



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Norway, one of the “three fingers” of Scandinavia, is just larger than New Mexico. It covers 125,182 square miles (324,220 square kilometers). Its coastline, indented with beautiful fjords, stretches more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) from the North Sea to the Arctic Ocean. *Norway* means “the northern way.” In fact, the Arctic Circle crosses the country almost in its middle. Along the fjords on the western coast are numerous small islands. Norway is generally mountainous and has several glaciers. As a result of the forbidding terrain, large areas of the country cannot be permanently inhabited. Only about 3 percent of Norway is suitable for cultivation.

Norway has many natural resources, including crude oil (in the North Sea), copper, nickel, zinc, lead, and timber. More than one-fourth of the land is forested. Waterfalls are a source of clean, inexpensive electrical power. The North Atlantic Drift, a warm ocean current, moderates the otherwise cold climate and allows for ice-free harbors and mild summers. Rain is abundant on the west coast. In the interior, winters are colder and summers are warmer than on the coast. Above the Arctic Circle, the sun shines day and night for part of the summer and does not rise above the horizon for part of the winter. In the absence of the sun, the *aurora borealis* (northern lights) is often visible.

History. During the Age of the Vikings (800–1050), Vikings conquered many areas in Scandinavia and Europe and made exploratory voyages as far west as North America. Records

indicate that Leifur Eiriksson landed in present-day Canada, preparing the way for later settlements on the continent. In Norway, Viking leader Harald the Fairhead became the first supreme ruler of a unified kingdom around 872. Christianity spread throughout the area by 1030. The country came under Danish domination from 1381 to 1814. It was then given to Sweden as a peace treaty provision after Denmark’s alliance with Napoleon during the Napoleonic Wars. Thereafter, Norway declared its independence and drafted a constitution, although it still accepted the Swedish king as its monarch. A referendum in 1905 dissolved the union with Sweden, and a Danish prince, later called Haakon VII, was chosen as the constitutional monarch of an independent Kingdom of Norway.

Norway was neutral in World War I, but Germany attacked in World War II (April 1940) and held the country until May 1945. During that time, the monarch was out of the country supporting the Allied effort against the Germans. The son of Haakon VII, Olav V, was king of Norway from 1957 to 1991. Upon his death, his son, Harald V, took the throne.

Norway’s postwar period has been marked by political stability, economic progress, and development. Norway is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Economic Area (EEA), but it is not a member of the European Union (EU). The issue of joining the EU has been sensitive in Norway ever since voters rejected membership in 1972. In 1990, a prime minister (Jan Syse) resigned over the debate. His successor, Gro Harlem Brundtland, risked

Norway

her considerable popularity in 1994 to apply for membership in the EU and then to campaign to have voters approve the measure. In a 1994 referendum, held after neighbors Sweden and Finland voted in favor of joining the EU, voters rejected entry into the EU. Many expressed concern that some autonomy would have to be sacrificed to EU leaders. Further, Norwegians have enough confidence in their country's resources and economy remaining strong without membership in the expanding EU. There is evidence that public opinion on EU may be changing gradually, but it is unlikely that Norway will pursue membership in the near future.

THE PEOPLE

Population. Norway's population of 4.5 million is growing at approximately 0.5 percent annually, a rate close to the European average. Norway is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. About 75 percent of Norwegians live along the coast and in urban areas. The two largest cities are Oslo (about 500,000 residents) and Bergen (about 230,000). The population is predominantly of Nordic (Scandinavian) descent. Although Norway strictly limits immigration, immigrant workers now number 75,000 since the discovery of oil in the North Sea. A small minority (20,000) of native Sami (pronounced "SAW-me") live mostly in the north. Also called Laplanders, their ancestors were the original inhabitants of northern Norway.

Language. Norwegian, a Germanic language, has two forms. *Bokmål*, or "book language," is used in most written works and is spoken by more than 80 percent of the people, especially those in urban areas. It is also the main language of instruction and broadcasting, although laws require that the other form, *Nynorsk*, be used in a certain percentage of schools and broadcasting media. *Nynorsk* was created in the 1800s using a combination of various rural dialects. During Denmark's 400 years ruling Norway, *Bokmål* adopted many characteristics of the Danish language. The Sami speak Sami (Lappish) but learn Norwegian in the schools as a second language. The Norwegian alphabet has three more vowels than the English: *å*, *ø*, and *ø*. Schoolchildren begin learning English at age seven; it is spoken widely as a second language.

Religion. More than 86 percent of the population belongs to the state church, the Church of Norway, which is Evangelical Lutheran. Still, freedom of religion is guaranteed, and many other Christian churches are active in the country. Among them are the Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, and various Protestant groups. Because of immigration, the Muslim population is also growing. Although religion is important to some Norwegians, less than half the population practices religion on a daily basis. Most people attend church services only on special occasions or holidays.

General Attitudes. Tolerance, honesty, human kindness, and independence are important Norwegian ideals. Reliability in business and private matters is also valued. Norway's interest in peace and progress is reflected in its long-time sponsorship of the Nobel Peace Prize. Norway is also one of the world's leaders in the percentage of gross national product provided in aid to the world's poorest countries. Criticism of other peoples or systems is considered inappropriate, although distrust of foreigners is common, especially among older generations.

Norwegians take great pride in their individual and national independence. They are very patriotic and feel Norway has developed a superior social system with high standards. Indeed, social equality and a good standard of living are

important values that have shaped post-World War II politics. Although the country is rich and has many natural resources, Norwegians tend to be modest about their personal wealth. They love the outdoors and promote measures to protect their environment.

Sincerity in friendship is important, but people show reserve in the expression of personal feelings. Neighbors, even in large cities, get along very well and usually consider each other close friends.

Personal Appearance. Dress generally follows conservative European fashions and is influenced by the necessity to keep warm. Cleanliness and dressing well are important; an unkempt appearance in public is considered inappropriate. Norwegians tend to dress up for social gatherings and dress down for work. Shirt and tie, casual pants, and sweaters or pullovers are appropriate professional attire for men. Suits are worn for business meetings. A dinner party with colleagues (especially at Christmas) is an occasion to dress up.

Traditional costumes (*bunad*), which are specific to each region, are worn on special occasions such as weddings and national and local holidays. The costumes are often hand sewn and have elaborate embroidery. For women, they usually consist of a white blouse (often embroidered), a jumper-type skirt, an apron, and a headdress. Men wear traditional knee pants, shirts, and vests.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. Norwegians generally do not wait to be introduced by others. They often take the initiative in meeting new colleagues or neighbors. Natural courtesy is important to good relations. Shaking hands is appropriate in both formal and informal contexts. In formal contexts, businesslike handshakes are firm and short. In personal contexts, handshakes are longer and warmer. Close friends may hug each other while touching opposite cheeks during or after a handshake.

Everyday acquaintances greet each other with a casual *Morn* (literally, "Morning"), regardless of the time of day. The term is roughly equivalent to "Hi." The word *Hei* also means "Hi" and is as common as *Morn*. A slightly more formal greeting is *God dag* (Good day). People greeting others they have not seen for a while often say *Takk for sist!* (Thanks for the last time!), a phrase comparable to "Long time no see."

Traditionally, only close friends addressed each other by first name, but the youth increasingly are using first names once they have been introduced. Even schoolchildren may call teachers by their first name. Older individuals continue to follow the custom of using titles with a family name. When being introduced for the first time, a person addresses the other by both first and last name.

Gestures. Norwegians keep hand gestures to a minimum during conversation. However, people may wave the index finger in the air when warning others or expressing anger. It is impolite to place one's hands in the pockets when standing in front of a large group. Chewing gum is also inappropriate in public and business settings. It is impolite to yawn without covering the mouth. On public transportation, people usually offer their seat to women or the elderly. Courtesy and good behavior are important in all cases.

Visiting. Most Norwegians socialize at home. Friends visit each other regularly, either to maintain friendships or just to socialize. In the past, people visited unannounced, but now a call in advance is appreciated. Guests usually are offered coffee, tea, lemonade, or soda water and cakes or cookies. It is

considered rude for invited guests to refuse any refreshments the hosts offer.

When visiting a home for the first time, one customarily brings a gift of flowers, sweets, or another small token of appreciation to the hosts. Traditionally, guests wait to be invited in by the host, who helps them remove their coats as a gesture of hospitality. Guests may also wait to sit down until they are invited to do so. Personal privacy is important; topics such as income and social status are avoided in casual conversation. Punctuality is important. It is considered poor taste to leave directly after dinner.

Eating. In the past, Norwegian families ate breakfast, dinner, and supper together. Today, most families meet together for dinner and sometimes breakfast. Many also enjoy a light evening snack. Norwegians eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. It is impolite to leave food on the plate. At the end of a meal, whether in casual or formal situations, diners thank the person who prepared or is responsible for the meal. Indeed, children are taught to say *Takk for maten* (Thank you for the food) before leaving the table. Hands are kept above the table during the meal.

Except for on special occasions, most Norwegians do not eat out often. Since restaurants generally are expensive, most people prefer to eat out in cafés, called *gatekjøkken*, which serve sausages, hamburgers, french fries, and other types of fast food. In a restaurant, a patron summons the server with a raised hand. The bill usually includes a service fee, but a small tip (5–10 percent) is also customary.

LIFESTYLE

Family. The typical Norwegian family unit is small, consisting of a mother, father, and two children. Both parents usually work outside the home, but women still handle most household tasks. Most husbands and wives consider each other equal in authority. In fact, gender equality throughout the country is rather pronounced. Women have a strong presence in politics, holding nearly 40 percent of parliamentary seats and nearly half of cabinet posts. They comprise 45 percent of the labor force. Their influence has helped Norway develop strong child-care, educational, and family programs. After a child's birth, parents can take up to 42 weeks of fully paid leave. The father must take four weeks, and the mother must take twelve. The government provides some monetary support until the child is 18 years old.

Many people own their homes or condominiums. More than one-third also own or share a cabin in the mountains or near the sea. Spending time in these cottages is a favorite family activity. Although divorce was once uncommon, a dramatic increase has occurred over the last decade. Still, about half of all adults are married.

Dating and Marriage. Serious dating is discouraged among the youth, but group dating usually starts between the ages of 14 and 18. Dances, outdoor activities, and movies are favorite pastimes. Most Norwegian couples live together before or instead of marrying. Men usually marry around age 25; women marry at a slightly younger age. Weddings take place in churches or before a judge at a public office. Large parties for families and friends include dinner and speeches, followed by refreshments and dancing.

Diet. Breakfast and lunch usually consist of open-face cheese or ham sandwiches and milk or coffee. Meat or fish, potatoes, vegetables, and a soup or dessert are generally prepared for the main meal. A common meal is meatballs with potatoes and

brown gravy, served with vegetables. Norwegian specialties include fish balls served in a milk sauce, smoked salmon, *lutefisk* (cod or coalfish, soaked in potash lye), *fårikål* (cabbage and mutton), *smalahode* (sheep's head), and a variety of other dishes. Ready-made or frozen foods are popular, particularly for evening snacks. Delis usually sell ready-made fried fish, fish cakes, fish pudding, and meatballs. Ice cream and puddings with various toppings are popular desserts.

Recreation. Most Norwegians are physically active. Many enjoy skiing (cross-country skiing is especially popular), and children learn at a very young age. "Norwegians are born with skis on their feet" is a common cliché. Norway is one of the world's centers for ice-skating and skiing, both Alpine (downhill) and Nordic (cross-country). The city of Lillehammer was the site of the 1994 Winter Olympics. Fishing is excellent and popular; trout, pike, and salmon abound in Norwegian waters. People also enjoy playing soccer, swimming, and hiking during the summer months. Boating is popular when the frozen lakes and fjords thaw. Sports are not connected to school activities, but each community has its own sports clubs for individual and team competition. Participation is emphasized more than winning. Most families are actively involved in these clubs. Reading is a popular leisure activity.

The Arts. Many families participate in the performing arts, either by performing themselves or by attending theater, concerts, and other cultural events. Theater is particularly valued. The Norwegian Opera, the Norwegian National Ballet, and numerous orchestras add to the lively arts scene.

Traditional arts are important to Norwegians. Folk musicians are popular, and festivals feature many types of folk music. The best-known folk dance is the *halling*, in which male dancers perform challenging kicks and leaps. Norwegian folktales are also popular. They often portray animals or mythical creatures such as trolls, pixies, and monsters living in the ocean.

Rock carvings, wooden stave churches, and Viking ships are examples of ancient architecture and craft. Contemporary arts include furniture, jewelry, textiles, and painting. Norwegian mural painting is especially renowned.

Holidays. Official holidays include New Year's Day, Easter (Thursday–Monday), Labor Day (1 May), Constitution Day (17 May), and Christmas (24–26 Dec.). Nearly all businesses close on these days. The Norwegian flag is a prominent feature of all holidays; it is even used to decorate Christmas trees. Constitution Day is celebrated much like the Fourth of July in the United States, with parades, flags, family gatherings, and the like. Families often take skiing vacations during the Easter holiday. Christmas is the biggest celebration of the year. As in other countries, preparations begin well in advance. At 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve, bells ring and the holiday officially begins. Stories about *Julenisse* (Father Christmas) are popular among children. Families gather to share a big meal and exchange gifts. Parties are common on Christmas Day and thereafter until the new year begins.

Commerce. The average workweek in Norway is one of the shortest in the world: about 37.5 hours. Office hours are usually from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. Grocery stores open from 9 or 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. while other stores close at 4 or 5 p.m. In large towns, stores often stay open as late as 7 p.m. on Thursdays. Shops close by 2 p.m. on Saturdays and are closed on Sunday. Shopping centers are now common in cities; their hours are from 10 a.m. to 8 or 9 p.m.

SOCIETY

Government. Norway is a constitutional monarchy. The king (currently Harald V) has limited authority, except as head of the military and as a symbol of continuity and stability. The leader of the dominant party in Parliament serves as prime minister (currently Kjell Magne Bondevik) and has executive power. The *Storting* (Parliament) has an upper chamber (*Lagting*) and a lower chamber (*Odelsting*). Its 165 members are elected every four years. In Norway's judicial system, the highest court is the Supreme Court, or *Høyesterett*. There are also courts of appeal for civil and criminal cases and conciliation courts for civil suits. Norway has 19 provinces (*fylker*), which are further subdivided into rural and urban municipalities. All citizens may begin voting at age 18.

Economy. Norway enjoys a strong economy and has one of the highest standards of living in the world. Wealth is, in general, evenly distributed. Highly developed social institutions are able to provide for general economic prosperity but also result in heavy tax burdens. The decision to remain outside the EU has not weakened the economy. Inflation and unemployment are low. Norway remains closely tied to Europe through its membership in the European Economic Area (EEA), which allows for the free movement of labor, capital, goods, and services between the EU and non-EU European countries.

Norway is one of the world's largest oil exporters. It is also a major aluminum producer. Other important exports include natural gas, fish, and manufactured items such as furniture and ships. Oil drilling, commercial shipping, paper products, textiles, chemicals, technology, and food processing are among the key industries. The government is working to further diversify the economy to reduce its dependence on oil. The services sector of the economy employs about 75 percent of the labor force. Agriculture and fishing employ 4 percent. The currency is the Norwegian *kroner* (NOK).

Transportation and Communications. Norwegians depend on cars for personal transportation, particularly because of the country's length and sparse population. Trains, buses, and airplanes also connect many cities and towns. Norway has the third largest fleet of commercial ships in the world. Ferries, which provide service across many fjords, are vital to infrastructure in western parts of the country. Before cars and airplanes became readily available, steamboats known as *Hurtitruten*, or coastal steamers, were the main form of transportation for people along the coast. Steamers still transport goods and are popular among tourists. The communications system is highly developed and fully modern. Norwegians enjoy newspapers; local, district, and national papers are widely read. One state and three private television stations broadcast throughout the country.

Education. Schooling is free and compulsory for all children between the ages of six and sixteen. The first six years constitute primary school, while the last three are lower secondary school. Upper secondary school is open to all, although students usually are between the ages of 16 and 18. It provides both vocational training and preparation for higher education. Private secondary and continuing-education schools are gaining popularity.

After secondary school, many Norwegians begin working.

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	1 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	1 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$29,620
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 99 (female)
Infant mortality rate	4 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	76 (male); 82 (female)

Others are admitted to a university or college, and a small number attend the folk college, a liberal-arts boarding school that does not give credit toward a degree. Universities are located in Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø, and Trondheim. There are a number of specialized colleges and institutes. Instruction is readily available to most citizens and basically free at all levels, including higher education. Space is limited at universities, however, so many students travel to other countries for their college education. The government offers generous loans to students who seek education abroad.

Health. In keeping with its commitment to social welfare, the government has an extensive system that provides free, high-quality healthcare services to all. Health clinics and regional hospitals provide service on a local level, but district and national hospitals are also available. Socialized medicine pays for all hospital charges, although small fees are charged for medicine and some procedures. Costs are shared between the central and local governments. Private doctors, clinics, and hospitals are limited.

AT A GLANCE**Events and Trends.**

- In January 2004, a daughter was born to Norway's Crown Princess Mette-Marit and Crown Prince Haakon (the son of King Harald V and next in line to the throne). Named Ingrid Alexandra, the baby princess is second in line to the throne, making it possible that Norway could eventually have a female head of state for the first time since the 15th century. A change to Norway's constitution in 1990 allows the monarch's firstborn child, regardless of sex, to be next in the line of succession.
- Eighteen crewmembers died when their cargo ship capsized after striking underwater rocks near Bergen in January 2004. Most of the victims were Filipino. Twelve people were rescued.
- In September 2001 elections, the Labour Party, led by Jens Stoltenberg, suffered a major defeat, losing more than one-third of its seats. Stoltenberg resigned to make way for Kjell Magne Bondevik's minority coalition government that includes the Conservative Party, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Liberal Party.

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