

Destination Norway

Norway is a country at a crossroads, although given Norway's natural wonders and significant wealth, it's a situation in which most countries in the world would love to find themselves.

Norway is, by any standards, one of the most beautiful countries on earth, but that beauty brings with it a responsibility that weighs heavily upon Norwegians. For here is a people with an enduring love for the natural world that is profoundly etched into the national character. In the past, this was expressed in the Norwegian tradition of isolated farmsteads that colonised the most secluded corners of the country's wilderness. Increasingly, however, the irrevocable movement of Norwegians towards the cities – cities that are themselves places of great beauty, such as Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger and Tromsø – has altered the relationship between Norwegians and their natural world. But one thing remains unaltered: to paraphrase that great Norwegian son, Henrik Ibsen, those who wish to understand Norwegians, must first understand Norway's magnificent but severe natural environment, for these are a people of the land, perhaps more so than any other Europeans.

Wilderness in Norway has become more of a leisure pursuit, an idea that Norwegians embrace, escape to and explore with great fervour. Nowhere is this more evident than in the country's national parks – shining symbols of the nation's desire to protect the environment as much as they are showpieces of Norway's peerless landscapes and otherworldly natural grace. At the same time, Norwegians worry about their impact upon the environment, over the consequences of global warming for the country's glaciers and Arctic ecosystems, and about Norway's contributions to this decline and the decline of wilderness the world over due to their massive oil reserves and exports.

And then there are the trials of living in one of the richest countries on earth. Norwegians are burdened with a highly developed social conscience that manifests in far-reaching promises to reduce greenhouse gases, in using its astonishing oil wealth to promote ethical investment abroad and in committing itself to a foreign-aid budget that puts most countries to shame. Where things get complicated is at home, leading to anguished national debates over rising immigration, over the incremental loss of Norway's cultural heritage and over the effects of being cosseted by what is arguably the world's most generous and enlightened welfare system. The country is also divided over whether Norway can continue to go it alone by staying outside the EU, or whether it really should play its part in building a more prosperous and united Europe.

It's not that you'll find many Norwegians complaining about their lot. Nonetheless, you will encounter, again and again, a people wondering about their place in the world.

FAST FACTS

Population: 4.7 million

Raw/real GDP per capita:
US\$54,465/46,300 (2nd
highest in the world)

Inflation: 2.3%

Unemployment rate:
3.5%

Life expectancy: 82.46
years (women) and 77.04
years (men)

Value of Norway's
oil-funded Government
Pension Fund: US\$300
billion

External debt: 0

No of polar bears: around
3000

Maternity/paternity leave
on full pay for working
parents: 42/5 weeks

Ranking on 2006 UNDP
Human Development

Index: 1

Getting Started

The challenges of Norway's soaring topography and the sheer length of the country – Lindesnes in the south is 2518km from Nordkapp in the far north (leaving aside Svalbard) – mean that preplanning is essential. Norway also doesn't come cheap but careful planning can help ameliorate your expenses. And then there's the simple pleasure of imagining your trip. Bergen and the fjords or the Arctic north? The Lofoten Islands or Jotunheimen? Wonderful, difficult choices all, and ones you really should make before leaving home.

WHEN TO GO

Norway's climate should be your primary consideration. The main tourist season (which coincides with Norwegian and other European school holidays) runs from mid-June to mid-August. During this period, public transport runs frequently, tourist offices and tourist sights are open longer hours and many hotels offer cheaper rates.

That said, Norway is at its best and brightest for much of the period from May to September. Late May is particularly pleasant: flowers are blooming, fruit trees blossoming (especially in Hardangerfjord; p214), daylight hours are growing longer and most hostels, camp sites and tourist sights are open but uncrowded. Be aware, however, that if you've come to Norway to hike (see p391), many routes and huts won't be open until late June or early July. Smaller mountain roads usually don't open until June.

North of the Arctic Circle, the true midnight sun is visible at least one day a year, and at Nordkapp it stays out from 13 May to 29 July. Dates for more places appear on p66.

At any time of the year, be aware that extremes of temperature are always possible; temperatures over 30°C in summer and below -30°C in winter aren't uncommon. Unless you're an avid skier (p393) or hope to glimpse the aurora borealis (see the boxed text, p66), Norway's cold dark winters can be trying for visitors; public transport runs infrequently; most hostels and camp sites are closed; and sights, museums and tourist offices open only limited hours, if at all.

The Norwegian year is also chock-full of outstanding festivals and some of them are well worth planning your trip around. For a list of major festivals, as well as public holidays in Norway, see p22.

For climate details of major centres across Norway, including climate charts, see p394.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- sturdy hiking boots – hiking in sandals is a recipe for disaster
- a jacket, jersey (sweater) or anorak (windbreaker) that can readily be carried with you, even in summer.
- a sleeping sheet, a warm, but lightweight sleeping bag and/or your own sheets – most hostels and camping huts charge extra for bed linen
- a rail pass of some description (p406) – why pay full price when you don't have to?
- plenty of patience if you're driving – getting anywhere in a hurry can be a frustrating business (see p415)
- a small pair of binoculars for the views and wildlife-spotting
- mosquito repellent
- airline-style sleeping mask for light-filled Norwegian summer nights

HOW MUCH?

Cup of coffee with pastry
Nkr55

Adult entry to museum
Nkr40-80

Oslo-Bergen train one-
way Nkr298-728

'Norway in a Nutshell'
tour from Bergen Nkr820

One-day car rental from
Nkr500

COSTS & MONEY

Norway is expensive. If you stay in camp sites, prepare your own meals and buy discounted transport tickets, you could squeeze by on around Nkr300 per person per day. Staying in hostels that include breakfast (or eating breakfast at a bakery), having lunch at an inexpensive restaurant and picking up supermarket items for dinner, you can possibly manage on Nkr400 per day, but Nkr500 is more realistic.

Staying at hotels that include buffet breakfasts, and eating light lunches and an evening meal at a moderately priced restaurant, you can expect to spend at least Nkr750 per person per day if you're doubling up and Nkr900 if you're travelling alone. Once you factor in transport, sights and alcohol (nightclub cover charges start from Nkr70), you'll struggle to keep below Nkr1000; if you rent a car, Nkr1500 is a more likely minimum. For a run-down on accommodation prices, see p385. See the boxed text, below, for further advice on cost-cutting.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

For great predeparture reading or an accompaniment to long, lazy cruises through the fjords, the following books should fit the bill. The Culture chapter also has a detailed run-down of Norwegian literature (p47), music (p49) and films (p55).

The Ice Museum: In Search of the Lost Land of Thule, by Joanna Kavenna, vividly captures our fascination with the Arctic north, with some outstanding sections on Norway.

Norway: The Northern Playground, by Cecil Slingsby, is a classic early-20th-century account of climbing in the Norwegian mountains; it's a gripping account that will appeal equally to nonclimbers.

Fellowship of Ghosts: A Journey Through the Mountains of Norway, by Paul Watkins, is loaded with insight as it tells of the author's solo journeys through Norway's high country on foot.

Isles of the North: A Voyage to the Lands of the Norse, by Ian Mitchell, recounts a boat journey into the Norwegian fjords with musings on Norway's place among modern nations.

Summer Light: A Walk Across Norway, by Andrew Stevenson, is an affectionate and luminous account of a walk from Oslo to Bergen that captures the essence of Norway.

Letters from High Latitudes, by Lord Dufferin, evokes a mid-19th-century sailing trip around the Arctic, including Jan Mayen Island,

NORWAY ON THE CHEAP

Norwegian prices are high by anyone's standards, but here are a few tricks for saving your kroner.

- Plan your eating strategy well (see p56)
- Camp (p386) – camp sites are economical and open-air camping is also possible
- Carry a student or senior citizens' card (p397) to get discounts on entry fees
- Plan ahead and buy *minipris* tickets (p419) or train pass (p406) for train and some bus journeys
- If renting a car (p414), do so across the border in Sweden
- Join Hostelling International (HI; p387), Den Norske Turistforening (DNT; p386) or hotel pass networks (p388) for accommodation discounts

Svalbard and mainland Norway, with references to the more romantic aspects of Norwegian history.

Arctic Dreams, by Barry Lopez, is a classic, haunting treatment of Arctic regions, with many references to Sami culture.

Rowing to Latitude: Journeys Along the Arctic's Edge, by Jill Fredston, documents the harsh richness of Norway's arctic coasts by an author who rowed her way almost along its length.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Norway has colonised the internet and listed here are a few of our favourite websites; there are hundreds more listed throughout the book. Look especially for tourist-office websites that tend to be excellent.

Bergen Tourist Office (www.visitbergen.com) An example of what to expect from tourist-office websites across the country.

Fjord Norway (www.fjordnorway.com) Everything you need to know about Norway's star attraction.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Latest travel news, succinct summaries on Norway, postcards from other travellers and the Thorn Tree bulletin board.

Norway.Com (www.norway.com) Comprehensive tourist-oriented site with a practical focus.

Norway Guide (www.norwayguide.no) An excellent site that gives a detailed rundown on Norway's top sights.

Norwegian Tourist Board (www.visitnorway.com) Comprehensive site ranging from the practical to the inspirational.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

A single trip might not seem particularly environmentally significant, but Norway's environment remains one of its main drawcards and one that millions of travellers who visit Norway every year have a responsibility to protect.

So what can you do to limit your environmental footprint? For a start, take advantage of Norway's excellent public transport system. Trains cover southern and central Norway, particularly between major centres, while buses make up the shortfall in most places where the trains don't reach. For general information on train and bus travel see the Transport chapter (p413). The Hurtigruten Coastal Ferry (p412) is another form of transport that may equate to less emissions than if the potential travellers chose to travel the equivalent distance by car.

One of the more exciting programmes in recent years is the *National Geographic*-inspired Geotourism charter; for more information, see the boxed text, p85.

Ecofriendly Travel Choices

Look out for ecofriendly places to stay and eat (see p21). Norway also has a wealth of environmentally sound activities (see p388), among them hiking, white-water rafting, skiing, cycling and dog-sledding, many of which cater for those with a commitment to minimal impact or 'slow' travel. For ways to further minimise your impact upon the environment when hiking, see the boxed text, p390. Most tourist offices also rent out bicycles for a reasonable fee.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Aviation is the fastest growing contributor to climate change, although mile for mile, the amount of carbon dioxide emitted for one person driving a car is about as much as that for one per passenger on a plane. However, the problem with flying is not only the carbon emitted (and

'Norway's environment remains one of its main drawcards'

TOP 10

NORWAY

SCENIC JOURNEYS

In Norway, getting somewhere can be half the fun and few countries can boast such a fine array of scenic journeys. Some have been designated as National Tourist Routes (see the boxed text, p414).

- Oslo–Bergen railway (p209)
- Norway in a Nutshell (p201)
- Hurtigruten coastal ferry (p412)
- Romsdalen by rail (p178)
- Peer Gynt Vegen (see the boxed text, p168)
- Sognefjellet Road (p184)
- Arctic Highway (p291)
- Kystriksveien Coastal Route (p303)
- E10 across Lofoten (p310)
- Senja (p342)

WILDERNESS AREAS

Travellers who value pristine wilderness will love exploring the following stirring landscapes:

- Svalbard (p370) As deep as you're likely to get in the Arctic north
- Møysalen National Park (p331) Pristine alpine coastal scenery.
- Hardangervidda (p188) Wild high plateau of severe beauty
- Rondane National Park (p180) Cathedral-like mountains with otherworldly forms
- Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park (p178) Home of the musk ox, diverse birdlife and wonderful scenery
- Femundsmarka National Park (p175) Forests and lakes with a taste of Sweden
- Jostedalbreen (p244) Mainland Europe's largest icecap, a glorious world of glaciers
- Jotunheimen National Park (p184) Roof of Norway with trails winding among glaciers and snow-capped peaks
- Saltfjellet-Svartisen National Park (p296) Icefields, rugged peaks and rolling moor country
- Øvre Dividal National Park (p343) Roadless frontier country awash with lakes, forests and views

SIGHTS FOR CHILDREN

Many of Norway's sights (and its trolls!) seem to spring from a child's imagination and will appeal to kids as much as adults. But for some, kids take centre stage.

- Kristiansand Dyrepark (p142)
- Hunderfossen Familiepark (p168), near Lillehammer
- Atlantic Ocean Park (p263), Ålesund
- Musk-ox and elk safaris (p179)
- White-water rafting, Sjoa (see the boxed text, p182)
- The myths of Seljord (see the boxed text, p158)
- Dog-sledding (p389) and visiting a Sami camp (p173), Røros
- Children's Art Museum (p107), Oslo
- Children's Museum (p225), Stavanger
- Midnight Sun (p66)

other greenhouse gases, such as water vapour), but at high altitude these have a greater effect on climate change.

Most forms of transport emit carbon dioxide to some degree so the idea of offsetting schemes is to enable you to calculate your emissions so that you can invest in renewable energy schemes and reforestation projects that will reduce the emission by an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide. Some schemes focus just on emissions caused by flights, while others also help you work out emissions from specific train, car and ferry journeys. One place to try is **Climate Care** (in the UK ☎ 01865-207000; www.climatecare.org). For more information on climate change and travel, see the boxed text, p404.

Remember, however, that paying to offset your emissions is nowhere as effective as choosing to travel in a way that minimises your emissions in the first place.

Responsible Travel Schemes

Arctic Menu (www.arctiskmeny.no) A commitment around 40, often family-run restaurants to using local, natural ingredients; see p293.

Den Norske Turistforening (DNT; www.turistforeningen.no) The Norwegian Mountain Touring Club encourages ecofriendly exploration of Norwegian wilderness areas.

Miljøfyrtårn (www.eco-lighthouse.com) Environmental certification for small- and medium-sized companies, although you'll need to contact them to find out which businesses qualify.

Miljømerking (www.ecolabel.no) An accreditation system for environmentally sound practices set up by the Nordic Council of Ministers; the Norway page has 23 (mostly top-end) hotels that meet the strict standards. Look for the Swan label at participating hotels and businesses.

National Geographic Centre for Sustainable Destinations (www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/index.html) Follow the links to 'Programs for Places' where there are details on Norway's participation in the Geotourism programme.

Save Our Snow (www.saveoursnow.com) Use the searchable directory to find out what, if anything, ski resorts are doing to green up their act.

Vossafjell (www.vossafjell.com) Geotourism-based activities and presentations in western Norway.

World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (www.wwoof.it) Learn about biodynamic and organic living in return for a few hours' work.

Events Calendar

The Norwegian year overflows with festivals. We've listed the major ones that draw international or Norway-wide audiences, but dozens of local festivals are covered in the regional chapters.

JANUARY–FEBRUARY

RØROSMARTNAN 2nd-last week of Feb
Norway's largest winter festival dates to 1644 and runs Tuesday to Saturday; it continues today in Røros (p173) with cultural programmes, street markets and live entertainment.

MARCH–APRIL

SAMI EASTER FESTIVAL

Easter among the indigenous Sami people in Kautokeino (p367) sees celebrations to mark the end of the polar night with reindeer racing, the Sami Grand Prix and other traditional events.

VINTERFESTUKA

Mar
All through its long winter, Narvik (p300) looks forward to this week-long festival of cultural events with music, local food and people scanning the horizon for the sun.

HOLMENKOLLEN SKI FESTIVAL

mid-Mar
Draws Nordic skiers and ski jumpers from around the world with skiing events and cultural programmes just outside Oslo (p108).

MAY

CONSTITUTION DAY

17 May
Celebrated with special fervour in Oslo (p108) where locals descend on the Royal Palace dressed in the finery of their native districts.

NIGHT JAZZ FESTIVAL (NATTJAZZ)

late May
This fine Bergen (p202) festival is one of the happiest as the city's large student population gets into the swing.

BERGEN INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

late-May–Jun
One of the biggest events on Norway's cultural calendar, this two-week Bergen (p202) festival showcases dance, music and folklore presentations.

JUNE–JULY

VIKING FESTIVAL

early Jun
Karmøy Island (p221) returns to Norway's historical roots with Viking feasts, processions and saga evenings.

MIDDLE AGES FESTIVAL

Jun
Locals in period costume and Gregorian chants in the glass cathedral of Hamar (p169) are the highlights of this popular local festival.

MIDNIGHT SUN MARATHON

Jun
A midnight marathon could only happen in Norway and Tromsø (p337) is the place to try the world's northernmost 42km road race. In January the city also runs the Polar Night Half Marathon.

MOLDE JAZZ

mid-Jun
With 100,000 spectators, world-class performers and a reputation for consistently high-quality music, this jazz festival in Molde (p268) is one of Norway's most popular.

EXTREME SPORT WEEK

late Jun
Adventure junkies from across the world converge on Voss (p212) for a week of skydiving, paragliding, parasailing and base jumping; local and international music acts keeping the energy flowing.

KONGSBERG JAZZ FESTIVAL

late Jun–early Jul
Kongsberg's (p151) jazz festival, which is Norway's second-largest, lasts four days and pulls in some of the biggest international names. As it follows the Molde Jazz festival, this is a great season for jazz lovers.

FJELLFESTIVALEN

early Jul
Åndalsnes (p257) hosts what could be northern Europe's largest gathering of mountaineers and rock-climbers, swapping stories and inching their way up the sheer cliffs.

ST OLAV FESTIVAL

late Jul
This nationwide commemoration of Norway's favourite saint is celebrated with special gusto in Trondheim (p282) with processions, medieval markets, Viking dress-ups, concerts and, in Stiklestad (p287), a prestigious four-day pageant.

HOLIDAYS

- New Year's Day (Nyttårsdag) 1 January
- Maundy Thursday (Skjærtorsdag) March/April
- Good Friday (Langfredag) March/April
- Easter Monday (Annen Påskedag) March/April
- Labour Day (Første Mai, Arbeidetsdag) 1 May
- Constitution Day (Nasjonaldag) 17 May
- Ascension Day (Kristi Himmelfartsdag) May/June, 40th day after Easter
- Whit Monday (Annen Pinsedag) May/June, 8th Monday after Easter
- Christmas Day (Første Juledag) 25 December
- Boxing Day (Annen Juledag) 26 December

AUGUST

RAUMA ROCK

early Aug
Central Norway's largest pop gathering is held in Åndalsnes (p257) over two days, with everything from indie to hard rock.

NOTODDEN BLUES FESTIVAL

early Aug
Nondescript Notodden (p152) comes alive with an outstanding blues festival.

INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

early Aug
Stavanger (p225) is the venue for this stately festival; some concerts take place in Stavanger Cathedral.

NORDLANDS MUSIC FESTIVAL early–mid-Aug
Bodø (p308) celebrates 10 days of music from symphony orchestras to jazz trios, folk groups and rock bands.

OSLO INTERNATIONAL JAZZ

Aug
A worthy member of Norway's coterie of terrific jazz festivals, this one takes over Oslo (p108) for six days of live music.

VOSS BLUES & ROOTS FESTIVAL

late Aug
If you're around the western fjords in August, head for Voss (p212) and one of Norway's better music festivals.

SEPTEMBER

DYRSKU'N FESTIVAL

2nd weekend Sep
Seljord's (p158) premier annual festival centres on Norway's largest traditional market and cattle show; it attracts 60,000 visitors annually.

LILLEHAMMER JAZZ FESTIVAL

mid-Sep
This former Olympic city farewells the summer with the last major jazz festival of the Norwegian year; like any ski town, Lillehammer (p163) rocks (so to speak) during festival time.

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

BERGEN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

mid–late Oct
Arguably Norway's most important film festival, Bergen (p202) becomes a film-lover's paradise with subtitled movies in cinemas across the city.

UKA

Oct–Nov
Norway's largest cultural festival means three weeks of concerts, plays and general celebration led by Trondheim's (p282) 25,000-strong student population.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

NORWAY IN MICROCOSM

Two Weeks

After a couple of days exploring the many galleries and museums of **Oslo** (p93), take the scenic Oslo-Bergen railway, billed as one of the most spectacular rail journeys on earth. From Oslo, the line climbs gently through forests, plateaus and ski centres to the beautifully desolate and vast **Hardangervidda Plateau** (p188). At Myrdal, take the Flåmsbana railway down to **Flåm** (p234), from where fjord cruises head up the incomparable **Nærøysfjord** (p237), which can also serve as a gateway to the larger fjord network of **Sognefjord** (p234). Travel via Gudvangen to nearby **Voss** (p209), where thrill seekers love the easily accessible activities on offer.

Voss serves as a gateway to the splendid scenery of **Hardangerfjord** (p214), where **Ulvik** (p215) and **Eidfjord** (p216) stand out among Norway's most worthwhile fjord-side towns. Away to the south, **Stavanger** (p222) is one of Norway's most appealing cities and a base for trips to **Lysefjord** (p229), including the walk up to the dramatic Preikestolen (Pulpit Rock). Swinging back to the north, perhaps detouring via **Rosendal** (p220) and charming little **Utne** (p219), takes you to beautiful **Bergen** (p192) with its stunning timbered houses and cosmopolitan air.

Oslo to Bergen can be done in two days as part of the 'Norway in a Nutshell' tour. But a week is advisable as you travel through fabulous countryside by train, ferry and bus. Stavanger, Lysefjord and Hardangerfjord add another week to the journey before returning to Oslo, a trip that covers around 1700km.



THE HEART OF NORWAY

10 Days to Two Weeks

The dramatic high country of Central Norway is quite simply spectacular and, provided you're willing to rent a car for part of the time, it offers some unparalleled opportunities to explore the region's quiet back roads; serious cyclists could also follow many of the same routes for a slower, but spectacular, journey. A short train or bus ride from **Oslo** (p88), **Lillehammer** (p163) hosted the 1994 Winter Olympics and it remains one of central Norway's most pleasing spots with a wealth of Olympic sites. Continuing north, **Ringebu** (p182) has one of Norway's prettiest stave churches, but having a car enables you to take the quiet Rv27, which draws near to the precipitous massifs of the **Rondane National Park** (p180), before continuing northwest to Unesco World Heritage-listed **Røros** (p171), one of Norway's most enchanting villages with painted timber houses and old-world charm. From Røros, it's an easy detour north to **Trondheim** (p275), a delightful coastal capital.

Turning to the south, head past **Oppdal** (p175) and **Dombås** (p177), both gateways to the **Dovrefjell-Sunddalsfjella National Park** (p178), which is a base for musk-ox safaris in summer. From Dombås, consider a side-trip by train or down the E136, which leads through the heart of **Romsdalen** (p178) with its sheer rock walls. Returning to the main road south, head to **Otta** (p179), where the E15 branches west to **Lom** (p182), the starting point for the **Sognefjellet Road** (p184), which leads through the extraordinarily beautiful **Jotunheimen National Park** (p184). From Turtagrø, head up a scenic road to **Øvre Ardal** (p186), then twist your way across to **Jotunheimvegen** (p186) and then the wonderfully quiet **Peer Gynt Veggen** (see the boxed text, p168) and then back down to Lillehammer.



You could accomplish this 1600km journey in 10 days, but two weeks would enable you to linger a little longer. This would be especially worthwhile in Røros and Trondheim. Although buses and trains run along the main north-south routes, you'll need a car to explore the quiet back roads.

TAILORED TRIPS

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE–LISTED NORWAY

The drafters of Unesco's World Heritage list must have been tempted simply to list the whole country! As it is, they have chosen six sites that, if you visit them all, will see you travelling through large swathes of northern and western Norway.



Norway's first listing happened back in 1979, when Bryggen, comprised of 58 of the wonderful old trading warehouses beside the harbour of **Bergen** (p195), was added to the list. Difficult as it is to believe now, Unesco's recognition of Bryggen's priceless cultural and architectural heritage came when it was by no means certain that it would be saved from demolition – see the boxed text, p198.

While Bryggen is the most accessible, and hence most popular, of Norway's Unesco-listed sights, it is followed closely by the western fjords of **Geirangerfjord** (p259) and **Nærøyfjord** (p237). These two fjords always rank highly on many travellers' list of favourite fjords (including ours) and chances are that you've seen photos of these

exceptional fjords long before you arrive as they're among Norway's most archetypal images.

The same can be said for the **Urnes Stave Church** (p243), set deep in the heart of the western fjords. Dating from the 12th century, this is one of the oldest stave churches in Norway, not to mention one of the most beautiful, with its setting alongside Lusterfjord and the flourishes and flights of architectural fancy for which stave churches are renowned.

Norwegian villages don't come much more picturesque than the former mining settlement of **Røros** (p171), west across the towering peaks of the Norwegian interior from the fjords. Colourfully painted timber-clad houses climb up the Røros hillside like an evocation of all that is quaint about rural Norwegian architecture. Unlike so many other Norwegian villages, Røros retains its 15th-century ambience, albeit with an artsy vibe and a gritty charm bequeathed by centuries of mining operations, the remnants of which remain as some of the most intriguing attractions.

The north's contribution to the Unesco list begins at **Vesterålen** (p324), otherwise known as the Vega Archipelago. This rarely visited cluster of islands just below the Arctic Circle made the list primarily for the cultural heritage of its fishing communities. Here you'll find the all-too-rare sense (for Norway) of a place time forgot and yet to be discovered by mass tourism, which carries significant appeal.

Far, far away to the north, it's a long, but astonishingly beautiful haul up to **Alta** (p344), home to an astonishing collection of thousands of rock paintings and carvings. The fusion of artistic sophistication and a childlike vision of the world adds up to a fascinating history lesson on the lives of the ancients. With the oldest paintings dating back to 4200 BC, the open-air gallery takes in every aspect of late Stone Age life, from hunting scenes and fertility symbols to reindeer and crowded boats.

THE ARCTIC NORTH

The mystique of the extreme north has drawn explorers for centuries. Here is a horizonless world seemingly without end – a frozen wilderness that inspires the awe reserved for the great empty places of our earth. Welcome to Norway's Arctic north, as much a territory of the mind and a land of the spirit as a place of rare and stark physical beauty.

There are many routes from the south into this wonderful land, from the seagoing **Hurtigruten coastal ferry** (p412) to the beautiful routes of the inland **Arctic Highway** (p291) or the coastal **Kystriksveien** (p303). Whichever route you take, a detour to the **Lofoten Islands** (p310) offers a taste of the splendour of what awaits you north of the Arctic Circle.

Less trodden by tourists are the trails that lead to the **Vesterålen** (p324) archipelago, home to landscapes even more untamed than those of Lofoten, while the artists' colony at Nyksund and the whale-watching opportunities off Stø provide some focus for your exploration.

If the solitude of island life has you craving company, **Tromsø** (p334) is the perfect antidote. Arguably Norway's liveliest large town, Tromsø is a university town *par excellence* and its Polar Museum captures the spirit of Arctic exploration while the surrounding peaks host a wealth of summer and winter activities. Tromsø is also an ideal base for excursions offshore to pretty **Karlsøy** (p341) or inland to the **Lyngen Alps** (p341), which are rugged and supremely beautiful with many glaciers and craggy summits. You could visit **Senja** (p342) for a day, but it's far better to stay overnight to truly embrace the quiet of northern Norwegian nights.

The Arctic sense of a world without limit is easy to understand in the forests and lakes of **Øvre Dividal National Park** (p343), while the rock carvings of **Alta** (p344) should also not be missed.

As far north as you can go in Norway without setting out to sea, **Nordkapp** (p350) is high on novelty value, if somewhat overwhelmed by visitors, while further west the **Nordkyn Peninsula** (p355) has much to explore and nearby **Tana Bru** (p356) is one of the best places in the world to go salmon fishing.

But Arctic Norway is so much more than landscapes and activities and to understand why, head to Inner Finnmark, the heartland of the Sami people. **Kautokeino** (p365) is a long-standing centre of Sami culture, and its cultural centre and museum are ideal places to provide cultural context to your visit. Hiking in the **Reisa National Park** (p367) is a possibility, but only for the seriously fit, while **Karasjok** (p367) is the undisputed capital of Sami Norway, filled with fascinating sites of Sami patrimony.

Finally, it may be a challenge and expensive to visit, but there's nowhere in Norway quite like **Svalbard** (p370) for its end-of-the-earth feel. This old whaling centre supports a rich array of Arctic wildlife, including reindeer, polar bears and a few brave whales, not to mention epic glaciers, icebergs and icefields, but perhaps its greatest reward for those who get here is Magdalenefjord, where turquoise seas meet the polar north.



The Authors



ANTHONY HAM **Coordinating Author, Southern & Central Norway, Bergen, Southwestern Fjords**

More often found exploring Africa, the Middle East or his adopted home in Spain, Anthony nonetheless fell in love with Norway the first time he laid eyes on her. Like the altogether more clamorous destinations that he usually frequents, Norway's hospitable people and the drama of its landscapes call him back to Norway time and again. In addition to more than 30 guidebooks for Lonely Planet, including the previous edition of this book, Anthony works as a photojournalist for newspapers and magazines around the world with a particular focus on travel and the environment.



KARI LUNDGREN **Oslo**

With a stewardess mother, pilot father and Viking roots, Kari began exploring at an early age, sailing up the coast of Norway to 80 degrees north when she was aged 12 and across the Atlantic at 15. Now based in London, she returns home whenever she can to ski, bask in the midnight summer sun and drink the occasional glass of aquavit. She is the author of the Norway chapter in Lonely Planet's *The Europe Book*.



MILES RODDIS **Western Fjords, Trøndelag, Nordland, Far North, Svalbard**

A distant camping holiday deep in the forests of Finland, an even more distant Swedish girlfriend and two stimulating months in the vast lands north of the Arctic Circle, researching the previous edition of this guide: such were the irresistible pulls that drew Miles back once more to this land of dramatic cliffs, fretted fjords and lush, green grass. Miles, who has written or contributed to 40 Lonely Planet guidebooks and walking guides, usually writes about Mediterranean lands these days. So these chill breaths of Scandinavian air came as a tonic and reminder of his northern European roots.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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