



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 125,023 square miles (323,802 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 electric 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 (AD 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 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 about joining the 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 over 4.6 million is growing at approximately 0.33 percent annually. Norway is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. Over 75 percent of Norwegians live along the coast and in urban areas. The two largest cities are Oslo (more than 900,000 residents) and Bergen (about 253,000).

The population is predominantly of Nordic (Scandinavian) descent. Although Norway strictly limits immigration, the number of immigrant workers increased following the discovery of oil in the North Sea. A small minority (about 60,000) 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 the most common form. It 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 school as a second language. The Norwegian alphabet has three more vowels than the English; *å*, *æ*, and *ø*. Schoolchildren begin learning English at age seven; it is spoken widely as a second language.

Religion

More than 85 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, and attitudes toward immigrants can be critical.

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. Norwegians tend to be reserved; city-dwellers rarely are close friends with their neighbors nor do they greet passersby on the street.

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, a headdress, and silver fasteners. 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 for the first time since a shared social event often say *Takk for sist* (Thanks for the last time), a phrase that recognizes the closer social bond between them.

Traditionally, only close friends addressed each other by first name, but the younger generation tends to use 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.

Recent affluence has increased the popularity of eating out. Formal restaurants, coffee bars, and informal cafés, which serve sausages, hamburgers, french fries, and other types of fast food, are popular. 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 of the household tasks. Most husbands and wives consider each other equal in authority. Women have a strong presence in politics, holding nearly 40 percent of the seats in parliament and roughly half of the cabinet posts. They comprise 45 percent of the labor force. Their influence has helped Norway develop strong child-care, educational, and family programs. Parents can take up to 46 weeks of fully paid leave (or 56 weeks at 80 percent of their usual pay) before their child's third birthday. Mothers take three weeks of leave before their due date and six weeks after the birth. Fathers must take a total of 10 weeks. Parents then may split the remainder as they wish. The government provides some monetary support until the child is 18 years old.

Housing

Most Norwegians prefer traditional home styles. It is not uncommon to restore old houses instead of buying or building new ones, although new home building has surged recently. In some neighborhoods, functional houses date back more than one hundred years. Where new houses are built, they are often designed to fit in with older, existing homes. Showy homes are considered to be in extremely bad taste but are becoming more popular among younger Norwegians.

Most Norwegians decorate and fix up their homes themselves. Many are highly design conscious and spend a lot of time and money making their homes more attractive. This tendency may be related to the fact that Norwegians spend a lot of time in their homes during the long winter season. In decorating, Norwegians have generally conservative tastes, preferring furnishings made from wood, leather, or wool. Many well-off Norwegians own summer cabins near the ocean or winter cabins in the mountains close to skiing and other winter activity sites.

Dating and Marriage

Serious dating is discouraged among young teens, 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. On average, men marry at age 34 and women at

age 31. 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. Nearly 50 percent of marriages end in divorce.

Life Cycle

It is in Norwegian life-cycle rituals where the influence of the Church of Norway, the Lutheran state church, can be seen most clearly. Almost everyone in Norway observes the traditional religious ceremonies associated with birth, marriage, and death. Confirmation, which marks the admission of young people into the church, is another important ceremony. In recent years, the growth of the Human Ethics organization has provided Norwegians the opportunity to undergo secular versions of the traditional religious ceremonies. Most graveyards are on grounds belonging to the state church and, in the past, burial there was denied to people who had not been baptized and confirmed.

Diet

Breakfast and lunch usually consist of open-faced 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. Examples of ancient craft and architecture include rock carvings, Viking ships, and 1,000-year-old churches made out of wooden slats. Contemporary arts include furniture, jewelry, textiles, and painting. 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, etc. 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.

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. A 1990 change to Norway's constitution allows a monarch's firstborn child to inherit the throne, regardless of sex. The leader of the dominant party in Parliament serves as prime minister (currently Jens Stoltenberg) and has executive power. The Parliament (*Storting*) has an upper chamber (*Lagting*) and a lower chamber (*Odelsting*). In 2007, parliament voted to combine the two chambers after the 2009 elections. Members of Parliament 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 as well as conciliation courts for civil suits. Norway has 19 counties (*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, but the government is working to diversify the economy and reduce its dependence on oil. Norway 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 industrial sector employs about 20 percent of the workforce, while the services sector accounts for more than 75 percent and agriculture and fishing 3 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 its sparse population. Trains, buses, and airplanes also connect many cities and towns. Norway has one of the largest fleets 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 *Hurtigruten*, or coastal steamers, were the main form of transportation for people along the coast. Steamers still transport goods and are popular among tourists. The country's communications system is highly developed and fully modern. Norwegians enjoy newspapers; local, district, and national papers are widely read. Multiple television stations broadcast throughout the country.

Education

Schooling is free and compulsory for all children between the ages of six and sixteen. The first seven 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. Others are admitted to a university or college, and a small number attend folk colleges, liberal-arts boarding schools that focus on personal enrichment without giving credit toward a degree. Universities are located in Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø, and Trondheim, Stavanger, and Ås. There are also a number of specialized colleges. 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

Contact Information

Royal Norwegian Embassy, 2720 34th Street NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 333-6000; web site www.norway.org. Innovation Norway, 655 Third Avenue, 18th floor, New York, N.Y. 10017; phone (212) 885-9700; web site www.visitnorway.com.

POPULATION & AREA

Population	4,676,305 (rank=118)
Area, sq. mi.	125,023 (rank=68)
Area, sq. km.	323,802

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	1 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	5 of 155 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$57,600
Adult literacy rate	100% (male); 100% (female)
Infant mortality rate	4 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	77 (male); 83 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

ProQuest
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA
Toll Free: 1.800.521.3042
Fax: 1.800.864.0019
www.culturegrams.com

© 2011 ProQuest LLC and Brigham Young University. It is against the law to copy, reprint, store, or transmit any part of this publication in any form by any means without strict written permission from ProQuest.

