INSIGHT GUIDES

NORWAY



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LEGEND

Insight on
Photo Story

THE BEST OF NORWAY: TOP ATTRACTIONS

△ **Preikestolen**. The route up to Preikestolen, or Pulpit Rock, is Norway's most popular hike, and with good reason. The views are stunning, but vertigo-sufferers should steer clear. See page 196.



△ **Tromsø**. The gateway to the far north, Tromsø has great museums and a beautiful cathedral, and appeals to adventurous types curious about the Arctic. See page 282.

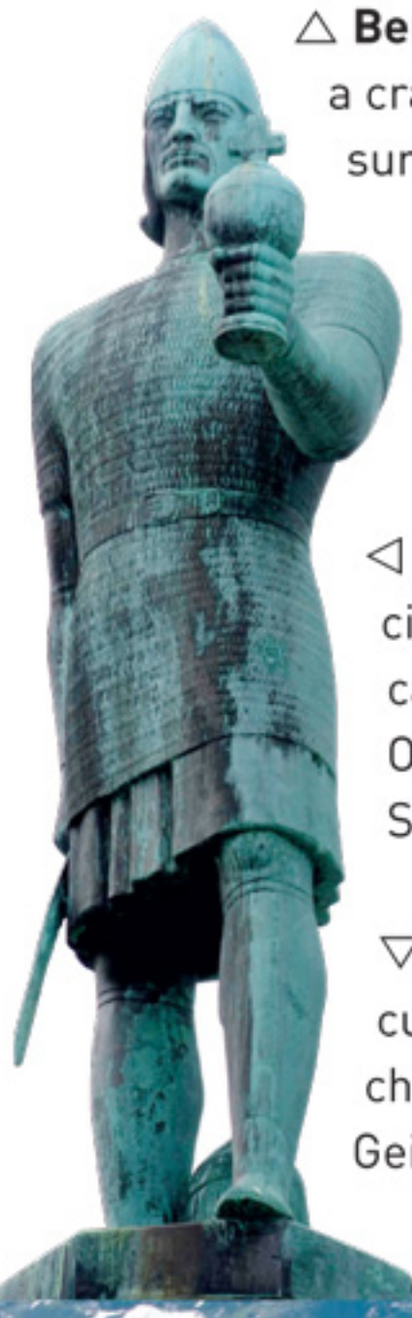
▽ **Oslo**. Norway's capital is a vibrant city, with child-friendly museums, great dining and shopping, and a stunning opera house. See page 139.



▽ **Hardangervidda National Park**. Europe's largest mountainous plateau and a popular hiking destination in summer. See page 175.

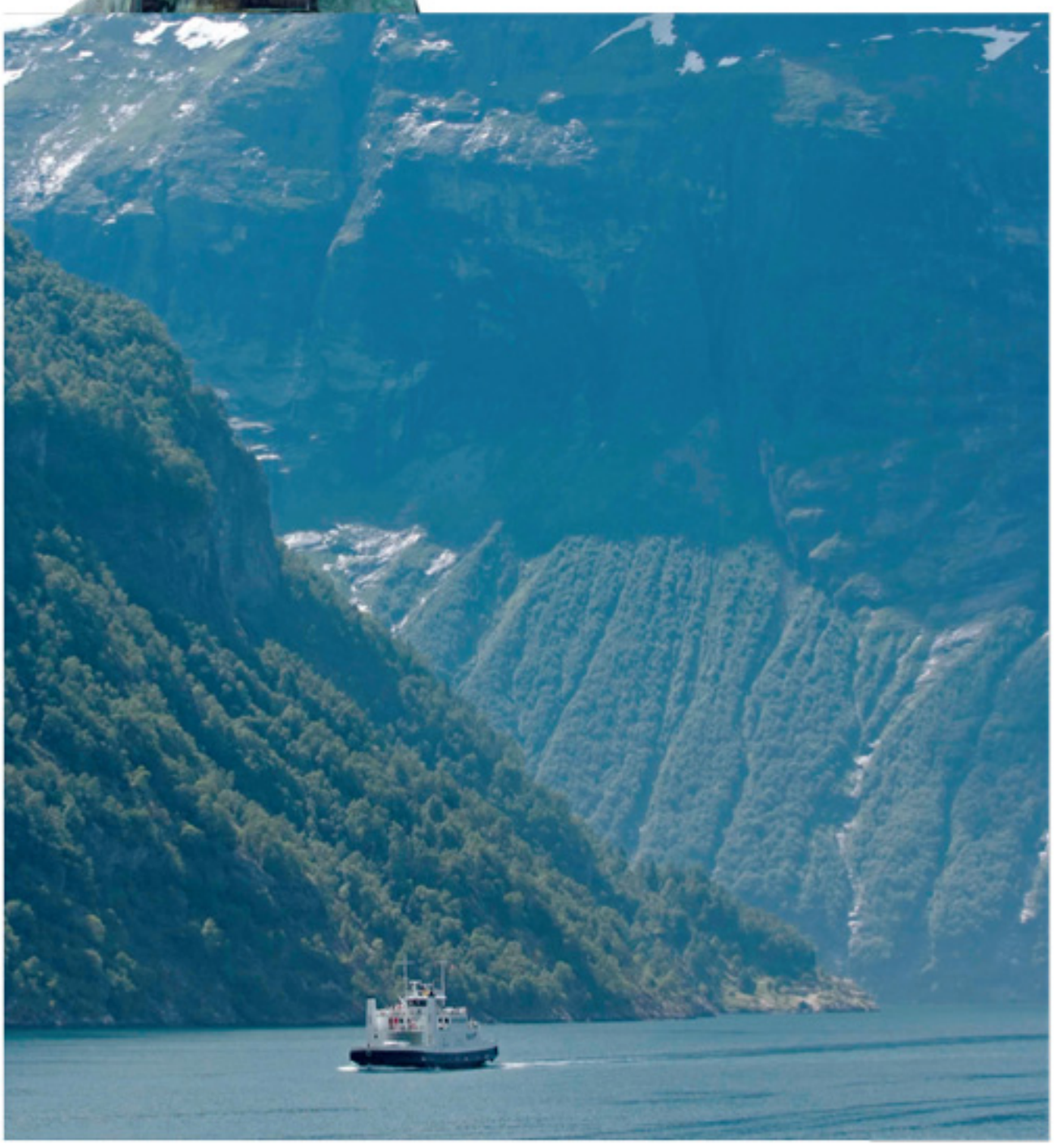


△ **Bergen**. Norway's second city sits on a craggy shoreline on the west coast surrounded by islands. It's rich in history and sights, so allow a couple of days to make the most of its museums, galleries and restaurants. See page 217.



◁ **Trondheim**. Norway's third-largest city is still its historical and religious capital. Seen here is a monument to Olav Tryggvason, the city's founder. See page 255.

▽ **The fjords**. Norway's most spectacular attraction: each has its own character and appeal – this is Geirangerfjord, to many the most beautiful. See page 245.





△ **Lofoten**. Its dramatic island scenery with rugged peaks and white sand beaches, and its traditional fishing industry make Lofoten well worth the trip north. See page 275.

▽ **North Cape**. This is Continental Europe's northernmost tip and the last frontier. See page 287.



▽ **Røros**. The Unesco World Heritage Site is a beautifully preserved old mining town famed for its turf-roofed wooden buildings and its church. See page 170.



THE BEST OF NORWAY: EDITOR'S CHOICE



Lysefjord, Rogaland.

BEST FJORDS (FROM NORTH TO SOUTH)

Geirangerfjord. A Unesco World Heritage Site, Geirangerfjord is famous for its emerald waters and stunning waterfalls; it is arguably the most beautiful of the Norwegian fjords. See page 245.

Sognefjord. Norway's deepest and longest fjord, and one of its most spectacular. Here you'll find the Urnes stave church and the Norwegian Glacier Museum. The spectacular Flåm railway ends in Aurland on Sognefjord, and is a must too. See page 235.

Nærøyfjord. An arm of Sognefjord, and only 250 metres (820ft) across at its narrowest, the peaceful "Narrow fjord" is another Unesco World Heritage Site. The fjord, which sometimes freezes over in winter, is popular with kayakers in summer. See page 238.

Hardangerfjord. Visit this fjord in spring, when the many orchards are in full bloom, or in summer to gorge on the delicious *moreller* (black cherries), then call by the manor house of Baroniet Rosendal, and the excellent folk museum at Utne. See page 206.

Lysefjord. Barren and windswept, Lysefjord is home to Preikestolen, a huge block of granite jutting out 600 metres (2,000ft) above sea level, and Kjerag, a mighty boulder precariously stuck between two mountain walls. A popular destination for extreme-sport enthusiasts and hikers. See page 195.

BEST ARCHITECTURE

Oslo Opera House. This striking building in white granite and glass has made its mark on the Oslo waterfront since opening in 2008, and is now one of the capital's top attractions. See page 139.

Ålesund. When this town burned to the ground in January 1904 it was rebuilt in the *Jugendstil* style and today hosts a superb concentration of Art Nouveau buildings. See page 244.

Stave churches. There are 28 stave churches in Norway, two of the most striking being the church at Urnes, which is on the Unesco World Heritage list, and the Heddal stave church in Telemark, the largest. See pages 189 and 237.

Hamsun Centre, Nordland. With its grassy roof and black wood exterior, the Hamsun Centre towers over the island of Hamarøy, where the novelist Knut Hamsun spent his childhood. See page 280.

Sami Parliament, Finnmark. An outstanding exercise in modern architecture, with a design blending Sami culture and building traditions with modern technology. See pages 84 and 289.

Hallingdal stave church.



BEST OUTDOOR PURSUITS

Hiking. Norway is a hikers' paradise, and opportunities abound all over the country, with Jotunheimen and Hardangervidda among the most popular walking haunts. See page 93.

Whale-watching. Between May and September off the coast of Nordland and in the Lofoten Islands, you don't need too much luck to spot minke whales, orca and even sperm whales. See page 279.

Northern lights. There is nothing quite like witnessing the northern lights (aurora borealis), one of nature's most breathtaking spectacles. Visible almost anywhere north of the Arctic Circle in winter when the skies are clear. See page 273.

Hurtigruten. The Norwegian coastal voyage from Bergen to Kirkenes has been recognised as one of the best cruises in the world – it's an ideal way to experience the drama of Norway's extraordinary coastline. See page 229.

Cross-country skiing. Come winter, Norway becomes one of Europe's best winter-sport destinations. Cross-country here reigns supreme, with thousands of kilometres of prepared tracks. See page 96.

BEST MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

National Gallery, Oslo. A great introduction to Norwegian art, focusing on the late 18th century to the early 20th, with works by artists such as Christian Krogh and J.C. Dahl well represented. See page 145.

Viking Ship Museum, Oslo. Three carefully restored Viking ships and hundreds of artefacts draw the crowds to this ever-popular museum in Bygdøy. See page 152.

Maihaugen, Lillehammer. One of the best folk museums in the country, with 200 buildings, wonderful handicraft and folk art, and activities for children year-round. See page 168.

Norwegian Petroleum Museum, Stavanger. A highly interactive, educational museum that will delight both grown-ups and children visiting the oil capital of Norway. See page 203.

KODE, Bergen. One of the largest arts, crafts and design museum complexes in Scandinavia, with a 50,000-strong collection spread out over four locations. See page 226.



Cross-country skiing.

BEST HISTORIC SIGHTS

Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim. Norway's oldest cathedral, and the resting place of St Olav, the king who brought Christianity to Norway. See page 256.

Old Town, Fredrikstad. Scandinavia's best-preserved fortress town. Quaint, cobblestoned streets and period wooden buildings. See page 160.

Akershus Fortress, Oslo. The pride of Norway's capital, perched on a bluff overlooking the harbour and fjord, this 1,000-year-old complex is a must. See page 141.

Røros. This perfectly preserved old mining town, with its 300-year-old wooden houses, is a remarkable survivor of the industrial past. Some mines are open for tours. See page 170.

Håkonshallen, Bergen. Norway's royal family still holds events at this legendary spot on the Bergen waterfront. See page 221.

The northern lights over Kvaløya.



NORTHERN CONTRASTS

Norway rewards the visitor with a beguiling mix of tradition and modern convenience, spectacular nature and city delights.



Alpine landscape.

Norway is a land of contrasts: majestic mountains tower above mysterious fjords; harsh winters are relieved by often glorious summers; and long polar nights give way to the radiant midnight sun. One of the oldest civilisations in Europe has become one of its youngest nations. The rapacious Vikings have turned into global peacemakers. It is a country where Grieg and Ibsen compete with Eurovision and American sitcoms; where environmental concerns challenge overconsumption. Norway has urban excitement and rural tranquillity: shopping malls and Toyotas rub shoulders with compass and rucksack; high technology parallels tradition.

A thriving offshore oil industry has brought prosperity and, as a consequence, social habits are changing rapidly. Though, in a society where the divorce rate is high and cohabitation the norm, the home and family remain important. Politically, democracy and debate pervade all levels of society. Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Norway* described the Norwegians in 1874 thus: "Great patriotism and hospitality are two of the leading characteristics of the Norwegians; they are often cold and reserved, and combine great simplicity of manner with firmness and kindness. 'Deeds, not words' is their motto" – 136 years later, little has changed.



Lindesnes Lighthouse.

UNEXPECTED PLEASURES

Most people are pleasantly surprised when they visit Norway. Not only are the people friendly (with many speaking fluent English), the scenery is even more breathtaking in reality than any guidebook could ever hope to inspire. The architecture too is stunning – from numerous Unesco-listed stave churches and entire *Jugendstil* cities like Ålesund to recent ultra-modern designs in Oslo and Bergen. Add to this the fact that communications and services are efficient, and that it is safe to go out at night, and you have all the ingredients for an enjoyable stay. As for prices, Norway can be eyewateringly expensive, so budgeting for your trip is a must (see page 311). But Norway's spectacular nature is free – another reason to make the most of its best playground: the great outdoors.