



Winter in
Norway's
capital, Oslo.
PHOTO: SCANPIX

FACTS ABOUT NORWAY, AND HOW TO SURVIVE

Norway has vast oil and gas resources buried in sandstone layers at the bottom of the North Sea. As a result, we are among the richest nations in the world.

By Bent Botten

Chances are your country ranks lower on that list, and Norwegian prices may come as a severe shock. The cheapest place to buy things is at a supermarket. All other places charge more. Tipping is optional, and VAT is included in all bills. All major credit cards are accepted, and some places (i.e. hotels) will only reluctantly accept payment in cash.

Learning Norwegian? Forget it!

Norway has two official languages, Norwegian and sami, including two official written forms of Norwegian. Fortunately for you, most Norwegians also speak English. Norwegians also understand quite well Danish, Swedish, and some are also familiar with German and French. Don't hesitate to make contact, Norwegians are generally friendly, but don't expect a smile. Living in one of the northernmost countries in the world,

much of which lies in darkness for six months of the year, has made us a serious and somewhat shy crowd. Don't expect a Norwegian to talk to you first, unless he or she has been drinking.

Be on time

Most things in Norway begin exactly at the time given. Don't be late! If you receive an invitation of any sort, say «yes» if you want to come, and «no, I'm sorry, I've got other plans» if you don't. Never say «yes» to be polite, and then not show up. When you have been told where and when, don't expect a second invitation. You are not required to refuse the first time to be polite.

Drugs and alcohol

Alcohol and tobacco are the only legal drugs. Attempting to bring any other recreational drugs across the border may land you in trouble with the authorities. Alcohol is heavily taxed, which makes drinking in Norway very, very expensive.

A drink in a bar may cost as much as 15 USD. Partly because of this, it is not customary to buy rounds. Drinking in public places is illegal, as is smoking indoors.

Your hotel room will most likely have a mini bar, containing soft drinks and alcoholic beverages. These are possibly the most expensive drinks you will ever be offered! Don't take anything unless you are prepared to pay for it. The same goes for chocolates and wine bottles in small baskets on your desk. They are not free gifts from the hotel. On the bright side; you can safely drink the tap water. Bottled water is expensive.

Equality

The polite form 'De' (= 'You') is rarely used any more. The prime minister is referred to by his given name «Jens». Norwegians don't address authorities as «Sir» and «Mrs».