelandic literature). The latter, which combines Christian with pre-Christian elements, is the most extensive source of information on Norse

Accessible yet serious-minded, Gender .no ([www.gender.no](http://www.gender.no)) is easily the best resource on issues of gender equality in Norway.

mythology, but it wasn't written down until Snorre Sturluson recorded it in the 13th century, long after the Christianisation of both Norway and Iceland. Its subject matter includes the story of the origin, history and end of the world, instructions on writing poetry, and a series of disconnected aphorisms attributed to the god Óðinn. Apart from the *Edda* itself, there are three forms of eddic poetry: legendary sagas, heroes' sagas and didactic poetry.

### THE GOLDEN AGE

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were the golden age of Norwegian literature. Although most of the attention centres on Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906; see the boxed text, p50), it was Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910) who in 1903 became the first Norwegian writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Best known for his story *Trust and Trial* (1857), Bjørnson's work documented vignettes of rural life (for which he was accused of romanticising the lot of rural Norwegians). His former home at Aulestad (p168) is open for visitors.

The hugely controversial Knut Hamsun (1859–1952) won the Nobel Prize in 1920. His greatest novels include *Hunger* (1890), *Mysteries* (1892) and *The Growth of the Soil* (1917). However, Hamsun's elitism, his appreciation of Germanic values and his idealisation of rural life led him to side with the Nazis in WWII, forever darkening his reputation with Norwegians. Only now is he being recognised as belonging to the tradition of Dostoevsky and Joyce.

Sigrid Undset (1882–1949) received the Nobel Prize in 1928 and is the most significant female writer in Norwegian literature. Undset began by writing about the plight of poor and middle-class women; between 1920 and 1922 she published the *Kristin Lavransdottir* trilogy, which was set in 14th-century Scandinavia and was later turned into a film (see p54). Her former home in Lillehammer (p165) is open to the public.

### CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

One of the best-known modern Norwegian writers is Jan Kjærstad (b 1953), whose *The Seducer* (2003) combines the necessary recipes for a best-seller – a thriller with a love affair and a whiff of celebrity – with seriously good writing. It won the 1999 Nordic Prize for Literature among other international prizes.

Another increasingly world-renowned author is Jostein Gaarder (b 1952) whose first bestselling novel, *Sophie's World* (1991), sold over 15 million copies worldwide. Other Gaarder works include *The Solitaire Mystery* and *The Christmas Mystery*, which are similarly written in the voice of a child protagonist.

Other popular and well-known novelists include Erik Fosnes Hansen (b 1965), Lars Saabye Christensen (b 1953) and Dag Solstad (b 1941), who is the only Norwegian author to win the Norwegian Literary Critics' Award three times. Herbjørg Wassmo (b 1942) has also won numerous international prizes and her 1989 *Dina's Book*, set in 1840s Norway, was turned into a film *I am Dina* (2002), starring Gerard Depardieu; her acclaimed *The House with the Blind Glass Windows* is set in and after WWII. In the crime fiction genre, Gunnar Staalesen and Karin Fossum have devoted international followings.

Another name to catch international headlines is journalist Asne Seierstad, whose *The Bookseller of Kabul* was a runaway international success. Her more recent *A Hundred and One Days* is a first-hand account of the fall of Saddam Hussein.

*Twentieth-Century Norwegian Writers*, by Tanya Thresher (ed), is ideal for those wanting to learn more about Norway's recent literary history and looking for little-known English-language titles.

### FOLK TALES & LEGENDS

Nowhere else in Europe does a tradition of folk tales and legends survive to quite the extent it does in Norway.

#### Mythical Creatures

The most Norwegian of Norway's supernatural beings is the troll, which emerged in Norway at the close of the last ice age. Trolls inhabit gloomy forests, moonlit lakes, deep fjords, snowy peaks and roaring waterfalls. They're creatures of shadow and darkness; any troll who is exposed to direct sunlight turns to stone.

**Trolls**, who can live for hundreds of years, come in all shapes and sizes, but nearly all have four fingers and toes on each hand and foot, as well as long, crooked noses and bushy tails. Some have multiple heads, with up to three eyes per head. They also have a strange predilection for harassing billy goats and a violent aversion to church bells. Despite having a short fuse and getting decidedly cranky, they're generally kind to humans.

A larger version of the troll was the **giant**, and according to legend, the world was created from the body of the giant Ymir of Jotunheimen (home of the giants), after his death at the hand of the Norse god Óðinn.

**Elves**, which normally live stream-side in the deepest forests, also come in both good and bad varieties. They only emerge at night, and it's said that the sites of their nocturnal festivities and dances are marked by luxuriant rings of grass.

Other elusive creatures include **hulder**, which steal milk from summer pastures; the frightening **draugen**, a headless fisherman who foretells drownings with a haunting wail; and the **vetter** (wights), who serve as the guardian spirits of the wildest coastlines. Serpents also existed in Viking mythology, but at least one is still with us today – the mysterious Selma the Serpent (see p158). For more information on Norway's fairy-tale characters, see the boxed text (p107).

#### Folk Tales

The valleys in western and northern Norway are rich sources of folk tales, sagas and myths, many of them explaining curious geographic features.

In one story, a lonely island-dwelling giantess shouted across the water to a giant named Blåmann (Blue Man) on the mainland, asking him to marry her. He agreed, provided she brought the island along with her. Sadly, by the time she'd packed, the sun rose and she turned to stone, as did Blåmann, who'd stayed out too long waiting for her. The island became known as Gygrøy (Giantess Island), but local fisherfolk renamed it Landegode (Good Land), lest the giantess take offence. Landegode's distinctive profile is a familiar landmark on the ferry between Bodø and Kjerringøy, while poor old Blåmann is now an ice-cap.

Another legend involves Hestmannen (the Horseman), who attempted to shoot the princess Lekamøya with an arrow when she wouldn't marry him. Her father, the king of Sømna, threw down his hat as a distraction, and the result was Torghatten, a hat-shaped peak that looks as if it's been pierced through, on Torget island south of Brønnøysund. Hestmannen himself is a knobbed peak on the island of Hestmanna, located further north near Mo i Rana.

### Music

#### CLASSICAL MUSIC

The 19th century was an extraordinarily rich time for Norwegian music, for it was then that Edvard Grieg (see the boxed text, p50), who is regarded as one of history's greatest composers, emerged. Of arguably equal importance, however, was the virtuoso violinist Ole Bull, known throughout Europe as the 'Nordic Paganini'. Bull is credited with critically encouraging the careers of Edvard Grieg and Henrik Ibsen, bringing the Hardanger folk fiddlers to Bergen concert halls and reviving Europe-wide interest in Norwegian folk music.

## CULTURAL ICONS

Norway's cultural life in the 20th century may have been dominated by its enviable list of literature Nobel Laureates (p48) and outstanding sportsmen and sportswomen (p43), but three figures from the 19th century – playwright Henrik Ibsen, composer Edvard Grieg and painter Edvard Munch – tower over Norway's cultural life like no others. Their emergence came at a time when Norway was forging its path to independence and pushing the creative limits of a newly confident national identity. More than just artists, Ibsen, Grieg and Munch are an expression of the Norwegian soul.

### Henrik Ibsen

Born in Skien, Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828–1906) became known as 'the father of modern drama', but to Norwegians he was the conscience of a nation. Norwegians are extremely proud of Ibsen, but from 1864 until 1891 he lived in disenchanting exile, decrying the small-mindedness of the Norwegian society of the day. Although in 1863 he wrote *The Pretenders*, which takes place in 13th-century Norway with King Håkon Håkonsson expressing anachronistic dreams of national unity, the enormously popular *Peer Gynt* (1867) was Ibsen's international breakthrough. In this enduring epic, an ageing hero returns to his Norwegian roots after wandering the world and is forced to face his own soul.

His other best-known plays include *The Doll's House* (1879), the highly provocative *Ghosts* (1881), *An Enemy of the People* (1882), *Hedda Gabler* (1890) and, his last drama, the semi-autobiographical *When We Dead Awaken*.

Throughout his life, Ibsen was always more than a chronicler of Norwegian society and saw himself as the very reflection of 19th-century Norwegians: 'He who wishes to understand me must know Norway. The magnificent but severe natural environment surrounding people up there in the north forces them to keep to their own. That is why they become introspective and serious, they brood and doubt – and they often lose faith. There, the long, dark winters come with their thick fogs enveloping the houses – oh, how they long for the sun!'

Top places to catch up with Ibsen's work are:

- Ibsen Museum (p94), Oslo
- Ibsenhuset Museum (p138), Grimstad
- Henrik Ibsenmuseet (p153), Skien

### Edvard Grieg

Norway's renowned composer, Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) was so disappointed with his first symphony that he scrawled across the score that it must never be performed! Thankfully, his wishes were ignored. Grieg was greatly influenced by Norway's folk music and melodies and his first great, signature work, *Piano Concerto in A minor*, has come to represent Norway as no other work before or since.

There are fine philharmonic orchestras in Oslo, Bergen (dating from 1765), Trondheim and Stavanger; and the Norwegian Opera Company (established in 1958) is based in Oslo. In addition to Grieg, watch out for works by his contemporaries Halvdan Kierulf and Johan Svendsen, or more recent composers such as David Monrad Johansen, Geirr Tveitt, Fartein Valen, Pauline Hall and **Ketil Bjørnstad** ([www.ketilbjornstad.com](http://www.ketilbjornstad.com)). Modern Norwegian compositions often bear unmistakable traces of folk music roots, including works by Hanson, Kvandal and Söderlind.

## CONTEMPORARY JAZZ & FOLK MUSIC

If the country's jazz festivals (see p22) are any indication, Norway has a thriving jazz scene, with world-class annual events in Molde, Kongsberg, Oslo, Bergen, Lillehammer and Arendal among others. Jazz saxophonist Jan Garbarek is one of the most enduring Norwegian jazz personalities. Other

Two years after the concerto Grieg, encouraged by luminaries such as Franz Liszt, collaborated with Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, setting the latter's poetry and writing to music. The results – *Before a Southern Convent*, *Bergliot* and *Sigurd Jorsalfar* – established Grieg as the musical voice of Norway. This was followed by a project with Henrik Ibsen, setting to music Ibsen's wonderful novel *Peer Gynt*. The score found international acclaim and became his – and Norway's – best-remembered classical work.

By 1885 he had developed a formidable repertoire (including *Ballad in G minor*, *The Mountain Thrill*, *Norwegian Dances for Piano* and the *Holberg Suite*), and he and his wife Nina moved into the coastal home at Troldhaugen, close to Bergen, from which he set off on numerous concert tours of Europe. According to his biographer, Aimer Grøvald, it was impossible to listen to Grieg without sensing a light, fresh breeze from the blue waters, a glimpse of grand glaciers and a recollection of the mountains of Western Norway's fjords.

Places to check out:

- Troldhaugen (p199), Bergen
- Open-air concerts (p207), Bergen
- Grieghallen (p207), Bergen

### Edvard Munch

Edvard Munch (1863–1944), Norway's most renowned painter, was a tortured soul: his mother and elder sister died of tuberculosis and his younger sister suffered from mental illness from an early age. Munch's first great work, *The Sick Child*, was a portrait of his sister Sophie shortly before her death. In 1890 he produced the haunting *Night*, depicting a lonely figure in a dark window. The following year he finished *Melancholy* and began sketches of what would become his best known work, *The Scream*, which graphically represents Munch's own inner torment.

In 1892 Munch buried himself in a cycle of angst-ridden, atmospheric themes collectively entitled *Frieze of Life – A Poem about Life, Love and Death*. Beyond the canvas, his obsession with darkness and doom cast a long shadow over his life. Alcoholism, chronic emotional instability and a tragic love affair culminated in the 1907 work, *Death of Marat*, and, a year later, he checked into a Copenhagen mental health clinic for eight months.

After leaving the clinic, Munch settled on the coast at Kragerø. It became clear that Munch's post-clinic work was to be altogether different, dominated by a sunnier, more hopeful disposition dedicated to humans in harmony with their landscape.

Best places to see Munch's work (just don't take them with you, eh?):

- National Gallery, Oslo (p93)
- Munch Museum, Oslo (p103)
- Bergen Art Museum (p198)

well-known names include Karin Krog, Bugge Wesseltoft, Nils Petter Molvær, Silje Nergaard, Solveig Slettahjell, Espen Larsen and Sidsel Endresen.

Folk music is another central pillar of Norwegian music, and the Hardanger fiddle – which derives its distinctive sound from four or five sympathetic strings stretched out beneath the usual four strings – is one of Europe's best-loved folk instruments. Some of the hottest folk acts include: Tore Bruvoll and Jon Anders Halvorsen's traditional Telemark songs (*Nattsang*); the live Norwegian performances of Bukkene Bruse (heavy on the Hardanger fiddle; *Spel*); Rusk's impressively wide repertoire of music from southeastern Norway (*Rusk*); Sigrid Moldestad and Liv Merete Kroken, who bring classical training to bear on the traditional fiddle (*Spindel*); while Sinikka Langeland's *Runoja* draws on ancient runic music. For a wonderful overview of traditional Norwegian folk music, the 2007 CD *Norway: Traditional Music* excavates long-lost music from the vaults of Norwegian Public Radio.

Music from Norway ([www.musicfromnorway.com/default.aspx](http://www.musicfromnorway.com/default.aspx)) is a thorough overview of Norwegian music with biographies and informative summaries of the most popular musical forms.



The haunting music of the Sami people of northern Norway is also enjoying a revival. Recent Sami artists such as Aulu Gaup, Mari Boine Persen and Nils Aslak Valkeapääs have performed, recorded and popularised traditional and modern versions of the traditional *joik* (personal songs); Boine in particular has enjoyed international airtime. For further information on the role of music in Sami culture, see p43.

#### POPULAR MUSIC, ELECTRONICA & HEAVY METAL

One Norwegian fan of A-ha told us that the group is the Norwegian equivalent of Abba from Sweden or U2 from Ireland. While that may be stretching things a little (especially the comparison to U2), no-one can deny the band's enduring success. After making it big in the 1980s, they remain in fine voice and released their eighth studio album, *Analogue*, in 2006. Band member Magne Furuholmen is more than just a musician; see the boxed text, p54.

Electronica is another Norwegian speciality. Although much of the energy surrounding Norwegian electronica has shifted to Oslo in recent years, the so-called 'Bergen Wave' was largely responsible for putting Norway on the world electronica circuit in the first years of the 21st century. **Røyksopp** (www.royksopp.com) in particular took the international electronica scene by storm with their debut album *Melody A.M.* in 2001 and they've never really left the dance-floor charts since. The Bergen Wave was not just about electronica and also produced internationally acclaimed bands **Kings of Convenience** (www.kingsofconvenience.com) and **Ephemera** (www.ephemera.no).

In recent years Oslo has taken up the mantle with *Sunkissed*, produced by Oslo label **Small Town Super Sound** (www.smalltownsupersound.com) and spun by G-Ha and Olanskii – it's quite simply the hottest thing to hit Norwegian dance music since Røyksopp. Other electronica acts causing a stir include Kim Hiortøy, Magnet (aka Even Johansen; www.homeofmagnet.com) and Bjorn Torske.

One popular young singer who's starting to make waves internationally is Maria Mena, whose 2004 album *White Turns Blue* (released as *Mellow* in Norway) marked her out as a name to watch.

Norwegian metal is another genre that Norway has taken to heart and, again, Bergen tends to be the home city for much of the action. There you'll find Hulen (p208), an almost mythical venue among European heavy

Jazz Basen (www.jazzbasen.no/index\_eng.html), the internet's true home of Norwegian jazz, covers festivals and an extensive list of jazz artists to watch out for.

*Fiddling for Norway: Revival and Identity*, by Chris Goertzen, looks at the revival of folk-fiddling in Norway, the history of Norwegian folk music and its influence on the world folk music scene.

#### INTERVIEW WITH ESPEN LARSEN, JAZZ MUSICIAN

Espen Larsen's CDs include *Alone Together*, *Jazzsnadder* and *Hope*.

**Which city is Norway's jazz capital?** I have to say Oslo because they have many different scenes. Cosmopolite is a great scene, but hr.Nilsen.Oslo [a live-music venue] also has its own jazz festival.

**Who are the best-known Norwegian jazz musicians?** The best known jazz musician outside Norway is I guess, the saxophonist Jan Garbarek. Close behind him you have Bugge Wesseltoft, the pianist, keyboardist and owner of the Jazzland label (under Universal music). For the younger audiences I guess Jaga Jazzist is well known.

**Who are the most exciting young jazz musicians in Norway?** There are too many to mention, but I would like Solveig Sletthjell & Slow Motion Orchestra to get more attention outside Norway. Also Come Shine is a great example of a great band with a great singer in front.

**Which are your favourite music festivals in Norway?** Kongsberg Jazz Festival, Canal Street Jazz & Blues Festival (Arendal), May Jazz Festival (Stavanger), Vossjazz (Voss), Night Jazz Festival (Bergen) and Molde International Jazz Festival.

*As told to Anthony Ham*

#### INTERVIEW WITH BERNT ERIK PEDERSEN, MUSIC EDITOR, DAGSAVISEN

**Which city is Norway's musical capital?** There isn't really any competition: no other Norwegian city can match Oslo for the amount and diversity of bands, venues, clubs, hangouts, record labels, shops, media, ie the things that makes a music city great. For gigs Oslo can match most major European cities, with top international acts almost every night. For innovation I'd rate Tromsø as Norway's most influential music city. The house/techno/electronica-revolution came to Tromsø first, and Tromsø's influence on the current Norwegian music scene is huge, although most of the major players have now moved from Tromsø.

**Which are your favourite music festivals in Norway?** Oslo's Øya-festival (http://oyafestivalen.com) is not to be missed, with a good mix of mainstream and underground sounds, Norwegian and international. The new Hove festival in Arendal looks good for indie rock. And NuMusic in Stavanger is an excellent, innovative festival for electronica, hip-hop, noise etc. For travellers outside the summer season there is always good fun to be had at the Oslo World Music Festival, early November.

**If you had to choose your five favourite Norwegian musical acts across any genre, from any era, who would they be?** Røyksopp, Radka Toneff, Geir Jenssen aka Biosphere, deLillos, Lasse Marhaug.

**Who are the Norwegian heirs to Røyksopp when it comes to electronica?** I've recently come to the conclusion that Hans-Petter Lindstrøm is a genius. His productions are crisp, clean and wonderfully starry-eyed. 'I Feel Space', indeed! A lot of current dance music producers are influenced by the post-disco sound of the early '80s, few others make this stuff sound as fresh and contemporary as Lindstrøm. Watch him go!

**Who are Norway's most exciting jazz prospects?** Piano/keyboard etc-player Morten Qvenild has that magic touch where everything he is involved in just seems to sound better than everything else. There is a particularly dramatic, melancholy feel to his playing: In The Country, Susanna & The Magical Orchestra and Solveig Sletthjells Slow Motion Quintet are his main projects. There are a lot of extremely interesting bands and artists working within the increasingly blurred boundaries between jazz, improv, noise, electronica, avant-rock and contemporary music – ie Arve Henriksen, Lasse Marhaug, Puma, Paal Nissen-Love, and most artists associated with the Rune Grammofon label.

**Who will be, in your opinion, the next A-ha or Kings of Convenience when it comes to international success?** Soul-influenced rock singer/songwriter Thomas Dybdahl, maybe. But he doesn't really 'do' hits.

**Has Norway's landscape played an important role in determining the direction of Norwegian music? If so, how?** Norwegian nature has definitely shaped the Norwegian mentality, and subsequently Norwegian music. It is a cold, sparsely populated country, on the outskirts of Europe, where nature can be almost hostile. This has a tendency to turn people, perhaps particularly musicians and artists, into melancholic, outsider individualists. Internationally acclaimed Norwegian artists as diverse as A-ha, Røyksopp, Jan Garbarek, Geir Jenssen, Mari Boine all share a certain windswept melancholy.

*As told to Anthony Ham*

rock fans. While you're in the area, head for Garage (p207) another rock-heavy venue where former rocker and current caretaker 'Denis' will fill you in on everything you needed to know (and many things you didn't) about Norwegian rock.

#### Painting & Sculpture

Nineteenth-century Norway gave birth to two extraordinary talents: painter Edvard Munch (see the boxed text, p51) and sculptor Gustav Vigeland (see p99).

During the early 20th century, the impressionist Henri Matisse inspired several ardently decorative Norwegian artists such as Axel Revold, Per Krohg,

Norwegian Black Metal (www.norsk svartmetall.com) has everything you ever wanted to know about Norway's own genre of metal.

**NOT JUST A SINGER**

Magne Furuholmen may be known better as the guitarist and keyboard player in the group, A-ha, but there's a more serious side to this talented artist. Furuholmen held his first solo exhibition in London in 2007, with 40 monoprints that experiment with what the exhibition's catalogue notes described as, 'a constant game with the structures of language'. He has also exhibited around Europe and in Oslo's Henie-Onstad Art Centre, showcasing his skills with woodcuts, sculpture and other visual arts. Furuholmen's most prominent piece of art is the sculpture of blue vases, in the open square immediately northeast of the tourist office in Bergen.

Alf Rolfsen and Henrik Sørensen, known collectively as the 'fresco brothers'. During the postwar years, the brooding forests of Jakob Weidemann, the constructivist paintings of Gunnar S Gundersen, and the literal (nonfigurative) sculptures of Arnold Haukeland and Åse Texmon Rygh dominated the visual arts scene.

Of the crop of contemporary Norwegian artists, Olav Jensen, Anne Dolven, Ørnulf Opdahl, Bjørn Tufta, Håvard Vikhagen, Odd Nerdrum and Andres Kjær have all created a minor stir with their return to abstract and expressionist forms, with harsh depictions of the Norwegian landscape the norm. Norwegian sculptors who've distinguished themselves include Bård Breivik, Per Inge Bjørlo and Per Barclay.

For the best overview of Norwegian art, visit the National Gallery (p93) in Oslo, the Rogaland Art Museum (p225) or the Bergen Art Museum (p198). The best collections of contemporary Norwegian art are on display at National Museum of Contemporary Art (p93), the Astrup Fearnley Museum (p93) and the Henie-Onstad Art Centre (p104), all of which are in Oslo.

**Theatre & Dance**

Traditional folk dancing and singing is enjoying something of a resurgence and numerous festivals feature roundels, *pols*, *reinlenders*, polkas and mazurkas. Today, troupes of *leikarringer* (folk dancers) practise all over the country and compete in *kappleiker* (dance competitions), which attract large

**TOP NORWEGIAN FILMS**

- Kristin Lavransdatter (1995; director Liv Ullmann) Based on the novel by Sigrid Undset and set in 14th-century Norway.
- The Bothered Man (2006; director Jens Lien) An absurdist fable set in a loveless and claustrophobic IKEA-world.
- Blue Angel (1994; director Marius Holst) A 1995 Berlin Festival winner for its depiction of childhood conflicts in Oslo.
- Frida (1991; director Berit Nesheim) A searing portrayal of adolescence.
- Håkon Håkonsson/Shipwrecked (1990; director Nils Gaup) Disney-funded tale of a 19th-century Norwegian Robinson Crusoe who set off for the South Seas.
- The Pathfinder (1987; director Nils Gaup) Based on a medieval legend and presented in the Sami language.
- The Witch Hunt (1981; director Anja Breien) Won awards at the 1982 Venice Film Festival.
- Nine Lives (1957; director Arne Skouen) Oscar-nominated tale of a soldier on the stormy northern coast of Norway during the German occupation.

audiences. The best place to catch performances of live folklore in summer is Bergen (p207).

Oslo, Bergen and other larger towns have theatre, opera and ballet companies. Classical performances take place in summer in Bergen, including a number of evocative outdoor settings, but elsewhere most are in winter, when outdoor activities are limited, and sadly, few visitors are around to enjoy them.

For information on Henrik Ibsen, Norway's finest playwright, see the boxed text, p50.

**Cinema**

Norway has a small but internationally acclaimed film industry. Pioneering the industry's claims to international recognition were the Oscar-nominated Nils Gaup and Arne Skouen. Other, more recent directors to catch the eye include Marius Holst, Berit Nesheim, Anja Breien and Jens Lien.

Of the movies filmed in Norway, *Black Eyes*, by Russian director Nikita Michalkhov, was set in the spectacular landscapes around Kjerringøy in Nordland, while Caspar Wrede's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was filmed in Røros.

# Food & Drink

Norwegian food *can* be excellent. Abundant seafood and local specialities such as reindeer are undoubtedly the highlights, and most medium-sized towns have fine restaurants in which to eat. The only problem (and it's a significant one) is that prices are prohibitive, meaning that a full meal in a restaurant may become something of a luxury item for all but those on expense accounts. What this does is push many visitors into eating fast-food meals in order to save money, at least at lunchtime, with pizzas, hot dogs and hamburgers a recurring theme. As a result, you may end up leaving Norway pretty uninspired by its food. It's not only foreign visitors who feel the pinch – it's often claimed, backed by authoritative research surveys, that Pizza Grandiosa, a brand of frozen pizza, is in fact Norway's national dish.

Striking a balance between eating well and staying solvent requires a clever strategy. For a start, most Norwegian hotels and some hostels offer generous buffet breakfasts ensuring that you'll rarely start the day on an empty stomach; if you take full advantage, you'll need only a light meal for lunch. Some hotels also lay on lavish dinner buffets in the evening – they're generally expensive, but excellent if it's your main meal of the day. Another key is to think in krone and avoid converting the Norwegian price into your home currency, otherwise you really might wind up emaciated.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

### Meat

Norwegians love their meat and some of the most memorable meals for carnivores will involve Norway's signature species. Roast reindeer (*reinsdyrstek*) is something every nonvegetarian visitor to Norway should try at least once; despite its cost (starting from around Nkr275), you'll likely order it again as it's one of the tastier red meats. If you're fortunate enough to be invited to a Sami wedding, you might also come across a traditional reindeer stew (*bidos*). Another popular local meat is elk (*elg*), which comes in a variety of forms, including as a steak or burger.

Other meat-based dishes that Norwegian chefs excel at preparing include *bankebiff* (slices/chunks of beef simmered in gravy), *dyrestek* (roast venison) and *lammebog* (shoulder of lamb). Not surprisingly given the Norwegian climate, meats are often cured, one variety of which is *spekemat* (cured lamb, beef, pork or reindeer, often served with scrambled eggs). Further

### TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

Norway has its share of strong-tasting culinary oddities that the brave among you may wish to try:

- whale steak (*hvalbiff*) – a reasonably common sight on restaurant menus and in harbourside markets (eg in Bergen); eating it is an act of defiance to your environmental credentials.
- brown cheese – *Gudbrandsdalsost* is made from the whey of goat's and/or cow's milk and has a slightly sweet flavour despite its off-putting caramel-coloured appearance.
- reconstituted cod, mackerel or saithe balls – more common in homes than restaurants and something of a staple for older folk.
- cod tongues – enormously popular in Lofoten and, strangely enough, nowhere else.
- fermented trout – some Norwegians swear by it, but some Lonely Planet authors are happy to leave them to it.

### FOOD IN A TUBE

A Parisian orders a *café au lait*, a Londoner kippers. In New York it might be a bagel, in Tokyo rice. Comfort food or culture shock, they're all breakfast, and for Norwegians it comes in a tube.

The question mark at hotel breakfast buffets, and nothing to do with dental hygiene, cream cheese and *kaviar* (sugar-cured and smoked cod roe cream) packaged in a tube have been Norwegian favourites for decades. There are two especially popular Norwegian brands: the Trondheim-based Mills, best known for its *kaviar*, and the older Kavli in Bergen. A dairy established in 1893, Kavli began exporting cheese to the US in the early 1920s and launched its first tube of Primula cream cheese in 1924 – quite the ground-breaking event in the cheese-processing world. It now produces bacon, ham, salami, shrimp, tomato, mexicana and jalapeño flavoured cheeses, all packaged in the familiar tube.

Though both spreads are good alone and part of a well-rounded-Norwegian *frokost* (breakfast), *kaviar* is especially popular coupled with Norwegian cheese or a few slices of boiled egg.

dishes include *kjøttpållegg* (cold meat cuts), *fårikål* (lamb in cabbage stew), *syltelabb* (boiled, salt-cured pig's trotter), *lapskaus* (thick stew of diced meat, potatoes, onions and other vegetables) and *pytt i panne* (eggs with diced potato and meat).

### Seafood

One Norwegian contribution to international cuisine that you shouldn't miss is salmon. Where other Norwegian foods will quickly empty your wallet without adequate compensations for taste, salmon (*laks*; grilled or smoked, in which case it's called *roykelaks*) remains blissfully cheap, although this applies only to farmed salmon; wild salmon is considerably more expensive. The quality is consistently top-notch. An excellent salmon dish, *gravat laks* is made by marinating salmon in sugar, salt, brandy and dill and serving it in a creamy sauce.

Other Norwegian freshwater seafood specialities that are recommended include brown trout (only in the south), perch, Arctic char, Arctic grayling, bream, tench and eel.

The most common ocean fish and seafood that you're likely to eat are cod (*torsk* or *bacalao*; often dried), boiled or fresh shrimps, sprat, haddock, mackerel, capelin, sand eel, ling, ocean perch and coalfish. The ugly but inexplicably lovable catfish is, sadly, rather delicious, as is the blenny. Herring (once the fish of the poor masses and now served pickled in onions, mustard or tomato sauce) is still served in some places, but it's becoming rarer while wild stocks recover. Norwegians are huge fans of *fiskesuppe*, a thin, creamy, fish-flavoured soup.

Other dishes to watch out for include: *fiskebolle* (fish balls), *fiskegrateng* (fish casserole), *gaffelbitar* (salt- and sugar-cured sprat/herring fillets), *klippfisk* (salted and dried cod), *sildesalat* (salad with slices of herring, cucumber, onions etc) and *spekeslid* (salted herring, often served with pickled beetroot, potatoes and cabbage).

### Other Specialities

Potatoes feature prominently in nearly every Norwegian meal and most restaurants serve boiled, roasted or fried potatoes with just about every dish. Other vegetables that turn up with sometimes monotonous regularity are cabbage (often stewed), turnip, carrot, swede (rutabaga), cauliflower and broccoli.

The country's main fruit-growing region is around Hardangerfjord, where strawberries, plums, cherries, apples and other orchard fruits proliferate.

In 2000 Norwegian chefs came third in an international cooking competition known unofficially as the 'culinary Olympics'. Taking four gold medals, Norway was beaten only by Sweden and Singapore.

Roots web ([www.rootsweb.com/~wgnorway/recipe.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~wgnorway/recipe.html)) has easy-to-follow recipes of traditional Norwegian foods passed down through generations of people of Norwegian descent.

*Authentic Norwegian Cooking* by Astrid Karlsen Scott has an emphasis on the practical and has been endorsed by none other than Ingrid Espelid, the Betty Crocker or Delia Smith of Norway.

The most popular edible wild berries include strawberries, blackcurrants, red currants and raspberries; blueberries (huckleberries), which grow on open uplands; blue, swamp-loving bilberries; red high-bush and low-bush cranberries; and muskeg crowberries. But the lovely amber-coloured cloudberries (*moltebær*) are highly prized and considered a delicacy. They grow one per stalk on open swampy ground and in Norway some cloudberry patches are zealously guarded. Warm cloudberry jam with ice cream is simply fantastic!

Norwegian cheeses have come to international attention as a result of the mild but tasty Jarlsberg, a white cheese first produced in 1860 on the Jarlsberg estate in Tønsberg. And for the sweet tooth among you, widely available rich, cream-filled cakes will animate your tastebuds time and again.

## DRINKS

If Norway has a national drink, it's coffee. In fact, it's almost universally drunk in such staggering quantities that one can only wonder how people can remain so calm under the influence of so much caffeine. Most Norwegians drink it black and strong, but foreigners requiring milk and/or sugar are normally indulged.

Teas and infusions are also available all over the country, as are the usual range of fizzy drinks and mineral water; they're much cheaper in supermarkets.

## Alcoholic Drinks

Beer is not far behind coffee in the popularity stakes. It's available in bulk at eminently reasonable prices from the beer outlets of the state monopoly shops known as Vinmonopolet (fondly known as just 'pole'), the only place where wine and spirits may be purchased.

Beer is commonly sold in bars in 400mL (from Nkr55) or 500mL (from Nkr65) glasses (about 30% and 15% less than a British pint, respectively). The standard Norwegian beer is pils lager, with an alcohol content of around 4%, and it's still brewed in accordance with the 16th-century German purity law. The most popular brands are the lagers Ringsnes in the south and Mack in the north. Munkholm is a fairly pleasant alcohol-free beer. Note that when friends go out drinking, people generally buy their own drinks rather than rounds, which is scarcely surprising given the prices.

Norway has no wine-growing tradition of its own, but Norwegians increasingly drink wine with meals. According to one study, wine makes up one-third of Norway's alcohol intake, compared to just 12% in 1974. Quality restaurants increasingly offer extensive wine lists with wines from across Europe (especially Spain, France, Germany and Italy) and further afield (Australia, Chile, South Africa and California). In some cities (especially Bergen and Oslo), wine bars are all the rage.

### NORWAY'S BEST COFFEE

Norwegians drink more coffee per person than anyone else in the world. Here are the places where you'll understand why:

**Stockfleths** (p111), Oslo

**Åpent Bakerei** (p111), Oslo

**Det Lille Kaffe Kompaniet** (p207), Bergen

**Dromedar Kaffebar** (p207), Bergen

**Café Det Lindvedske Hus** (p137), Arendal

**Bacalao** (p314), Svolvær

## AQUAVIT

Only the Norwegians would make an alcoholic drink from potatoes. The national spirit, aquavit (or *akevitt*) is a potent dose of Norwegian culture made from the potato and caraway liquor. The name is derived from the Latin *aqua vitae*, the 'living waters'. Although caraway is an essential ingredient, various modern distilleries augment the spicy flavour with any combination of orange, coriander (cilantro), anise, fennel, sugar and salt! The confection is aged for three to five years in 500L oak barrels that have previously been used to age sherry.

Perhaps the most esteemed version of this libation is *Linje Aquavit*, or 'line aquavit', which first referred to stores that had crossed the equator. In the early days, ships carried oak barrels of aquavit abroad to trade, but the unsold barrels were returned to Norway and offered for sale. When it was discovered that the product had improved with age and travel, these leftovers became highly prized commodities. Today, bottles of *Linje Aquavit* bear the name of the ship involved, its route and the amount of time the barrels have aged at sea.

## CELEBRATIONS

Food is central to Norwegian celebrations and this is particularly true at Christmas when special dishes include: *rømmegrøt* (a delicious sour-cream variant upon porridge); *rupa* (ptarmigan or grouse); *lutefisk* (a glutinous dish of dried cod or stockfish treated in lye solution that's definitely an acquired taste and extremely popular among Norwegians living overseas); *pinneribbe* (mutton ribs steamed over birch or juniper branches); and pork roast, which stems from the Viking tradition of sacrificing a pig at yuletide. Raisin buns and a variety of sweet biscuits, including *strull*, *krumkake* and *goro*, are what children get excited about. The almost-universal Christmas drink is *gløgg*, which roughly translates as 'grog', but is far more exciting in reality with its blend of cinnamon, raisins, almonds, ginger, cloves, cardamom and other spices with juice, which may or may not be fermented. Many people also imbibe *julaøl*, or 'holiday beer', which dates from the Viking days, when it was associated with pagan sacrifices; as with the *lutefisk*, not all foreigners fully appreciate it. Die-hard alcohol fans celebrate the season with generous quantities of Norway's own potato power brew, aquavit (see the boxed text, above).

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Hotel breakfasts in Norway often consist of a gargantuan buffet that includes English, American, Continental and Scandinavian options all on one groaning table. If you're staying somewhere where breakfast is not included, your best bet is a bakery where bread, pastries, sandwiches and bagels are well-priced.

If you love fresh fish, any of Norway's fish markets are fabulous places to eat; buy what you want as a takeaway and find a quiet vantage point alongside the water. Among the best are in Bergen, Trondheim and Kristiansand.

Norwegians love to eat out and just about every town in Norway has at least one sit-down restaurant. Although it's more usual to eat a light lunch and save the main meal for dinner, many Norwegian restaurants, especially in larger towns, serve cheaper lunch specials (often around Nkr70). These are often filling and well-sized for those wanting more than a sandwich. Sometimes these are signed as a *dagens rett* (daily special).

Meals at moderately priced restaurants are typically Nkr80 up to Nkr150. More upmarket restaurants tend to have high standards, with prices for main dishes rarely below Nkr180 and often considerably higher. If money is no object, some such places offer three- to five-course meals (from Nkr250 up to Nkr695), which are usually of the highest quality.



### NORWAY'S TOP RESTAURANTS

- Bagatelle (p111; Oslo) – Norway's only restaurant with two Michelin stars; for an interview with chef Eyvind Hellstrøm, see the boxed text, p111.
- Fosshheim Turisthotell (p184; Lom) – Founded by renowned chef Arne Brimi; his legacy of wild trout, reindeer, elk and ptarmigan lives on.
- Enhjørningen (p205; Bergen) – The freshest seafood in Bergen's charming Bryggen district.
- Finnegaards Stuen (p205; Bergen) – A new addition to Norway's culinary scene with old-style quality and traditional dishes.

### Cheap Eats

If you're trying to save a bit of money, shop in supermarkets, Norway's last bastion of reasonable prices; for nationwide opening hours, see inside the front cover of this book. Aside from the usual packaged foods, some supermarkets have reasonably priced delicatessens where you can pick up salads or grilled chickens. These delicatessens also sell smoked or cured meats that make an excellent filling for a sandwich or roll. If you buy your bread from a bakery and the rest of the items from a supermarket, you'll end up saving bucket loads of krone over the course of your trip. Major supermarket chains that you'll find across the country include Rimi, Spar, Co-op and Rema 1000.

Salads and other snacks are also available from convenience stores and petrol stations. Your standard snack for a quick lunch is usually a hot dog (*pølse*), of which you'll find various varieties; garnish and sauce cost no extra and if you buy a drink with it you'll often pay just Nkr35 to Nkr45. Petrol stations also often have a small choice of paninis and rolls that are similarly priced and far more healthy. *Gatekjøkken* (food wagons or kiosks) also serve hot dogs, burgers, chips, pizza slices and the like, and the better ones will also offer fish and chips and a range of sandwiches.

If you're by the coast, fish markets (p59) are often well-priced and that receive large numbers of tourists usually have a range of ready-to-go snacks, such as fish balls or takeaway platters of salmon and other fishy wonders.

Pizzas feature prominently in the local diet. Peppe's Pizza is Norway's standout pizza chain with creative pizzas (from Nkr159) that are a cut above the rest and servings large enough for two; its lunchtime buffets are even better value. Another similar chain is Dolly Dimple's.

### VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Norwegians are not the most vegetarian of people. That said, most restaurants offer some vegetarian options. Sometimes this may just be a cheese-and-onion omelette or a pasta with cream sauce, but increasingly you'll find creative salads (although vegans won't appreciate the widespread use of cheese) and a range of crepes or pancakes to add some variety to your diet. The predominance of potatoes on most Norwegian restaurant menus almost always provides a fall-back option. In general, the rule is that the larger the town, the wider your choices of vegetarian fare. In Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger and Trondheim, you'll find plenty of European-style cafés with a range of vegetarian choices and even vegetarian restaurants. Tapas restaurants are a recurring theme in larger towns and most have vegetable-only options. Pizza restaurants also always have at least one vegetarian dish.

### EATING WITH KIDS

Norwegians pride themselves on policies and attitudes that are child- and family-inclusive (see p38), and this extends to eating out. Even in many

Every Thursday from September to May, many Bergen restaurants serve *raspeballer*, a powerful traditional meal with salted meat, potatoes and mashed turnip – an acquired taste perhaps, but hearty winter food.

Nordic Plate ([www.nordicplate.net](http://www.nordicplate.net)) is an initiative by Scandinavian governments to provide a comprehensive site on Norwegian food with recipes and resources for teachers.

### THE TROUBLE WITH ALCOHOL

Norway must be one of the few countries in the world where the population actually voted for prohibition (in a 1919 referendum)! The ban on alcohol remained in force until 1927, by which time half the Norwegian population was involved either in smuggling or illegally distilling home brew, including no doubt many who had voted in favour of the ban. The state monopoly system (state alcohol outlets are called *Vinmonopolet*) emerged as an alternative method of restricting alcohol, but even today it seems to have had little effect on the amount of illegal distilling that continues. If you're offered any homemade swill, remember that the effects can be diabolical!

Alcohol sales are strictly controlled and a few towns have even implemented virtual prohibition. In some places, including parts of Telemark, drinking beer in public incurs a Nkr2000 fine and/or prison time!, although we're yet to hear of any tourist doing time for enjoying a quiet pint.

As such, Norway's official attitude toward alcohol borders on paranoia, especially as alcohol consumption by Norwegians is among the lowest in Europe, although whether this is because of the strict laws or in spite of them it's difficult to tell. Yes, Norwegian alcohol consumption has increased from 3.4L per person per week in 1960 to 6.2L in recent years, but these figures are still barely more than half the consumption levels in Germany or the UK. That said, there is a disturbing recent phenomenon whereby average alcohol consumption among Norwegian 15- to 20-year-olds doubled from 1995 to 2001. Apart from the figures themselves, what has parents and the government worried is the increasing tendency toward binge drinking. As one young bartender explained to us, prohibitive bar prices for drinks has forced many young Norwegians to buy alcohol in bulk from *Vinmonopolet* outlets, drink at home ('foreplay' according to the local vernacular) until midnight when they go out to drink in bars. The legal drinking age is 18 years for beer and wine and 20 for spirits.

of the most upmarket restaurants, children will be made to feel welcome and, as a result, Norwegians are often seen eating out as a family group. Many restaurants offer children's menus with smaller portions and prices to match. And most of those that don't are willing to serve a smaller portion if you ask.

In practical terms, high chairs are generally available as a matter of course and most places are happy to improvise with baby-changing areas if they don't have dedicated facilities in the toilets (which some do).

For more information on travelling with children in Norway, see p394.

### HABITS & CUSTOMS

The Norwegian day starts with coffee (always!), a boiled egg and some sort of bread or dry crispbread (normally *Ryvita*) topped with cheese, cucumber, tomato and a type of pickled herring.

For lunch, most people opt for a sandwich or a slice of bread topped with sardines, shrimp, ham, olives, cucumber or egg. In the mid-afternoon Norwegians often break for coffee and one of the highlights of the day, waffles with cream and jam. Unlike the firm Belgian waffles, which are better known abroad, Norwegian waffles are flower-shaped, soft and normally strongly flavoured with cardamom.

The main meal is eaten between 4pm and 6pm. Usually the only hot meal of the day, it normally includes a meat, seafood or pasta dish, with boiled potatoes, a scoop of vegetables and perhaps even a small salad or green garnish. Note that Norwegians often take full advantage of long summer days and eat out considerably later.

### EAT YOUR WORDS

If menus in Norway make you break out in a cold sweat, turn to p425 to start learning some elementary Norwegian.

*Norwegian National Recipes: An Inspiring Journey in the Culinary History of Norway* by Arne Brimi can be hard to track down, but there's no finer study of Norwegian food covering all regions and it's written by one of Norway's premier chefs.

*The Norwegian Kitchen* by K Innli (ed) brings together over 350 favourite recipes of members of the Association of Norwegian Chefs.

## Useful Phrases

### Table for..., please.

*Et bord til..., takk.*

### Can I see the menu, please?

*Kan jeg få menyen, takk.*

### I'd like today's special, please.

*Jeg vil gjerne ha dagens rett, takk.*

### What does it include?

*Hva inkluderer det?*

### Is service included in the bill?

*Er bevertninga iberegnet?*

### Not too spicy, please.

*Ikke for sterkt krydra, takk.*

### I don't eat meat.

*Jeg spiser ikke kjøtt.*

### I don't eat chicken or fish or ham.

*Jeg spiser verken kylling eller fisk eller skinke.*

et boo-rr til... tuhk

kuhn yay for me-nü-yön tuhk

yay vil ya-rrnö hah dah-göns rret takk

vah in-kloo-de-rre rde?

arr bö-vart-ning-uh ee-bö-rray-nöt?

ik-kö fo shtarrkt krrüd-drruh tuhk

yay spi-sörr ik-kö cher-t

yay spee-sörr varr-kön chül-ling el-lörr fisk el-lö shing-kö

## Food Glossary

### MEAT & POULTRY

<i>kjøtt</i>	meat
<i>kylling</i>	chicken
<i>oksekjøtt</i>	beef
<i>pølse</i>	sausage
<i>sauekjøtt</i>	lamb/mutton
<i>skinke</i>	ham
<i>svinekjøtt</i>	pork

<i>druer</i>	grapes
<i>eple</i>	apple
<i>frukt</i>	fruit
<i>jordbær</i>	strawberries

### DAIRY PRODUCTS

<i>fløte</i>	cream
<i>ost</i>	cheese
<i>smør</i>	butter

### VEGETABLES

<i>grøn(n)saker</i>	vegetables
<i>løk</i>	onion
<i>potet</i>	potato
<i>sopp</i>	mushroom
<i>tomat</i>	tomato

### SEAFOOD

<i>brisling</i>	sprat/sardine
<i>fisk</i>	fish
<i>hellefisk</i>	halibut
<i>lysing</i>	hake
<i>makrell</i>	mackerel
<i>reker</i>	shrimp
<i>sild</i>	herring
<i>torsk</i>	cod
<i>tunfisk</i>	tuna

### FRUIT

<i>ananas</i>	pineapple
<i>appelsin</i>	orange
<i>banan</i>	banana

### DESSERTS, CAKES & COOKIES

<i>goro</i>	variety of biscuit
<i>is</i>	ice cream
<i>kake</i>	cake
<i>krumkake</i>	variety of biscuit
<i>pannekake</i>	pancake
<i>shillingsboller</i>	pastry bun
<i>sjokolade</i>	chocolate
<i>strull</i>	variety of biscuit
<i>syltetøy</i>	jam

### DRINKS

<i>hvitvin</i>	white wine
<i>jus</i>	fruit juice
<i>kaffe</i>	coffee
<i>melk</i>	milk
<i>øl</i>	beer
<i>rødvinn</i>	red wine
<i>te</i>	tea
<i>vann</i>	water

# Environment

Norway and the environment are like everyone's model couple – from the outside, they seem like a perfect match even if you suspect that they conceal the occasional dark secret. Indeed, the story of how Norway has been acclaimed for promoting environmental sustainability while being one of the world's largest producers of fossil fuels (oil is the elephant in the room) is a fascinating tale. Add to the mix some of Europe's most dramatic landscapes and most stirring geographical forms and it quickly becomes clear that Norway is one of the most important places to watch in these days of creeping environmental uncertainty.

## THE LAND

The Norwegian mainland stretches 2518km from Lindesnes in the south to Nordkapp in the Arctic north with a narrowest point of 6.3km wide. Norway has the highest mountains in northern Europe and a land mass of 385,155 sq km. But these facts only hint at the country's spectacular natural history. The secret lies in the sheer diversity of Norwegian landforms, from glacier-strewn high country and plunging fjords to the tundra-like plains of the far north.

## The Coast

Seeming to wrap itself around Scandinavia like a protective shield from the freezing Arctic, Norway's coastline appears to have shattered under the strain, riven as it is with islands and fjords (long, narrow inlets of the sea bordered by high, steep cliffs) cutting deep fissures inland. Geologists believe that the islands along Norway's far northern coast were once attached to the North American crustal plate – such is their resemblance to the landforms of eastern Greenland.

Some of the islands along the far northern coast – notably Lofoten and Vesterålen – are largely comprised of granite and gneiss. Further north, Svalbard is geologically independent from the rest of Europe and sits on the Barents continental plate deep in the polar region. While the remainder of Norway's icefields struggle to survive, Svalbard still experiences dramatic glaciation. Sedimentary rock layers in Svalbard include fossils and coal.

Regardless of how Norway's geology evolved, the process has certainly proved profitable. In the North Sea lie two rift valleys that contain upper Jurassic shale bearing the rich deposits of oil and gas that are now being exploited, making Norway one of the world's largest exporters of petroleum products.

State of the Environment Norway ([www.environment.no](http://www.environment.no)) is a comprehensive site covering everything from biodiversity and international agreements to statistics and Svalbard.

## BIGGEST & HIGHEST

- Jostedalbreen (p244) is continental Europe's largest icecap
- Sognefjorden (p234), Norway's longest fjord at 203km (second only to Greenland's Scoresby Sund), is 1308m deep, making it the world's second-deepest fjord (after Skelton Inlet in Antarctica). Hardangerfjord (p214) is 800m deep and is, at 179km, the second-longest fjord network in Norway and the third-longest in the world.
- Galdhøpiggen (p184; 2469m) is the highest mountain in northern Europe
- Hardangervidda (p188), at 900m above sea level, is Europe's largest and highest plateau

## Inland

Norway's interior is dominated by fjords, plateaus, the high country of mountain massifs and the Arctic landscapes of the north. For detailed coverage of these signature landforms, see p82.

Rockfalls are a rare, if ever-present threat in Norway's fjord country. In 1934, a rockfall triggered a 62m-high tsunami in Tafjord, causing devastation to fjord-side communities.

## WATERFALLS

Norway contains some of the highest waterfalls and glacial streams in the world, hardly surprising given its combination of mountains and wet climate. Some authorities place the glacial stream Utigårdsfossen, which flows into Nesdalen and Lovatnet from Jostedalbreen (not readily accessible to tourists), as the third-highest waterfall in the world at 800m, including a single vertical drop of 600m. Other Norwegian waterfalls among the 10 highest in the world are: Mongefossen in Romsdal (774m; now dry due to hydroelectric developments); Espelandsfossen (703m; Hardangerfjord); Mardalsfossen (655m; Eikesdal); and Tyssestrengene (647m in multiple cascades; p219), near Odda. Vøringsfossen (p217) is one of Norway's most-visited natural landmarks.

## GLACIERS

Perhaps it's their sheer scale or the sense they leave us of a world in motion. Or maybe it's because glaciers have become a barometer for the health of the environment. Whatever the reason, few natural landforms inspire quite the same awe as glaciers and they are undoubtedly among the stand-out natural highlights of Norway, covering as they do some 2600 sq km (1% of Norwegian territory). But this is a far cry from the last Ice Age when Norway was one great icefield. The bulk of the ice melted about 8800 years ago, leaving behind the fjords (see p82) while only a few remnant icecaps and valley glaciers remain in Norway, although Svalbard is an obvious exception.

Not only are glaciers a stunning tourist attraction, but they also serve an important purpose in Norway's economy: 15% of Norway's electricity derives from river basins below glaciers.

Concerns about shrinking glaciers and icesheets in the Arctic have taken on added urgency in recent years as the impact of global warming takes hold. Some of Norway's glaciers retreated by up to 2.5km in the 20th century. The glacier of Austre Brøggerbreen in Svalbard ranks high among the world's glaciers in terms of thinning ice, having lost 15.3m since 1977, while Midre Lovenbreen (Svalbard; 12.3m) and Hellstugubreen (central Norway; 11.7m) aren't far behind. In 2006 Norway experienced its fourth-hottest summer on record, following on from above-average temperatures in 2002 and 2003, thereby accelerating the melting of Norway's glaciers. Inland glaciers are considered to be at far greater risk than Norway's coastal glaciers. A few Norwegian glaciers have grown in recent decades – the thickness of the ice on the Nigardsbreen glacier grew by 13.8m from 1977 to 2007 – although such stories are the exception and do little to diminish the otherwise gloomy outlook.

Jostedalbreen (p244) is mainland Europe's largest icecap and it feeds some of Norway's largest glaciers, among them Nigardsbreen (p246), Briksdalsbreen (p247) and Bødalsbreen (p248). Another spectacular example is Folgefonn (p219). If you're keen to hike atop a glacier, or if you want to learn more about glaciers at one of Norway's glacier museums, turn to p391 for details.

## WILDLIFE

Despite sparse wildlife populations compared with neighbouring Sweden and Finland – Norway's unique settlement pattern, which spreads the human

A stunning 99.3% of Norway's electricity comes from hydro power sources, with zero from nuclear power and just 0.4% coming from fossil fuels.

*Glaciers & Climate Change* by J Oerlemans can be a tad heavy-going, but it does tell you everything you need to know about why glaciers have become a cause célèbre for environmentalists across the world.

population thinly, limits wildlife habitat and restricts numbers – there's still plenty to see, including reindeer, elk, lemming and musk oxen.

## Animals

### LAND MAMMALS

If you plan carefully, there are plenty of opportunities to see Norway's larger land mammals.

From the forests of the far south to southern Finnmark, *elg* (elk; moose in the USA) are fairly common, although given the Norwegian fondness for elk meat, they wisely tend to stay clear of people and roads. Places that offer elk safaris include Oppdal (see p176), Dombås (p177), Evje (see the boxed text, p159) and Hovden (p161).

After being hunted to the brink of extinction, the downright prehistoric *moskus-okse* (musk oxen) were re-introduced into Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park from Greenland in the 1940s and have since extended their range to the Femundsmarka National Park near Røros. For more information on the species, and the best places to join a musk-ox safari in summer, see p179.

Wild *reinsdyr* (reindeer) exist in large herds across central Norway, usually above the tree line and sometimes as high up as 2000m. The prime viewing areas are on the Hardangervidda Plateau, where you'll find Europe's largest herd (around 7000), but sightings are also possible in Jotunheimen, Dovrefjell and the inland areas of Trøndelag. The reindeer of Finnmark are domestic and owned by the Sami, who drive them to the coast at the start of summer, then back to the interior in winter. The smaller *svalbardrein* (Svalbard caribou) is native only to Svalbard.

The smaller mammal species that are more difficult to see include: *hare* (Arctic hares); *pinnsvin* (hedgehogs; mainly in southern Trøndelag); *bever* (beavers; southern Norway); *grevling* (badgers); *oter* (otters); *jerv* (wolverines); *skogmår* (pine martens); *vesel* (weasels); and *royskatt* (stoats).

*Lemen* (lemmings) occupy mountain areas through 30% of the country and stay mainly around 800m altitude in the south and lower in the north. They measure up to 10cm and have soft orange-brown and black fur, beady eyes, a short tail and prominent upper incisors. If you encounter a lemming in the mountains, it may become enraged, hiss, squeak and attempt to attack!

### MARINE MAMMALS

The seas around Norway are rich fishing grounds, due to the ideal summer conditions for the growth of plankton. This wealth of nutrients also attracts fish and baleen whales, which feed on the plankton, as well as other marine creatures that feed on the fish.

*Minkeval* (minke whales), one of the few whale species that is not endangered, measure around 7m to 10m long and weigh between five and 10 tonnes. They're baleen whales, which means that they have plates of whalebone baleen rather than teeth, and migrate between the Azores area and Svalbard.

Between Ålesund and Varangerhalvøya, it's possible to see *knollhval* (humpback whales), toothed whales that measure up to 15m and weigh up to 30 tonnes. These are among the most acrobatic and most vocal of whales, producing deep songs that can be heard and recorded hundreds of kilometres away.

*Spekkhogger* (killer whales), or orcas, are the top sea predators and measure up to 7m and weigh an astonishing five tonnes. There are around 1500 off the coast of Norway, swimming in pods of two or three. They eat fish, seals, dolphins, porpoises and other whales (such as minke), which may be larger than themselves.

*Northern Lights: The Science, Myth, and Wonder of Aurora Borealis* by Calvin Hall et al combines hard science with historical legend to help unlock one of Norway's great mysteries.



## ARCTIC PHENOMENA

### The Aurora Borealis

There are few sights as mesmerising as an undulating aurora. Although these appear in many forms – pillars, streaks, wisps and haloes of vibrating light – they're most memorable when taking the form of pale curtains wafting on a gentle breeze. Most often, the Arctic aurora appears as a faint green or light rose but, in periods of extreme activity, can change to yellow or crimson.

The visible aurora borealis, or northern lights, are caused by streams of charged particles from the sun, called the solar wind, which are directed by the Earth's magnetic field towards the polar regions. Because the field curves downward in a halo surrounding the magnetic poles, the charged particles are drawn earthward. Their interaction with electrons in nitrogen and oxygen atoms in the upper atmosphere releases the energy creating the visible aurora. During periods of high activity, a single auroral storm can produce a trillion watts of electricity with a current of one million amps.

The Inuit (Eskimos) call the lights *arsarnerit* ('to play with a ball'), as they were thought to be ancestors playing ball with a walrus skull. The Inuit also attach spiritual significance to the lights, and some believe that they represent the capering of unborn children; some consider them gifts from the dead to light the long polar nights and others see them as a storehouse of events, past and future. Norwegian folklore attributes the lights to old maids or dead maidens dancing and weaving. The lights were seen as a bad omen and a sign that God was angry, and people who mocked the superstition risked incurring the ire of God.

The best time of year to catch the northern lights in Norway is from October to March, although you may also see them as early as August. Oddly enough, Svalbard is actually too far north to catch the greatest activity.

### Midnight Sun & Polar Night

Because the Earth is tilted on its axis, polar regions are constantly facing the sun at their respective summer solstices and are tilted away from it in the winter. The Arctic and Antarctic circles, at 66° 33' north and south latitude respectively, are the southern and northern limits of constant daylight on their longest day of the year.

The northern half of mainland Norway, as well as Svalbard and Jan Mayen island, lie north of the Arctic Circle but, even in southern Norway, the summer sun is never far below the horizon. Between late May and mid-August, nowhere in the country experiences true darkness and in Trondheim, for example, the first stars aren't visible until mid-August.

Conversely, winters here are dark, dreary and long, with only a few hours of twilight to break the long polar nights. In Svalbard, not even a twilight glow can be seen for over a month. During

The long-finned *grindhval* (pilot whales), about 6m long, may swim in pods of up to several hundred and range as far north as Nordkapp. *Hvithval* (blubgas), which are up to 4m long, are found mainly in the Arctic Ocean.

The grey and white *narhval* (narwhal), which grow up to 3.5m long, are best recognised by the peculiar 2.7m spiral ivory tusk that projects from the upper lip of the males. This tusk is in fact one of the whale's two teeth and was prized in medieval times. Narwhal live mainly in the Arctic Ocean and occasionally head upstream into freshwater.

For more whale species see p69. For the best places for whale spotting, see p393.

Norway also has bottlenose, white-beaked, Atlantic white-sided and common dolphins, while seals are commonly seen near the seashore throughout Norway and some inland fjords. The main species include *steinkobbe* (harbour seals), *havert* (grey seals), *ringsel* (ringed seals), *grønlandssel* (harp seals), *klappmyss* (hooded seals) and *blåsel* (bearded seals). The much larger *hvalross* (walruses), which in Norway lives only in Svalbard, measures up to nearly

this period of darkness, many people suffer from SAD syndrome, or 'seasonal affective disorder'. Its effects may be minimised by using special solar spectrum light bulbs for up to 45 minutes after waking up. Not surprisingly, most northern communities make a ritual of welcoming the sun the first time it peeks above the southern horizon.

Town/Area	Latitude	Midnight Sun	Polar Night
Bodø	67° 18'	4 Jun to 8 Jul	15 Dec to 28 Dec
Svolvær	68° 15'	28 May to 14 Jul	5 Dec to 7 Jan
Narvik	68° 26'	27 May to 15 Jul	4 Dec to 8 Jan
Tromsø	69° 42'	20 May to 22 Jul	25 Nov to 17 Jan
Alta	70° 00'	16 May to 26 Jul	24 Nov to 18 Jan
Hammerfest	70° 40'	16 May to 27 Jul	21 Nov to 21 Jan
Nordkapp	71° 11'	13 May to 29 Jul	18 Nov to 24 Jan
Longyearbyen	78° 12'	20 Apr to 21 Aug	26 Oct to 16 Feb

### Fata Morgana

If the aurora inspires wonder, the Fata Morgana may prompt a visit to a psychiatrist. The clear and pure Arctic air ensures that distant features do not appear out of focus. As a result, depth perception becomes impossible and the world takes on a strangely two-dimensional aspect where distances are indeterminable. Early explorers meticulously laid down on maps and charts islands, headlands and mountain ranges that were never seen again. An amusing example of distance distortion, described in the enigmatic book *Arctic Dreams* by Barry Lopez, involves a Swedish explorer who was completing a description in his notebook of a craggy headland with two unusual symmetrical valley glaciers, when he discovered that he was actually looking at a walrus.

Fata Morganas are apparently caused by reflections off water, ice and snow, and when combined with temperature inversions, create the illusion of solid, well-defined features where there are none. On clear days off the outermost coasts of Lofoten, Vesterålen, northern Finnmark and Svalbard, you may well observe inverted mountains or nonexistent archipelagos of craggy islands resting on the horizon. It's difficult indeed to convince yourself, even with an accurate map, that they're not really there!

Also unsettling are the sightings of ships, large cities and forests where there could clearly be none. Normal visibility at sea is less than 18km, but in the Arctic, sightings of islands and features hundreds of kilometres distant are frequently reported.

4m and weighs up to 1450kg; their elongated canine teeth can measure up to 1m long in the males. Although once heavily hunted for their ivory and blubber, their Svalbard population has increased to around 1000 since they became a protected species in 1952.

### FISH

Centuries of fishing have severely depleted fish stocks among species that were once the mainstays of the Norwegian economy. *Sild* (herring), *hellefisk* (halibut) and *lysing* (hake) have all been over-fished and are no longer abundant, though the situation has improved in recent years. Among freshwater fish, *laks* (salmon) are the most widespread and a large sport-angling community ensures that the stocks are kept as widespread as possible. However, diseases have, on occasion, spread from farmed fish to the wild stocks, creating major problems in some areas. See the boxed text, p389, for information on how to protect salmon, while a more extensive rundown on the impact of Norway's fishing industries on the environment can be found on p73. To learn more about salmon, visit the Wild Salmon Centre (p238) in Lærdalsøyri.

Polar Bears International ([www.polarbearsinternational.org](http://www.polarbearsinternational.org)) is dedicated to the *isbjørn* (polar bear), with educational information, details on threats and campaigns to save it, and great photos.

**BEST BIRD-WATCHING SITES**

**Femundsmarka National Park** (p175) Falcons.

**Fokstumyra Marshes** (p178) Over 100 species of bird nest here.

**Gjesvær** (p353) Offshore colonies of puffins, skuas, razorbills, kittiwakes, gannets and white-tailed eagles.

**Øvre Pasvik National Park** (p363) Siberian jays, pine grosbeaks, redpolls, smews and ospreys.

**Runde** (p261) Near Ålesund, with over 350,000 nesting pairs of sea birds.

**Stabbursnes** (p354) Wetland birds including some exotic species and ospreys.

**Svalbard** (p377) Puffins, little auks, purple sandpipers, Brünnich's guillemots.

**BIRDS**

Norway is an excellent destination for ornithologists. The greatest bird populations are found along the coastline, where millions of sea birds nest in cliff faces and feed on fish and other sea life. The most prolific species include terns, *havsuble* (gannets), *alke* (razorbills), *lundefugl* (puffins), *lomvi* and *teist* (guillemots), *havhest* (fulmars), *krykkje* (kittiwakes), *tjuvjo* and *ffjello* (skuas) and *alkekonge* (little auks). The standout species among Norway's host of wading and water birds include the *storlom* (black-throated wading birds), *smålom* (red-throated divers; called 'loons' in North America), *horndykker* (horned grebes), *åkerrike* (corncrakes) and Norway's national bird, the *fossefall* (dippers), which make their living by diving into mountain streams.

Norway is also home to at least four species of owls: *jordugle* (short-eared owls); *spurveugle* (pygmy owls); *snøugle* (snowy owls); and *hubro* (eagle owls).

The most dramatic of Norway's raptors is the lovely *havørn* (white-tailed eagle), the largest northern European raptor, with a wingspan of up to 2.5m; there are now at least 500 nesting pairs along the Nordland coast, Troms and Finnmark. The same number of *kongeørn* (golden eagles) inhabit higher mountain areas. The rare *fiskeørn* (ospreys) have a maximum population of 30 pairs and are seen only in heavily forested areas around Stabbursdalen (p355) and Øvre Pasvik National Parks (p363).

**ENDANGERED SPECIES**

Centuries of hunting and accelerating human encroachment have pushed numerous animal species to the brink of extinction, although some have begun to make a recovery thanks to bans on hunting.

*Bjørn* (brown bears) have been persecuted for centuries, and Norway's only permanent population is in Øvre Pasvik National Park (p363) in eastern Finnmark.

*Isbjørn* (polar bears), the world's largest land carnivore, are found in Norway only in Svalbard, spending much of their time on pack or drift ice. Since the ban on hunting came into force in 1973, their numbers have increased to around 3000, although they remain extremely difficult to see unless you're on a cruise around Svalbard. Despite weighing up to 720kg and measuring up to 2.5m long, polar bears are swift and manoeuvrable, thanks to the hair on the soles of their feet, which facilitates movement over ice and snow and provides additional insulation. A polar bear's diet consists mostly of seals, beached whales, fish and birds, and only rarely do they eat reindeer or other land mammals (including humans). Polar-bear milk contains 30% fat (the richest of any carnivorous land mammal), which allows newborn cubs to grow quickly and survive extremely cold temperatures. For more information on polar bears, see the boxed text, p374.

As in most places, *ulv* (wolves) aren't popular with farmers or reindeer herders and hunters, and only a few still exist in the country (around Hamar

Marine Mammals of the North Atlantic by Carl Christian Kinze is an excellent field guide to Norway's 11 marine mammals.

US government scientists estimate that two-thirds of the world's polar bears (now 22,000) will disappear by 2050 due to diminishing summer sea ice.

and in Finnmark). A rare forest-dweller is the solitary lynx, northern Europe's only large cat.

Sadly, many years of whaling in the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans have reduced several whale species to perilously small populations. Apart from the minke whale, there's no sign that the numbers will ever recover in this area.

The endangered *seihval* (sei whales), a baleen whale, swim off the coast of Finnmark and are named because their arrival corresponds with that of the *sei* (pollacks), which come to feast on the seasonal plankton. They can measure 18m and weigh up to 30 tonnes (calves measure 5m at birth). The annual migration takes the *sei* from the seas off northwest Africa and Portugal (winter), up to the Norwegian Sea and southern Barents Sea in summer.

*Finhval* (fin whales) measure 24m and can weigh 80 tonnes. These whales were a prime target after the Norwegian Svend Føyn developed the exploding harpoon in 1864 and unregulated whalers left only a few thousand in the North Atlantic. Fin whales are also migratory, wintering between Spain and southern Norway and spending summer in northern Norway.

*Spermsetthval* (sperm whales), which can measure 19m and weigh up to 50 tonnes, are characterised by their odd squarish profile. They subsist mainly on fish and squid and usually live in pods of 15 to 20. Their numbers were depleted by whalers seeking whale oil and the valuable spermaceti wax from their heads. The fish-rich shoals off Vesterålen attract quite a few sperm whales and they're often observed on boat tours.

The largest animal on earth, *blåhval* (blue whales), measure around 28m and weigh in at a staggering 110 tonnes. Although they can live to 80 years of age, 50 is more common. Heavily hunted for its oil, the species finally received protection, far too late, from the International Whaling Commission in 1967. Prior to 1864, there were between 6000 and 9000, but only a few hundred

Possibly the largest animal to ever inhabit the earth, the longest blue whale ever caught measured 33.58m; 50 people could fit on its tongue alone.

**THE TRUTH ABOUT LEMMINGS**

Few creatures have been so unjustly maligned as the humble lemming. We've all heard tales of countless lemmings diving off cliffs to their deaths in a ritual of mass suicide. Some people also maintain that their bite is fatal and that they spread disease.

All you need to know about lemmings? Actually, no. Firstly, although lemmings can behave aggressively and ferociously (sometimes even when neither threatened nor cornered), there's no evidence that their bite is any more dangerous than that of other rodents.

As for their self-destructive behaviour, lemmings are known for their periodic mass movements every five to 20 years, when a particularly prolific breeding season results in overpopulation. Thanks to the increased numbers, the vegetation is decimated and food sources grow scarce, forcing swarms of lemmings (the last plague was in 2001) to descend from the high country in search of other, less crowded high ground. Most meet an undistinguished fate, squashed on roads or eaten by predators and domestic animals. Indeed, for a couple of years following a lemming population surge, there will also be an increase in the population of such predators as foxes, buzzards and owls.

Quite often, however, the swarms head for the sea, and often do face high cliffs. When the press of their numbers builds up near the back of the ranks, the leaders may be forced over the edge. Also, inclement weather when crossing fjords or lakes can result in mass drownings. As unpleasant as the phenomenon may be, particularly for the lemmings, there's no evidence to suggest that lemmings are prone to suicide.

Not all lemmings join the rush to near-certain death. The clever, more aggressive individuals who remain in the hills to guard their territories grow fat and happy, living through the winter under the snow and breeding the following year. Females as young as 15 days can become pregnant and most individuals give birth to at least two litters of five each year, thereby ensuring the survival of the species.

remain in the world's oceans (although some Norwegian estimates put the number at around 11,000). Recent evidence suggests that a few hardy blue whales are making a comeback in the northeast Atlantic.

*Grønlandshval* (bowhead whales), or Greenland right whales, were virtually annihilated by the end of the 19th century for their baleen, which was used in corsets, fans and whips, and because they are slow swimmers and float when dead. In 1679 Svalbard had around 25,000 bowheads, but only a handful remains and worldwide numbers are critically low.

To read about Norway's controversial stance on commercial whaling, see p76.

## NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

At last count, Norway had 37 national parks (including seven in Svalbard) and around 15% of the country lies within protected areas; eight national parks have been added since 2003 alone. In some cases, they don't protect any specific features, but rather attempt to prevent development of remaining wild areas. As a result, park boundaries don't necessarily coincide with the incidence of spectacular natural landscapes or ecosystem boundaries, but simply follow contour lines around uninhabited areas. The focus is very much on preservation, rather than on the managed interaction between humans and their environment, although a few interpretation centres do exist. For a list of the major Norwegian national parks, see p72, while all national parks are marked on the map, above.

Compared to their counterparts in the USA, Britain and elsewhere, Norwegian national parks are low profile and pleasantly lack the traffic and overdeveloped tourist facilities that have turned parks in many countries into little more than transplanted (or seasonal) urban areas. Some parks, particularly Jotunheimen, are increasingly suffering from overuse but, in most parks, erosion, pollution and distress to wildlife are kept to a minimum.

Regulations governing national parks, nature reserves and other protected areas are quite strict. In general, there are no restrictions on entry to the parks, nor are there any fees, but drivers must nearly always pay a toll to use access roads. Dumping rubbish, removing plant, mineral or fossil specimens, hunting or disturbing wildlife, and using motorised off-road vehicles are all prohibited. For advice on responsible hiking, see the boxed text, p390.

Further national park information is available at local tourist offices and from the **Directorate for Nature Management** (☎ 73 58 05 00; www.dirnat.no) in Trondheim.

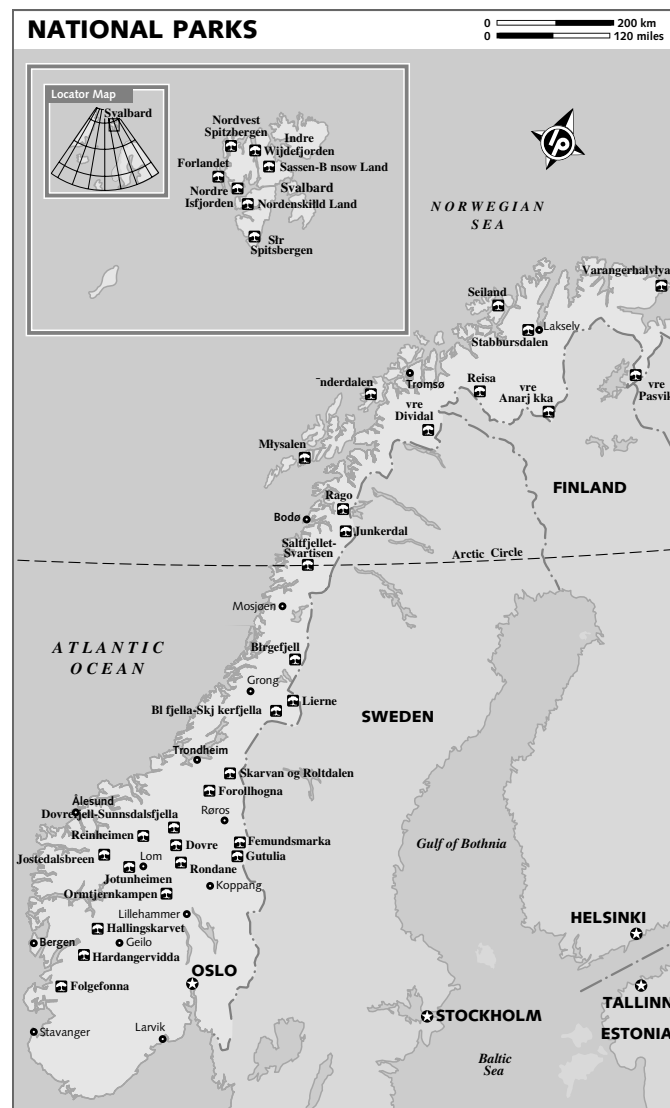
## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Norway is often held up as a stellar example of a responsible environmental citizen. Most of such praise is deserved, even as Norway's record in confronting the most important environmental issues is, like most countries, riven with contradictions. On the one hand, the Norwegian government has made an unprecedented commitment to cut its greenhouse gas emissions and the fjords were voted first for environmental sustainability out of 115 major tourist destinations by *National Geographic Traveler* magazine in 2004. At the same time, Norway is one of the world's largest oil exporters and a major player in the fishing industry.

When it comes to Norway's micromanagement of the environment, there is much to be praised. Industrial waste is highly regulated, recycling is almost universal, there's little rubbish along the roadsides and general tidiness takes a high priority in both urban and rural environments.

And yet, loss of habitat has placed around 1000 species of plants and animals on the endangered or threatened species lists (see p68). Although

Thanks to the polar bear's rich diet, its liver contains enough vitamin D to kill a human who might be stupid enough to eat it.



'Norway's unpopular stance on whaling and sealing has raised international ire'

many animals are now protected, sport-hunting and fishing are more popular here than in most other European countries. Norway's unpopular stance on whaling and sealing has raised international ire and resulted in boycotts on Norwegian products.

## Climate Change

Global warming is by no means a solely Norwegian problem, but few countries have committed to doing as much about it as Norway. In 2007 the

**MAJOR NATIONAL PARKS**

National Park	Features	Size	Activities	Best Time	Page No
Ånderdalen	bogs, coastal pine & birch forests (some trees over 500 years old)	125 sq km	-	Jul-Aug	
Blåfjella-Skjækerfjella	first growth spruce forest	1924 sq km	bird-watching	May-Sep	
Børgefjell	alpine vegetation	1447 sq km	bird-watching	Jun-Aug	
Dovrefjell-Sunddalsfjella	musk ox, reindeer, Snøhetta (2286m) highlands, Fokstummyra marshes p178	4367 sq km	hiking, climbing, bird-watching, wildlife safaris	May-Sep	p178
Femundsmarka	glaciers, highlands, musk ox, reindeer	390 sq km	hiking, boat trips	mid-Jun-Aug	p175
Folgefonna	glaciers	545 sq km	hiking, summer skiing	May-Sep	p219
Forlandet	waterbird, seal & walrus breeding grounds	640 sq km	bird-watching	Jul-Aug	p384
Forollhogna	wild reindeer	1062 sq km	-	Jul-Aug	
Hallingskarvet	wild reindeer	450 sq km	hiking	Jul-Aug	
Hardangervidda	vast upland plateau, largest wild reindeer herd in Europe	3422 sq km	Nordic skiing, hiking	Jun-Aug	p188
Jostedalbreen	Jostedalbreen icecap (487 sq km), glaciers	1310 sq km	hiking, ice-climbing, kiting, boat trips	Jun-Aug	p244
Jotunheimen	Norway's highest mountains	1145 sq km	hiking	Jul-Aug	p184
Lierne	mountains, lynx, wolverine, bears	333 sq km	bird-watching	Jul-Aug	
Møysalen	Lofoton's last wilderness, Møysalen Peak (1262m)	51.2 sq km	-	Jul-Aug	p331
Nordvest Spitzbergen	Kongsbreen icefield, Magdalenefjord, archaeological sights, caribou & marine mammal breeding grounds p384	9914 sq km	hiking, kayaking	Jul-Aug	p384
Øvre Anarjokka	birch & pine forests, bogs, lakelands	1399 sq km	-	Jul-Aug	
Øvre Dividal	wild park, Arctic rhododendron & heather, wolverine	743 sq km	hiking, dogsledding		p343
Øvre Pasvik	boreal forest, last Norwegian habitat of brown bear	119 sq km	hiking		p363
Rago	high peaks, plunging valleys & waterfalls, abuts Swedish national parks	167 sq km	hiking	Jul-Aug	p298
Reisa	dramatic Reisa Gorge, waterfalls, wildlife	803 sq km	hiking	Jun-Aug	p367
Rondane	reindeer, Rondane massif, archaeological sites	963 sq km	hiking, wildlife safaris	Jun-Aug	p180
Saltfjellet-Svartisen	straddles Arctic Circle, upland moors, icecaps, Sami archaeological sites p296	2105 sq km	hiking	Jul-Aug	p296
Sør Spitsbergen	Norway's largest park, 65% ice coverage, sea-bird breeding grounds	13,282 sq km	-		
Stabbursdalen	world's northernmost pine forest	98 sq km	hiking	Jul-Aug	p355

Norwegian government promised to 'be at the forefront of the international climate effort' and announced plans to become 'carbon neutral' and cut net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050. This will mostly involve offsetting its annual 54 million tonnes of emissions by purchasing carbon credits on international markets. The government also agreed to cut actual emissions by 30% by 2030. For all such good news, it is worth remembering that the average Norwegian emits 11 tonnes of greenhouse gases, three or four times the world average although in line with most other developed countries. Environmental groups have also criticised the moves as hypocritical, with

Greenpeace arguing that 'Norway should take responsibility for the 500 million tonnes of emissions caused by its exports of oil and gas'.

Climate change in Norway is most evident in the worrying signs that its glaciers may be under threat; see p64. Other touchstones of environmental health are more encouraging, with a detailed 2007 study of Arctic plant life on Svalbard by the University of Oslo (published in the prestigious journal *Science*) suggesting that the plants have proved more resilient than first thought, adapting and largely weathering the big climate swings of the past 20,000 years.

**Fishing & Marine Resources**

Norway's most controversial environmental issues involve marine mammal hunting, fishing rights and declining fish stocks.

**COMMERCIAL FISHING**

In a draft report by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1998, it was found that Norwegians place three or four times as much pressure on the environment as the average global citizen and were 'the most environmentally destructive people on earth', thanks largely to their consumption of marine fish; the national catch amounts to 250kg of fish per Norwegian per year, over 10 times the world average. For the Norwegian government's response, see p74.

It's fair to say that Norwegians usually view the critical depletion of fish stocks in Norwegian waters as much through the prism of economic self-interest as they see it as a strictly environmental concern. Throughout recorded history, the seas off the Norwegian coast have provided bountiful fishing opportunities and thereby providing a critical backbone to the Norwegian economy. Still Norway's second-largest export earner, it was one of the country's few commercial resources in the days before oil – an essential context to understanding many of Norway's environmental policies as they relate to marine life.

Fishing and aquaculture (fish farming) remain the foundation of Norway's coastal economy, provides work for almost 22,000 people in the fishing fleet, and a host of secondary industries such as shipbuilding, fish feed, processing, packaging, fishing gear and the transportation of fish products. With an annual catch of around 2.5 to three million tonnes, Norway is the 10th-largest fishing nation in the world and it is the world's largest exporter of seafood.

A major factor in the success of Norwegian offshore fisheries has been the warm Gulf Stream waters entering the northern seas, although this varies from year to year. The larger the volume of warm water, the greater the growth of plankton in the far north and the greater the amounts of food available to fish and marine mammals.

Until about 25 years ago, deep-sea fishing in the area was pretty much a free-for-all. Ideal ocean conditions, wedded to the development of sonar, which located schools of herring and other commercially valuable fish, ensured that during the 1960s the Norwegian fishing community enjoyed particularly high catches. Such a bounty, however, was unsustainable, and by the late 1970s, herring stocks were nearly wiped out. In addition, overfishing depleted stocks of cod all across the North Atlantic.

Stung into action by the threat to tens of thousands of livelihoods, on 1 January 1977 Norway established a 200 nautical mile offshore economic zone, which was extended to Svalbard later that year and to Jan Mayen in 1980. The country now has agreements with the EU, Russia, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland and Poland to set quotas.

Almost three decades of conservation measures later, including strict quotas, the herring fishery industry is again thriving. Cod fishing regulations are now in place, although it will be many years before the numbers return.

**'Climate change in Norway is most evident in the worrying signs that its glaciers may be under threat'**



## INTERVIEW WITH HENRIETTE WESTHRINS, CURRENT STATE SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

**Norway has been praised for its environmental protection. Is such praise justified?** Yes and no: Norway has lots of nature and few inhabitants, so Norwegians can take better care of the country than many others. Each Norwegian individually, however, has about the same impact as people in other European countries. Facts about every aspect of the Norwegian environment are on our website ([www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no)). Take a look at our environmental status reports and our indicators of sustainable development on our website. You may also wish to consult NGOs such as [www.wwf.no](http://www.wwf.no). I think you will find that we are doing a lot, but we also need to do much more.

**Which areas of environmental policy does the Norwegian government need to improve?** I want to reduce our own emissions and make Norway climate neutral, stop the loss of biological diversity, and eliminate emissions of persistent toxics. I want a better urban environment: less pollution, less noise, protect the green spaces and have more bike routes.

**Which areas of environmental policy does the Norwegian government deserve praise for?** Our new management plan for the northern ocean, the Barents Sea, with ecosystem-based management of biodiversity, strict emission controls and monitoring as well as areas out of bounds for oil exploration until more knowledge has been gained. The right of everyone in Norway to walk freely in nature, regardless of who owns the land, and that, with some exceptions, motorised vehicles are not allowed off the roads. More ambitious climate aims than the Kyoto treaty prescribes and a major effort to capture and store CO<sub>2</sub>.

**How does Norway resolve the contradiction between being one of the world's largest oil producers and its claims to be a good environmental citizen?** Oil and gas extraction accounts for about one-fifth of our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and just above one-fifth of our current GDP. Yes, that puts our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per person up above the EU average. But our policies eliminate any national feast of exorbitant consumption. The oil era will be over relatively quickly, so the income is placed in a fund for the future and only 4% of the income is used over the annual state budget. The wealth that comes from our indirect export of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions gives us a global duty to take on ambitious climate aims.

**Norway aims to become 'carbon neutral' and cut its net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050. What types of things is the Norwegian government doing to reach this goal?** We have both national and international emission reduction aims. Our road map sets out what can be done in the next few years in industry, transport, buildings and all other sectors of Norwegian society. If we can also progress by footing the bill for reducing emissions in other countries we will do so.

Audited greenhouse credits are not an escape hatch; it is an effective way of transferring technology to poor countries while reducing global emissions. The government appointed a commission to assess how our emissions could be drastically reduced. It concluded that the necessary changes are not even very costly. Look at its 2006 review of 'Natural resources and the environment' ([www.ssb.no/english/subjects/01/sa\\_nrm](http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/01/sa_nrm)).

The aquaculture industry, which has thrived for at least two decades and was born out of the depletion of wild fish stocks, concentrates mainly on Atlantic salmon and trout, but there have also been experiments with Arctic char, halibut, catfish and scallops. Currently, fish farming amounts to around 500,000 tonnes of fish per annum, but the export of pen-raised salmon and trout constitutes 55% of the value of Norway's fish exports.

This ready-made alternative to ocean fishing does carry attendant and potentially serious consequences. The main drawback is that diseases in captive stock have spread to wild populations whenever fish escape from the pens, thereby threatening wild populations. Tightened government regulations have reduced escapes in recent years, but it remains an issue of major concern.

**Do current tourist numbers pose a threat to the sustainability of the fjords?** Our coastline is 2650km long. If we include fjords, bays and islands we have 83,300km of seafloor, so there is plenty of space and a large number of fjords. In a few fjords there are at times queues of cruise ships and cars, which does cause raised levels of local air pollution, but not at a level that can cause long-term damage. Still, we have already introduced some restrictions. We do not have massive concrete hotels strung along each beach. We are also strengthening the rules prohibiting building closer than 100m from the shoreline so as to protect people's access to the sea.

**In 1998 a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report claimed that Norwegians were the most environmentally destructive people on earth, primarily for their consumption of marine fish. Have things improved?** As far as I know, that report was revised and in the end Norway got better grades. Some of the data for the comparisons – on fish, climate and water – was wrong, some was misinterpreted. Yes, we use lots of water, but unlike many other countries, we use only a tiny part of the annual rainfall. We use lots of electricity, but 99.9% is renewable energy.

We harvest about 2.5 million tonnes of marine life out of a world catch in the mid-80 millions. Yes, it is more than our share of the global population. This is, of course, because we have a very, very long coastline. Fish cross borders, so we have to cooperate with our neighbours in setting quotas. In particular cod, herring and mackerel have been overfished in the past, so sustainable quotas for all species are high on our list of priorities.

WWF did not just look at what each country does inside its borders, it examined the global footprint. Norway, like all other rich countries, has large imports and uses lots of resources abroad. If producing countries do not have strong policies, their environmental damage will be added to our account. Norway can consume with less impact and we can campaign for stronger environmental rules. The government tries both. We have consistently called for stronger international conventions.

**What is the biggest environmental challenge facing Norway?** Climate change is a serious global threat and a threat to Norway. With large territories in the Arctic we are particularly concerned. As an oil-producing country, Norway has a greater responsibility than many others.

**What advice would you give to travellers to Norway who want to ensure that their impact upon the environment is minimal?** You might take a ferry or the train to get here. Most tourists already travel by efficient public transport, but if you are fit and ready for a challenge, hike in the hills and mountains, rent a bike or a kayak and explore Norway by muscle power. You can enjoy the great outdoors without paying anyone. Get a set of maps. Or become a member of the DNT ([www.turistforeningen.no](http://www.turistforeningen.no)) and follow its red painted 'T' signs from hut to hut across the mountains.

**Norway has some more targeted tax regimes than others. Can you explain this further?** Norway has introduced taxes on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, pesticides and waste and we have mandatory deposit-return systems for bottles, cans, cars and electrical goods. I believe that this culture of sharing burdens to achieve national aims is one of our strongest assets.

*As told to Anthony Ham*

## SEALING

Seal hunting, perhaps because of its shocking visual images, has been a lightning rod for condemnation by animal lovers and environmentalists around the world. In Norway seal hunting is restricted to two species, the harp seal and hooded seal, and the purpose is ostensibly to cull a growing population. This is mainly driven by the needs of the fishing community; it wishes to restrict the competition between fishing boats and marine mammals that depend on fish and eat up to 2.5kg per day. Sealing also provides a livelihood for people in Norway and several other North Atlantic countries.

Sealing occurs on a small scale, mainly for fur and meat, but it is argued that it's a cruel business. To mitigate protests, regulations limit seal hunters to

### A DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD – MOOSE FARTS

Global warming. Fossil fuels. Moose farts... Although it doesn't quite roll off the tongue as a serious threat to the environment, a moose with gas can actually be more dangerous to the environment than your average family car.

According to a report in London's *Times* newspaper in August 2007, by doing nothing more than farting and belching every year a single adult moose releases the methane equivalent of 2100kg of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, equal to about 13,000km of travel in a car. Or, to put it another way according to Reidar Andersen, the scientist at the Technical University in Trondheim who came up with this startling fact, 'shoot a moose and you have saved the equivalent of 36 flights between Oslo and Trondheim'. With an estimated 120,000 wild moose roaming the Norwegian wilds – the Norwegian authorities authorised a nationwide hunting quota of 35,000 in 2007 – that adds up to a disturbingly high output of methane, not to mention a heightened state of nervousness among otherwise innocent moose.

*The Whaling Season - An Inside Account of the Struggle to Stop Commercial Whaling* by Kieran Mulvaney is a passionate account of whaling by an experienced Greenpeace activist.

only two tools: a rifle and a *hakapik*, or gaff; the former is for adult seals and the latter for pups (which may not be hunted while suckling). Hunters are also required to take courses and shooting tests before each sealing season.

### WHALING

No Norwegian environmental issue inspires more international fervour and emotion than that of renewed whaling in the North Atlantic.

In 1986, as a result of worldwide campaigns expressing critical concern over the state of world whale populations, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) imposed a moratorium on whale hunting. Although it has largely held, two key elements in recent years have placed the moratorium under considerable threat.

The first has been the decision by the three major whaling nations – Norway, Japan and Iceland – to either resume commercial whaling or, in the case of Japan and Iceland, to threaten to withdraw from the IWC and engage in a full-scale resumption of commercial whaling unless the moratorium is replaced by a management plan that allows some whaling.

Norway resumed commercial whaling of minke whales in 1993 in defiance of an international whaling ban. While Norway supports the protection of threatened species, the government contends that minke whales, with a northeast Atlantic population of an allegedly estimated 100,000, can sustain a limited harvest. The Norwegian government, after an unanimous vote, issued a quota of 1052 in 2006, a 30% increase on the previous year's quota and more than half the number of minke whales Norway hunted every year before the moratorium was imposed. Greenpeace, which has for decades been at the forefront of anti-whaling campaigns, described the increased quota as a 'meaningless provocation of the international community'.

The second development threatening world whale stocks is a concerted campaign that has seen nations with no history of whaling – including Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Grenada, Tuvalu and even landlocked Mongolia and Mali – joining the commission. The result has seen a change from nine pro-whaling votes out of 55 in 2000 to an almost-50% split among its 73 members currently (a 75% majority is required to change IWC policy). Allegations that prowhaling votes have been rewarded with development aid have not been denied by the Japanese.

Norway, for its part, sees the moratorium as unnecessary and outdated. It counters historical evidence indicating that whalers in this region hunted

Follow the whaling debate at Greenpeace UK ([www.greenpeace.org.uk](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk)), the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society ([www.wdcs.org](http://www.wdcs.org)), the High North Alliance ([www.highnorth.no](http://www.highnorth.no)), Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries ([www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/fkd.html?id=257](http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/fkd.html?id=257)) and the International Whaling Commission ([www.iwcoffice.org](http://www.iwcoffice.org)).

(Continued on page 85)

(Continued from page 76)

their prey to the verge of extinction, by claiming that modern whalers have a better and more informed perspective, that they adhere to a sensible quota system and now adopt more humane methods of killing. The Norwegians claim that they support only traditional, family-owned operations and have no intention to return to industrial whaling. Many Norwegians also feel that conservationists are mainly city folk who have a sentimental relationship with animals, which is based on an unrealistic projection of human ideas and emotions onto wild sea creatures. Japan and Norway resumed trading in whale meat in 2004 and it tends to be the export market that drives the industry rather than domestic consumption, although whale meat is openly sold in fish markets (especially Bergen) – a good moment to decide where you stand on the issue.

In addition to hunting, a major threat to Norwegian whales comes from chemical pollution, particularly the polychlorinated (PCBs), which are suspected of damaging cetacean reproductive and immune systems, a phenomenon which has already led to numerous deaths from viral infections.

### GEOTOURISM

One of the more exciting ecofriendly tourism ideas in recent years, Geotourism is an initiative of **National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations** (NGCSD; [www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/index.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/index.html)). The programme's centrepiece is the Geotourism Charter (click on 'Programs for Places' in the website and then in the Norway section); Norway is one of only three countries to have thus far signed the charter.

The Geotourism Charter's Global Statement of Principles is built around 13 commitments, all of which focus on preserving not only the environment, but also on a country's diversity of cultural, historic and scenic assets, as well as stressing community involvement. In Norway, the scheme is administered by the state-owned **Innovation Norway** ([www.innovasjon Norge.no/0m-oss/Innovation-Norway/](http://www.innovasjon Norge.no/0m-oss/Innovation-Norway/) or [www.innovasjon Norge.no/reiseliv](http://www.innovasjon Norge.no/reiseliv)) and we spoke to Bjørn Krag Ingul, the senior advisor to its geotourism programme.

**What are the first projects to begin under the Geotourism Charter?** We have developed a guide on what geotourism is and how to implement it in local communities and are working on a major educational program for the travel industry in Norway, to increase the level of competence within the trade. In autumn 2007 we launched a national competition in product development, where geotourism principles are one of the main criteria for getting money, as well as financing courses for about 600 cooks on how to make local food based on local ingredients. We are also funding two pilots – one in Geiranger and Nærøfjord and one with the Historical Hotels and the Good Life company. Both pilots aim to implement the geotourism principles in the region and within the businesses. But geotourism is still fairly new in Norway so it will take some time to implement it.

**Will there be any way for visitors to participate in the projects?** They can participate in the activities happening at the destinations of course and some companies also provide guidelines where the tourist must follow strict environmental rules when they visit.

**Is tourism at its current levels good for the fjords or does it pose a threat?** I think the fjords can handle even more visitors. The threat is if it grows out of hand, especially the cruise traffic ,which can be a problem in the future if it isn't handled right.

**If you could give one piece of advice to visitors about how they should respect the local environment when visiting Norway, what would it be?** My advice would be to learn about the region you are going to visit before you go, learn about the culture and history, and learn what activities you can join. You should also of course be careful not to spill garbage or pollute nature unnecessarily.

As told to Anthony Ham

For a Norwegian perspective on whaling, stop by the Whaling Museum (p131) in Sandefjord along Norway's southern coast.

### Forestry

Although no forestry operation can be entirely environmentally sound, currently Norway has one of the world's most sustainable forestry industries and much of the visible damage to the forests is due to agricultural clearing and timber over-exploitation between the 17th and 20th centuries. Government-protected wilderness areas account for less than 1% of Norway's forests, well below the international standard of 5%. More than 1000 forest-dwelling species are considered to be endangered and areas of old-growth forest are extremely rare.

One remaining stand of old-growth Norwegian forest that has caught the attention of environmentalists is Trillemarka-Rollagsfjell, about 100km west of Oslo and covering 205 sq km. Environmentalists have called on the Norwegian government to set aside the area as a protected reserve to shelter the endangered species that reside in the forest; among these species are the lesser spotted woodpecker, tree-toed woodpecker, Siberian jay and golden eagle, as well as threatened plant life.

Today, Norway's forests set aside for cultivation cover around 25% of the country. Currently, numerous small forestry operations, mostly in eastern Norway, cut about 8.5 million cu metre annually. Clear-felling is practised in some areas but it's reasonably rare. In general, operations employ selective cutting to prevent soil erosion and unsightly landscape degradation. In addition, companies immediately re-seed the cuts, planting a total of around 50 million seedlings annually.

### Wilderness Areas

Norway may have one of the lowest population densities in Europe, but due to its settlement pattern, which is unique in Europe, and favoured scattered farms over villages, even the most remote areas are inhabited and a large proportion of the population is rural-based. This factor, combined with a national appreciation – in summer, some would say that this appreciation is elevated to the level of obsession – of fresh air and outdoor recreation, has ensured that most Norwegians have kept some contact with nature.

It also means that, despite appearances, areas of true wilderness are rare. The natural world has been greatly altered by human activities in Norway and the landscape is crisscrossed by roads that connect remote homes, farmsteads and logging areas to more populated areas. All but a couple of the country's major rivers have been dammed for hydroelectric power, many Norwegian families own holiday homes beside lakes, around ski slopes or in areas of natural beauty, and even the wild-looking expanses of Finnmarksvidda and the huge peninsulas that jut into the Arctic Ocean serve as vast reindeer pastures. As a result, apart from the upland icefields and the national parks, real wilderness is limited to a few forested mountain areas along the Swedish border, scattered parts of Hardangervidda and most of Svalbard.

### Recycling

Norwegians strongly support sorting of household waste for collection and recycling, and travellers are encouraged to do likewise. A deposit scheme for glass bottles has been a success and about 96% of beer and soft-drink bottles are now returned. Supermarkets give money back for returned aluminium cans and plastic bottles (usually Nkr1 to Nkr1.50). There is also a prepaid recycling charge on automobiles sold in Norway, which ensures

'Norwegians strongly support sorting of household waste for collection and recycling'

that they're turned into scrap metal rather than roadside eyesores when their life is over.

Since the early 1970s, however, the average level of household waste generated per person has nearly doubled to around 375kg, a rise that coincides with the golden years of Norway's oil-fuelled prosperity boom. Despite Norway's generally impressive environmental record, the reaction to this increase from governments and ordinary Norwegians was slow – by 1992, just 9% of household waste was recycled – although the figures have since become a source of national pride: around 50% of household waste, and two-thirds of industrial waste is now recycled, while Norway is a world-leader when it comes to recycling electrical and electronics products. Methane from waste nonetheless still accounts for 7% of Norway's greenhouse gas emissions and Norwegians consume more than 130,000 tonnes of plastic packaging every year.



# Architecture & Landscape



Kjeåsen Farm (p216) beside Eidfjord enjoys one of Norway's best views



# Traditional Architecture

A number of Norway's architects have clearly been inspired by the country's dramatic landscapes, while recognising the need to build structures capable of withstanding the harsh dictates of Norway's climate. The results are often stunning: from rustic turf-roofed houses, whose design dates back almost two millennia, to Norway's signature stave churches, soaring religious architecture and creative adaptations of Sami symbols and some Arctic landforms.

Timber and stone are the mainstays of traditional Norwegian architecture; nowhere is this more evident than in the delightful former mining village of Røros (p171), where many of the colourful timber houses date back to the 17th and 18th centuries. In the far north, where both wood and stone were in short supply, the early nomadic Sami ingeniously built their homes of turf, which provided excellent insulation against the cold. While the rural sense of style revels in its rustic charm, Norway's urban architecture strives for a more modern aesthetic, with clean lines and minimalism all the rage.

For an overview of Norwegian architectural styles, it is well worth visiting Maihaugen (p165) in Lillehammer, or any of the excellent folk museums dotted around the country.

## STAVE CHURCHES

If Norway can be said to have made one stand-out contribution to world architecture, it is undoubtedly the stave church. Seemingly conceived by a whimsical child-

## top 10 ARCHITECTURE

Arctic Cathedral (p335), Tromsø

Art Nouveau Ålesund (p262)

Bryggen (p195), Bergen

Heddal Stave Church (p152)

Miners' Cottages (p171), Røros

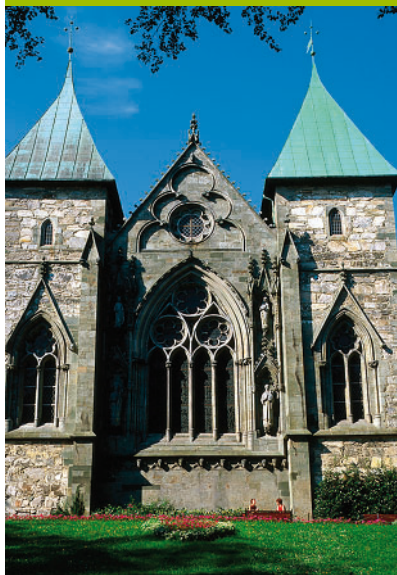
Nidaros Cathedral (p276),  
Trondheim

Sami Parliament (p368), Karasjok

Stavanger Cathedral (p223)

Urnes Stave Church (p243)

Viking Ship Sports Arena (p169),  
Hamar



Stavanger Cathedral (p223), Stavanger  
ANDERS BLOMQUIST

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IN PICK & MIX

like imagination, the stave church is an ingenious adaptation to Norway's unique local conditions. Originally dating from the late Viking Age, these ornately worked houses of worship are among the oldest surviving wooden buildings on earth, albeit heavily restored. Named for their vertical supporting posts, these churches are also distinguished by detailed carved designs, dragon-headed gables resembling the prows of classic Viking ships and by their undeniably beautiful, almost Asian, forms. Of the 500 to 600 that were originally built, only about 20 of the 28 that remain retain many of their original components. The most exquisite stave churches include those found at Heddal (p152), Ringebu (p182), the Fantoft Stave Church (p200) near Bergen and, the oldest of them all, the Unesco World Heritage-listed Urnes Stave Church (p243). More are listed in the index of this book. For more information about the construction of stave churches, see the boxed text, p240.

Ringebu's 13th-century stave church (p182)  
JON DAVISON



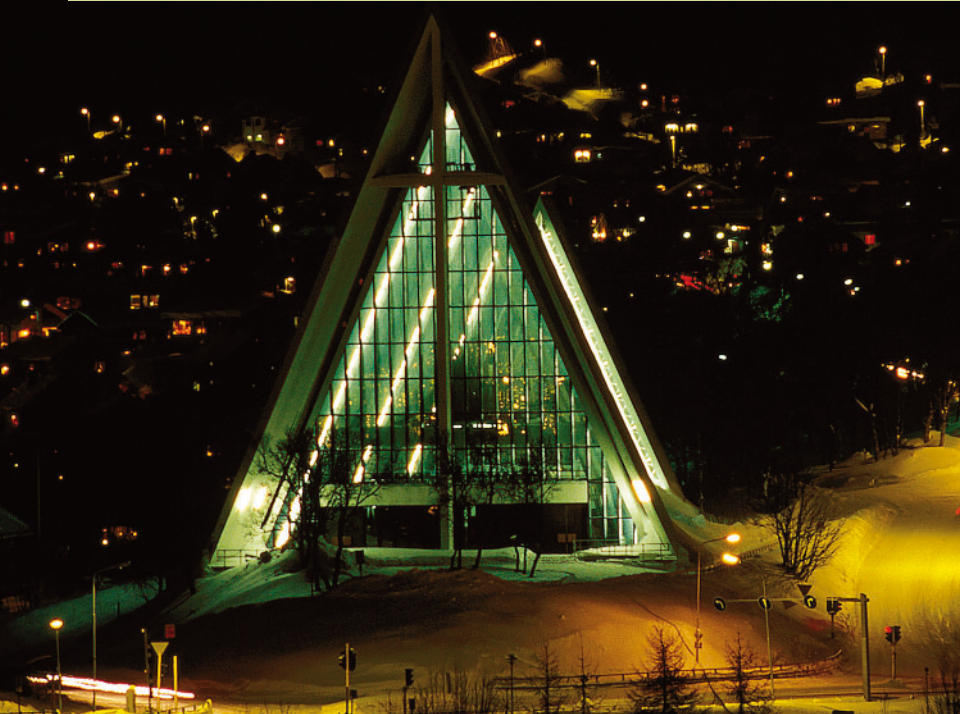
# Contemporary Architecture

Due to the need to rebuild quickly after WWII, Norway's architecture was primarily governed by functionalist necessity (the style is often called *funkis* in the local vernacular) rather than any coherent sense of style. Nowhere is this exemplified more than in the 1950, red-brick Oslo Rådhus (p95). As the style evolved, functionality was wedded to other concerns, such as recognising the importance of aesthetics in urban renewal (for example in Oslo's Grünerløkka district), and ensured that architecture once again sat in harmony with the country's environment and history.

It is with the latter concept that Norway's architects have excelled, especially in the Arctic north. Tromsø's Arctic Cathedral (p335), designed by Jan Inge Hovig in 1964, mimics Norway's glacial crevasses and auroral curtains. Another beautiful example is the Sami Parliament (p368) in Karasjok, where Arctic building materials (birch, pine and oak) lend the place a sturdy authenticity, while the use of lights to replicate the Arctic night sky and the structure's resemblance to a Sami *gamma* (tent) are extraordinary. The creative interpretation of historical Norwegian shapes also finds expression at the Viking Ship Sports Arena (p169) in Hamar.

Tromsø's Arctic Cathedral (Ishavaskatedralen; p335) featuring an auroral-curtain structure

CHRISTIAN ASLUND



The Nidaros Cathedral (p276) of Trondheim was built over the grave of St Olav

WAYNE WALTON

## INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES

Fused with the distinctive styles of Norway's own architectural flourishes are influences borrowed from elsewhere. The most uniform example of this is the Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) style that so distinguishes the harbourside districts of Ålesund (p262). Dating from the early 20th century, these buildings take on additional local charm with the clearly discernible use of symbols from traditional Norwegian mythology such as turrets, spirits and gargoyles. Other international architectural trends are evident in most larger religious buildings, which exhibit strong Anglo-Saxon influences, while the Gothic-style Nidaros Cathedral (p276) in Trondheim and the Romanesque Stavanger Cathedral (p223) bear strong traces of European architectural trends that prevailed at the time of their construction.

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# Signature Landscapes

## FJORDS

Norway's signature landscape, the fjord, ranks among the most astonishing natural landforms anywhere in the world. The Norwegian coast is riven with these inlets distinguished by plunging cliffs, isolated farms high on forested ledges and an abundance of ice-blue water. Norway's network of fjords is so vast – and each fjord so rich in its own character – that you could spend months exploring the fjords and never grow tired of the sheer wonder and beauty of it all.

## top 10

### FJORDS

#### Eidfjord (p216)

The most spectacular branch of Hardangerfjord

#### Geirangerfjord (p259)

Precipitous, popular and one of Norway's signature images

#### Hardangerfjord (p214)

Rolling hills and lovely villages climbing up from the bank

#### Jøssingfjord (p147)

Surprisingly vertiginous, if less spectacular, fjord in the flatlands of the south

#### Lysefjord (p229)

Plunging cliffs, cruises and death-defying lookout points

#### Magdalenefjord (p384)

Remote Svalbard fjord that you'll probably have all to yourself

#### Nærøyfjord (p237)

One of Norway's narrowest and prettiest fjords

#### Sognefjorden (p234)

Norway's longest (and one of the most beautiful) fjord network

#### Trollfjord (p313)

Breathtakingly steep fjord on Lofoten

#### Vestfjord (p311)

Sheltered bays and pretty villages separating Lofoten from the mainland



A waterfall tumbles into Trollfjord (p313), Lofoten

WAYNE WALTON



The ice-strewn waters and glaciers of Magdalenefjord (p384), Svalbard

GRAEME CORNWALLIS

So inseparable is the idea of Norway from its fjords that it can be easy to forget that the fjords are a relatively recent phenomenon in geological terms. Although Norwegian geological history stretches back 1.8 billion years, the fjords were not carved out until much later. During the glacial periods over this time, the elevated highland plateaus that ranged across central Norway subsided at least 700m due to an ice sheet up to 2000m thick. The movement of this ice, driven by gravity down former river courses, gouged out the fjords and valleys and created the surrounding mountains by sharpening peaks and exposing high cliffs of bare rock. The fjords took on their present form when sea levels rose as the climate warmed following the last Ice Age (which ended around 10,000 years ago), flooding into the new valleys left behind by melting and retreating glaciers. Sea levels are thought to have risen by as much as 100m, creating fjords whose waters can seem impossibly deep.

Not surprisingly Norway's fjords have many admirers. In 1870 representatives from the gentlemen's clubs of London travelled to the fjords to search for the region's famous blue ice so as to provide cachet as well as coolness in the clubs' drinks. Somewhat more recently, in 2004, *National Geographic Traveler* magazine voted Norway's fjords the world's most sustainable major tourist destination. A year later, Unesco inscribed Geirangerfjord and Nærøyfjord on their World Heritage List because they 'are classic, superbly developed fjords', which are 'among the most scenically outstanding fjord areas on the planet'. And then there are travellers who are drawn again and again to the water's edge or along a narrow trail hundreds of metres above the shoreline, to marvel at the silent, pristine drama of these remarkable cathedrals of ice and rock.

## ARCTIC NORTH

If the fjords have drama, Norway's Arctic north has an irrevocable sense of mystery. From Svalbard (p370), equidistant from the North Pole and Norway's Nordkapp in the north of the mainland, to the expansively beautiful Arctic Highway (p291) that carries you from the south into Arctic Norway, Norway's far north is rich in phenomena that seem to spring from a



A polar bear (*isbjørn*) rests on an ice floe, Svalbard (p370)

JONATHAN CHESTER

child's imagination. The first thing you'll most likely notice is the endless horizon that never quite seems to frame a landscape of austere, cinematic beauty. In its most extreme form, this disorienting sense of a world without limit is known as *Fata Morgana* (see the boxed text, p67) whereby all sense of distance and perspective is lost. Or perhaps what you will remember most is the astonishing night sky in winter when the weird and wonderful aurora borealis (see the boxed text, p66), also called the northern lights, can seem like an evocation of a colourful ghost story writ large. The midnight sun and seemingly endless polar night (see the boxed text, p66) can be similarly disorienting, adding a strange magic to your Norwegian sojourn. Another integral element in Arctic Norway's appeal is the soulful presence of the indigenous Sami people (p42), they of the reindeer herds and proud cultural traditions – for what could be more mysterious than a people who choose to live in such an inhospitable environment. Also part of Norway's Arctic mix is Europe's only population of polar bears on Svalbard, a lichen-strewn tundra landscape, as well as its perfect architectural adaptations to the local environment (p80). For the best of Norway's Arctic highlights, see p27.

## HIGH COUNTRY

If you think Norway is spectacular now, imagine what it was like 450 million years ago when the Caledonian Mountain Range, which ran along the length of Norway, was as high as the present-day Himalayas. With time, ice and water eroded them down to their current form (some capped with Europe's largest glaciers and ice fields) that covers more than half the Norwegian land mass – great news for tourists and adventure-seekers, less so for farmers with less than 3% of Norwegian soil suitable for agriculture. Norway's highest mountains are in the Jotunheimen National Park (p184) where Galdhøpiggen soars to 2469m. Nearby Glittertind (2465m and shrinking) was for a long time the king of the Norwegian mountains, but its melting glacier sees its summit retreat a little further every year. For an itinerary that takes you through some of the best of this high country, turn to p25.

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