

Norway



Norway, officially the Kingdom of Norway, is a sovereign and unitary monarchy whose territory comprises the western portion of the Scandinavian Peninsula, Jan Mayen, and the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard. The Antarctic Peter I Island and the sub-Antarctic Bouvet Island are dependent territories and thus not considered part of the Kingdom. Norway also lays claim to a section of Antarctica known as Queen Maud Land. Until 1814, the Kingdom included the Faroe Islands (since 1035), Greenland (1261), and Iceland (1262).

Norway has a total area of 385,252 square kilometers (148,747 sq mi) and a population of 5,109,059 people (2014). The country shares a long eastern border with Sweden (1,619 km or 1,006 mi long). Norway is bordered by Finland and Russia to the north-east, and the Skagerrak Strait to the south, with Denmark on the other side. Norway has an extensive coastline, facing the North Atlantic Ocean and the Barents Sea.

King Harald V of the House of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg is the current monarch of Norway. Erna Solberg became Prime Minister in 2013, replacing Jens Stoltenberg. A constitutional monarchy since 1814, state power is divided between the Parliament, the King and his Council, and the Supreme Court. Between 1661 and 1814, Norway was an absolute monarchy, and before 1661, the King shared power with the Norwegian nobility. Traditionally established in 872 and originating in one of the petty kingdoms, Norway is one of the oldest still existing kingdoms in Europe and world-wide. The Kingdom has existed continuously for over 1,100 years, and the list of Norwegian monarchs includes over sixty kings and earls.

Norway has both administrative and political subdivisions on two levels, known as counties and municipalities. The Sámi people have a certain amount of self-determination and influence over traditional territories through the Sámi Parliament and the Finnmark Act. Norway maintains close ties with the European Union and its member countries (despite rejecting full EU membership in two referenda), as well as with the United States. Norway is a founding member of the United Nations, NATO, the Council of Europe, the Antarctic Treaty and the Nordic Council; a member of the European Economic Area, the WTO and the OECD; and is also a part of the Schengen Area.

The country maintains a combination of market economy and a Nordic welfare model with universal health care and a comprehensive social security system. Norway has extensive reserves of petroleum, natural gas, minerals, lumber, seafood, fresh water, and hydropower. The petroleum industry accounts for around a quarter of the country's gross domestic product. The country has the fourth-highest per capita income in the world on the World Bank and IMF lists, as well as ninth-highest on a more comprehensive CIA list. On a per-capita basis, it is the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas outside the Middle East. From 2001 to 2006, and then again from 2009 to 2014, Norway had the highest Human Development Index ranking in the world. Norway has also topped the Legatum for the last five years. The OECD ranks Norway fourth in the 2013 equalised Better Life Index and third in intergenerational earnings elasticity. From 2010 to 2012, Norway was classified as the most democratic country by the Democracy Index.

Around 994 A.D., two centuries of Viking raids to southern and western areas of Europe tapered off following the adoption of Christianity. Norway then expanded its overseas territory to parts of Great Britain, Ireland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland. Norwegian power peaked in 1265. Competition from the Hanseatic League, and the spread of the Black Death, weakened the country. In 1397, Norway became part of the Kalmar Union with Denmark and Sweden. The Union lasted until Sweden left in 1523. The remaining union with Denmark lasted nearly three centuries. In 1814, Norwegians adopted a constitution before being forced into a personal union with Sweden. In 1905, Norway ended the union, subsequently confirmed in a referendum, ending over 500 years of monarchs residing outside the country. In the same year, the country confirmed the election of its own king. Despite its declaration of neutrality in World War II, Norway was occupied for 5 years by forces of Nazi Germany. In 1949 it abandoned neutrality, becoming a founding member of NATO. Discovery of oil in adjacent waters in the late 1960s boosted Norway's economic fortunes.

Norwegian houses



Norwegian houses are very charming with their wooden panels and slate roofing. It is typical for a house to be painted a strong colour such as red, blue or yellow, but white is the most popular.



Traditionally houses are built with poky, little rooms, to keep in the warmth, and steep roofs to help the snow slide off. Windows are small (as glass lets out the heat) and there is always a fire place or wood oven in the centre of the house to warm up the rooms during the cold winters.



In the old days, it was common for Norwegian houses to grow grass on the roof. Cottage roofs were made out of tree bark and to keep it from curling up the old folk would put turf on top. The grass held the turf down, keeping it on the roof and during the summer the grass (and weeds) would shoot and flower. As it turned out the turf on the roof was also good for insulation keeping the cottage warm during winter and cool during summer.



Houses are built with wood so they can move with the weather. It is rare to see a brick house (although the 70s did start a short trend) as they are prone to water damage and cracking in the Norwegian climate. (And as such they cost more to insure.) Norway is a producer of slate and so you'll find that most houses use slate tiles on their roofs as it is strong against the elements and easy to replace. However, some owners are now opting for the cheaper corrugated iron style roofs.



Having a south-to-west facing house is the best as it catches the day and afternoon sun. It is common for houses to have a patio or balcony on the sun side with deck chairs and hanging pots on the railing.

Norwegians are very good at gardening. (They must have a planting schedule that runs all summer as they always seem to have flowers blooming in their gardens). Quite often the grass is left to grow wild especially on the outside of fences but it adds to the character of the neighbourhood. However, not many houses have fences. If a house does have a fence it is no more than a meter tall and is always made of wood. Because of this you never see dogs hanging out in back yards. Some places have a very small dog pen outside but this isn't common. Many people have dogs – big dogs – they all come out during summer so that must mean Norwegians keep their big dogs inside all winter – yikes!

All houses have external lights. In the winter it is mandatory to have the outside lights on constantly during the dark season for safety. After a big snow fall people shovel the snow out of their drives onto the road so the city plough trucks can push it into a safe pile at the end of the street.



To help with finances most houses have one or two granny flats underneath, or the attic is converted into a single apartment. Sometimes houses are split into levels and sold off separately as individual apartments.



People who live in apartments have community gardening days and activities. They also get together to build play grounds and sand pits for the neighbourhood children.



Old fishermen cottages have become very trendy to live in. They are close to the sea shore normally in a prime position in the sun. The houses are often joined together in strips and have a 'miniature' effect as if they were built for the seven dwarfs. As cities grow more and more people are living in 'urban' apartments – minimalist studios attract the business class.



In rural Norway many people still live in old farm houses miles away from civilization. A lot of people live on islands and rely on barges to get to the mainland. I am often amazed at where some houses are built thinking 'how did someone decided to build a house there?' But Norwegians are very practical. You will sometimes see little fishermen cottages

standing along on a small island or a small group of miner cottages in the mountains. These cottages aren't their real homes – just a place to stay while they work the week.



One thing is for certain, Norwegians love being home and they put a lot of effort into making it sweet. There are many different types of wooden houses and I'm sure they all have their stories. If you are in Norway make sure you take a walk around the suburbs, especially in the old towns. You are bound to see cute little cottages with pretty gardens and flower baskets which are definitely worthy of filling up your camera stick.





Norwegian cuisine

Norwegian cuisine in its traditional form is based largely on the raw materials readily available in Norway and its mountains, wilderness and coast. It differs in many respects from its continental counterparts with a stronger focus on game and fish. Many of the traditional dishes are results of using conserved materials, as respect to the long winters.

Modern Norwegian cuisine, although still strongly influenced by its traditional background, now bears Americanization: pastas, pizzas and the like are as common as meatballs and cod as staple foods, and urban restaurants sport the same selection one would expect to find in any western European city. Most Norwegians eat three or four regular meals a day, usually consisting of a cold breakfast with coffee, a cold (usually packed) lunch at work and a hot dinner at home with the family. Depending on the timing of family dinner (and personal habit), some may add a cold meal in the late evening, typically a simple sandwich.

Breakfast: The basic Norwegian breakfast consists of milk or fruit juice, coffee (or more rarely tea), and open sandwiches with meat cuts, spreads, cheese or jam. Cereals such as corn flakes, muesli and oatmeal are also popular, particularly with children, as is yoghurt.

Dinner: A meal that is eaten between 1-7pm. This is the meal that is considered the "warm" meal of the day. The rest of the meals served throughout the day are generally cold. Some foods eaten at this time would be fish with boiled potatoes and vegetables.

Meat: Preserved meat and sausages come in a large variety of regional variations, and are usually accompanied by sour cream dishes and flat bread or wheat/potato wraps. Norwegian delicacies include the *fenalår*, a slow-cured lamb's leg, and *morr*, usually a smoked cured sausage, though the exact definition may vary regionally. Due to a partial survival of an early medieval taboo against touching dead horses, eating horse meat was nearly unheard of until recent decades, though it does find some use in sausages. Lamb's meat and mutton is very popular in autumn, mainly used in *fårikål* (mutton stew with cabbage). *Pinnekjøtt*, cured and sometimes smoked mutton ribs that are steamed for several hours (traditionally on a bed of birch sticks, hence the name, meaning "stick meat"), is traditionally served as Christmas dinner in the western parts of Norway. Another western specialty is *smalahove*, a smoked lamb's head.



National cloth of Norway

Gákti is the Northern Sámi word for a piece of traditional clothing worn by the Sámi in northern areas of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. The gákti is worn both in ceremonial contexts and while working, particularly when herding reindeer. The traditional Sami costume is characterized by a dominant color adorned with contrast colored bands, plaits, pewter embroidery, tin art, and often a high collar. In the Norwegian language it is called 'kofte', most probably due to the word "gákti" being somewhat similar to the word 'kofte' in the accusative, genitive, locative and comitative case. The colors, patterns and the jewellery of the clothing can signify if a person is single or married and where the person is from. There are different gákti for women and men; men's gákti have a shorter "skirt" than women's. Traditionally the gákti was made from reindeer leather, but now it's more common to use wool, cotton or silk. The gákti can be used with a belt (pleated, quilted or with silver buttons), silver jewellery, traditional leather footwear and a silk scarf. It is also a tradition that if your buttons on the belt are square, it shows that you are married. If they are round, you are single/not married yet. If a married couple divorce, and the ex-husband continue to use the Sami costume made by his ex-wife, he signals that he still wants her.



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References: <http://en.wikipedia.org> , <http://mylittlenorway.com>