

Norway: Basic Information

Around 2.7 million tourists visit Norway every year, 250 000 of them British. It is a country of vast distances. Although public transport is good, to explore even a small part of this beautiful country, a car is essential. It may be fairly expensive to take your own car, but once there, it will be much cheaper than using public transport. You will leave frustrated after a one-week visit; go for two weeks or more.

It is impossible to find all the information you want from a single source. These information documents are the accumulated wisdom (?) from over 35 years of visits to Norway, gleaned from books, travel brochures, government publications, web sites and personal experiences – some disastrous! They do not detail all the tourist sights – for that, consult one of the many tourist guides (Lonely Planet, Rough Guide and other publishers) for both Norway itself and Scandinavia in general. These are revised every few years; older editions in libraries may have out-of-date information.

The Norwegian Tourist Board and local tourist information offices in Norway publish annual guides. Most towns have a tourist office, usually near the station, ferry terminal or town centre; those displaying a green "i" sign are open all year, ones with a red "i" only for the summer; staff are very knowledgeable – make a point of visiting when you arrive in an area. Some holiday companies publish useful guides, but oriented to their own holidays.

Norwegian Tourist Board, Akersgata 13, N-0158 Oslo (T: 22 00 25 00, Fax: 22 00 25 01)

Innovation Norway (NTB), 5 Regent Street, London SW1Y 4LR (T: 0207 389 8800, fax: 0207 839 6014; the phone number 0906 302 2003 in some brochures is a premium rate); <london@innovationnorway.no>. Order printed brochures or download copies from <<http://www.visitnorway.co.uk>> (summer brochures are usually available from mid-February); the main brochure lists all regional tourist offices with phone numbers

The Norwegian Embassy can supply information on living and working in Norway.

Royal Norwegian Embassy, 25 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8QD (T: 0207 591 5500)

<<http://www.norway.org.uk>> The web site also has news of Norwegian events in the UK.

Royal Norwegian Consulate General, 12 Rutland Square, Edinburgh EH1 2BB (T: 0131-228 2444) <<http://www.norway.org.uk/edinburgh>>

<<http://www.arbeidsformidling.no/eng>> also has information on working in Norway.

Anglo-Norse Society, c/o British Embassy (in Norway) or c/o Norwegian Embassy (in UK)

<<http://www.anglo-norse.org.uk/>> <Secretariat@anglo-norse.org.uk>.

Scottish Norwegian Society, 36 Randolph Road, Glasgow G11 7LG (T: 0141-334 2260)

<grakar@bt.internet.com>

Useful Websites: Many Norwegian websites have pages in English.

Business and residential phone directories <<http://www.180.no/>>, <<http://www.1881.no>>,

<<http://www.gulesider.no>>, <<http://www.nettkatalogen.no/telefonkatalog/>>,

<<http://www.kvasir.no/>> (business only).

Comprehensive tourist information from USA <<http://www.norway.com>>

The Norway Post for news in English <<http://www.norwaypost.no>>

Packing guide <<http://www.oratory.com/onebag/home.html>>

Planning your visit <<http://www.dontforgetyourtoothbrush.com>>

Public Sector information portal in English <<http://www.norway.no>>

Scandinavia Connection <<http://www.scandinavia-connection.co.uk>> supplies books on Norway in English.

Travel Guide <<http://www.norwayguide.no>>

Information & Services for Travellers:

Asthma & Allergy Sufferers: *Norges Astma- og Allergiforbund*, Postboks 2603 St Hanshaugen, 0131 Oslo (T: 23 35 35 35, fax: 23 35 35 30) <<http://www.naaf.no>> <naaf@naaf.no> can

supply information about suitable hotels.

Backpackers: VIP Backpackers, PO Box 3184 Elisenberg, N-0208 for information on cheap accommodation (T: 48 13 47 25) <<http://www.vipbackpackers.no/engelsk/>> <post@backpackers.no>

Disabled: *Norges Handikapforbund*, Schweigaardsgt. 12, Postboks 9217 Grønland, N-0134 Oslo (T: 24 10 24 00) <<http://www.nhf.no>> <nhf@nhf.no> publishes a brochure in English, also available from tourist offices. Norway is disabled-friendly; accommodation brochures indicate wheelchair accessibility; some trains have special coaches, DFDS and *Hurtigruten* have special cabins. There are coach tours for wheelchair users. There is also useful information at <<http://www.direct.gov.uk/disabledpeople>>.

Gay & Lesbian: *Landsforeningen for Lesbisk og Homofil Frigjøring*, St Olavs plass 2, N-0165 Oslo (T: 22 36 19 48).

Independent travel: There are several gap year web sites with useful advice for anyone 'doing your own thing': <<http://www.dontworrymum.com>>, <<http://www.gapaid.org>>, <<http://www.gogapyear.com>>, <<http://www.ultimategapyear.co.uk>>.

Senior Citizens: Discounts for those over 67 are available at most museums, for air, rail and bus fares and at some hotels – always ask. Have your passport handy as proof of age if you look too youthful! <<http://www.ageconcern.org.uk>> for travel advice.

Students: Discounts are available for travel, museums and other venues. Obtain an International Student Identity Card; the ID card for your own educational institution may not be recognised.

Women: *Kvinnefronten*, Holsts gate 1, N-0473 Oslo (T: 22 37 60 54) and *Krisesenter* (T: 22 37 47 00 in Oslo or 112 elsewhere) in emergencies.

Complaints: If you are not satisfied with any goods or services you have paid for, raise the matter politely but firmly with the local provider at the earliest opportunity - don't wait until you return home. Focus on the main issues without introducing minor moans. Make written notes about the problem and take photographic/video evidence with contact details of witnesses if appropriate. Be reasonable and justify any monetary value you are claiming; this improves your chances in any subsequent mediation or court claim. Don't be fobbed off with a low offer or credit/vouchers that you cannot spend. Advice can be obtained from Citizens Advice, Consumer Direct or Which?. If you aren't satisfied, in the UK you can use the Small Claims Court or the ABTA or AITO arbitration services for claims against members. There are fees, time and compensation limits and documentary requirements; decisions are binding. Getting redress is difficult for privately owned accommodation, unless it is graded by the tourist authority or listed in a guide book; contact the local tourist office or guide publisher for advice.

Association of British Travel Agents <<http://www.abta.com>>

Association of Independent Tour Operators <<http://www.aito.co.uk>> then click on About AITO, Why AITO, Dispute Settlement Service.

Citizens Advice Bureau <<http://www.adviceguide.org.uk>>

Consumer Direct (T: 0845 404 0506) <<http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk>>

Which? <<http://www.which.co.uk/advice>>

Electricity: 220V, 50Hz, compatible with UK appliances. The unearthed 2.5A 2-pin round europlug and similar 16A Schuko plug with two earth contacts at its circumference are used; both plugs fit the same socket. International car ferries use the same. UK 3-pin to Schuko plug adapters are available in UK electrical shops, but are usually rated at 6A maximum and so are not suitable for most kettles and some hairdryers.

Steve Kropla's guide to electrical and phone plugs: <<http://www.kropla.com>>.

Hitch-hiking isn't common and is usually difficult as traffic can be very light. Expect very long waits. Ask truck drivers at ferry terminals, fuel stations and roadside café car parks.

Lost Property (*hittegods*): Enquire at bus or train stations or the police.

Photography: The outstanding scenery means you will take many more photographs than you expect. Take spare camera batteries, extra film or digital memory cards. Ask permission before taking photos of people, especially Sami. A UV filter may be needed to avoid glare from water, snow and ice; digital cameras may not work at temperatures below freezing.

Weather: For daily and 7-day forecasts: <<http://www.worldclimate.com>>

Documents in this series list organisations that provide brochures on travel, accommodation and activities. You can write to them in English.

Some Norwegian prices are given as a guide but they become out-of-date quickly. Consult brochures published annually or websites for current prices.

Norway: Emergencies, Health & Safety

Phone 110 for fire (*brann*).

Phone 112 for police (*politi*), **mountain rescue**.

Phone 113 for ambulance (*ambulanse*).

Phone 120 for coast guard (*kystvakt*).

Operators speak English.

Mountain Rescue: The Red Cross operates teams in many areas; major rock climbing areas have teams operated by local climbing clubs. Contact via the police. There is a Norwegian Air Ambulance service with twelve helicopters and nine aeroplanes. Ensure that your travel policy covers your activities; you may be charged for air rescue.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office <<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/europe/norway/>> for travel advice.

<<http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/2855621/going-to-live-abroad>>

British Embassy, Thomas Heftyesgate 8, N-0244 Oslo (T: 23 13 27 27, fax: 23 13 27 44)

<<http://www.britishembassy.gov.uk>> <<http://www.britain.no>>

British Consulate, Øvre Ole Bulls Plass 1, N-5804 Bergen (T: 55 36 78 10), M - F: 10.00 - 14.00.

British Consulate, Byggcon AS, Notveien 17, N-8013 Bodø (T: 75 56 58 00)

British Consulate, Tangen 10, N-4610 Kristiansand S (T: 38 12 20 70)

British Consulate, Prinsensgate 12, 4008 N-Stavanger (T: 51 52 97 13)

British Consulate, Macks Ølbryggeri, Storgata 5-13, N-9008 Tromsø (T: 77 62 45 00)

British Consulate, R Kjeldsberg AS, Beddingen 8, N-7014 Trondheim (T: 73 60 02 00)

British Consulate, Farstadgården, St Olavs plass, N-6001 Ålesund (T: 70 12 75 00)

British citizens are entitled to the same emergency health services as Norwegians. You need the European Health Insurance Card valid in all EEA (European Economic Area) countries including Norway; the former E111 is no longer valid. Application forms are available at all British Post Offices or phone 0845 606 2030 or online at <<http://www.ehic.org>>. Make photocopies — leave one copy at home and take two with you. You may have to hand the card to the medical service and in the stress of an emergency, forget to retrieve it. Show the card and hand over a copy instead. Get a receipt for any fees that you pay; you may get a partial refund by taking it to the local health insurance office (*trygdekontor*). If you claim on your travel policy, insurance companies expect you to use the facilities available through the EHIC whenever possible; some companies make it mandatory to carry the card. For any accident or illness requiring expensive treatment, first get advice and authorisation from your insurer.

Travel Health: The annual WHO publication 'International Travel and Health' is available online at <<http://www.who.int/ith>>.

Department of Health

<<http://www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/Healthcareabroad/pages/Healthcareabroad.aspx>>

Health Advice for Travellers booklet:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/dr_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4135858.pdf>

NHS Scotland: <<http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk>>

NaTHNaC: <<http://www.nathnac.org>>.

USA site with detailed advice updated daily

<<http://www.mdtravelhealth.com/destinations/europe/norway.php>>

Books: Traveller's Health, by Richard Dawood (OUP).

The Traveller's Good Health Guide, by Ted Lankester (Sheldon Press).

Hospital (*sykehus*): Emergency in-patient treatment, including medicines, is free; charges are payable for out-patient treatment.

Accident & Emergency Department/Casualty: A 24-hour clinic (*legevakt*) is attached to most

hospitals and can also be found in city centres. There is a fixed fee to pay, regardless of treatment.

Doctor (*lege*, but addressed as *doktor*): Tourist offices, pharmacies and hotels can direct you to a doctor who speaks English – most do. There are standard non-refundable consultation fees (kr 130 - 220).

Dentist (*tannlege*): Fees are expensive; adults pay the total cost. Make sure that your own dentist inspects your teeth regularly and completes treatment before you leave home. Cities have a 24-hour emergency service (*tannlegevakt*).

Optician (*optiker*): Take with you spare glasses, sufficient contact lens cleaner and a copy of your prescription which can be quickly made up locally if necessary (but expensively).

Pharmacy (*apotek*): Available in all towns, the pharmacist can also advise on minor ailments. Cities have a 24-hour service (*apotekvakt*). Pharmacies sell only medicines and medical appliance; go to a supermarket for toiletries and cosmetics. You pay the total cost of medicines, unless prescribed by a doctor on a blue prescription form (*resept*) when you pay 36%. Take a sufficient supply with you of any essential medication in its original packaging, details of both its proprietary and generic names and a legible copy of your prescription or doctor's letter to prove legal use. Laws on use of medicines and drugs are far more restrictive than the UK with very severe penalties – some UK over-the-counter medicines can be obtained only by prescription in Norway. Medicines cannot be supplied using a UK prescription; take it to a doctor who will issue a Norwegian prescription.

First Aid: Take your own first aid kit for minor injuries; if you make up your own, ensure it looks like a proper kit, rather than a suspicion-arousing collection of drugs. The Red Cross (*Røde Kors*) is usually present at major orienteering and other sports events.

Safety: Norway is a safe country with no unusual dangers, other than polar bears in Svalbard or getting lost in the vast empty countryside. People tend to be more careless when on holiday; take sensible precautions over money and valuables, where you go at night and taking part in risky activities, just as in the UK. Drunks, drug addicts and beggars can be a nuisance in central Oslo.

Travel with Care (01980 626 300) <<http://www.travelwithcare.com>> for money belts, neck pouches and other security devices.

Car Breakdown: See Driving section.

Crime: There are pickpockets and a risk of theft in central Bergen and in and around the Oslo airports and railway stations. The British Embassy is frequently asked to assist British nationals who have had their valuables stolen just after they arrive in the country. Crime rates elsewhere are low. Of about 400 000 offences reported annually, 30% are traffic and minor misdemeanours; serious crimes including violence and theft are decreasing; use and possession of less serious drugs is increasing.

If your belongings are stolen, get a crime statement from the police within 24 hours for your insurance claim. As a precaution against loss or theft, make photocopies of all important documents (including tickets) and keep them separate from the originals – on your person, in your car, in your luggage. The hassle resulting from loss can ruin a holiday.

Report lost or stolen mobile phones or SIM cards to the service provider and police immediately. You are liable for all call charges which may run into £000s with data downloads.

Report passports lost or stolen in Norway to the Foreign Office via the British Embassy which will issue temporary travel documents. If you are arrested contact the Embassy or a consulate.

Food Poisoning: Food hygiene standards are high, but stomach upsets and diarrhoea can occur, particularly with inadequately cooked shellfish. Commercial mussels (*blåskjell*) in restaurants are safe, but seek advice if offered for sale elsewhere. Wild mushrooms are popular and safe in restaurants but ensure they have been positively identified if offered by others.

Insect bites: Mosquitoes (*mygger*) and blackflies are prevalent in high summer, especially in the north, but usually not as annoying as Scottish midges; they are particularly active at dawn and dusk. Use insect repellent spray on clothing, roll-on repellent on skin, mosquito coils and tents with netting when camping. Recommended repellents include Autan, Avon Woodland Fresh dry oil body spray, citronella, neem oil from health food stores (smelly but effective), Permethrin spray (kills mosquitos and ticks), RID available as spray and roll-on from <<http://www.thesafaristore.co.uk>>, Stop Bite (bog myrtle) from <<http://www.totallyherby.com>>, Walkabout (tea tree oil and citronella) from <<http://www.wellbeing-uk.com>>; Deet-based repellents, eg Jungle Formula and RID, are effective but degrade some plastics and artificial fibres. Natural repellents are about 90% effective and last for only a short time – about 30 minutes if active, 2 hours if sitting still – before the need to re-apply. If you are out in the countryside and unprotected, crush the aromatic leaves of bog myrtle (sweet gale, *Myrica gale*) in your hands and rub the sap over your skin. The shrub is up to 1m high with yellow catkin-like flowers; for a picture, see <<http://www.bogmyrtle.com/>>. See <<http://www.bens100.com>> for more insect repellents. Do not use repellents on cuts, wounds or rashes, eyes or mouth; use lightly on ears. After repeated use, wash skin thoroughly. Use antihistamine, antiseptic, calamine cream, or Itch Ease (herbs and witchhazel) from <<http://www.totallyherby.com>> on bites – do not scratch as this can break the skin; most people develop resistance to the irritant chemicals in bites after about a week.

With the change to a warmer climate, ticks (*blodmidd*) are increasingly present in countryside areas (just like the UK), especially in the South and particularly in thicker vegetation; bites from infected ticks can pass on Lyme disease or encephalitis. Take precautions by wearing full arm and leg cover and using a repellent, especially on trousers and socks. Inspect clothing and skin thoroughly for ticks after walking or running in the countryside. They have a round unsegmented body with 8 bristly legs and can be up to 30mm long, although usually much smaller. Remove any attached ticks with a tick removal tool available from pet shops or Lyme Disease Action or with tweezers; press the skin down around the head, grip the sides of the head and lift straight up. Do not lift by or squeeze the tick's body. Seek medical attention promptly if bitten. Visit <<http://www.LymeDiseaseAction.org.uk>> or <<http://www.tickalert.org>> for more information on ticks, . For details of Lyme disease and encephalitis symptoms, visit <<http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections>> or <<http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk>> or <<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>>. Immunisation against encephalitis is not available free through the NHS but can be bought from some GPs and specialist travel clinics <<http://www.masta-travel-health.com>>.

Insurance: Travel and car breakdown insurance are strongly recommended; 39% of UK citizens travel abroad without insurance and any mishap can be very expensive. Don't rely on the limited free cover offered with some bank current accounts and for goods and services purchased by credit card. Insurance companies always avoid paying for anything not explicitly included in the policy so read the limits on value, terms and conditions carefully, especially the cheaper policies. Many exclude cash unless locked in a safe or on your person or unattended baggage unless in a locked glove compartment or locked boot – the insurer expects you to exercise responsible care. Ensure that you specifically include expensive single items like iPods and cameras.

75% of mobile phone users do not insure their phones. Most phone insurance policies, especially those provided by the phone networks, do not cover call charges following loss or theft which may be very expensive abroad, especially for data downloads, and may run into £000s. Keep a separate record of your SIM number and provider's phone number for reporting loss or theft.

You must declare any pre-existing medical condition (including close relatives where problems may require holiday cancellation or curtailment). Non-declared medical conditions and accident or illness in which alcohol or drugs are contributory factors will invalidate the policy. Insurewith, Insurepink and EHIC Plus specialise in insurance for people with pre-existing and serious medical conditions. Many travel insurance policies

(including those offered by car ferries and airlines) exclude all sports activities and people over 60; All Clear, Avanti, Flexicover, Freedom, IC Insurance Choice, Intune/Age UK (expensive, merged from Age Concern and Help the Aged), Holidaysafe Club 65, JD Travel, LV= (Liverpool Victoria), PJ Hayman, Preferential, RIAS, Saga, Staysure, World First specialise in policies for over 50s. If you travel abroad more than once per year, an annual policy will be cheaper. If you intend to work in Norway, then you need insurance that covers it. Photocopy documents with emergency contact numbers; keep one in your car, one in your luggage. Always obtain receipts for any additional payments that you intend to claim for but before incurring expensive medical costs resulting from illness or accident always inform the insurer first to authorise such expenses.

If you are away for long, be aware that most household policies do not cover an empty house for more than one month (two for a few insurers); you must inform your insurer that the house will be empty.

When making a claim for stolen property, you need to report the loss to the police within 24 hours and obtain a copy of the police report to confirm the loss; if luggage is lost by the airline obtain a copy of its property irregularity report. Always inform the insurer as soon as possible even if you can't send documentation immediately. There may be a time limit for making a claim.

Richard Weston Ltd, PO Box 168, London, SW20 8LE <info@richardweston.co.uk> (T: 0208 543 6166) provides a comprehensive policy that includes orienteering, other sports and adventurous activities. HMCA, Beech Hall, Knaresborough HG5 9YX (T: 01423 866 985) <<http://www.hmca.co.uk/bof.htm>> offers single trip and annual policies for orienteers.

International Passenger Protection <<http://www.protectmyholiday.com>> insures against financial failure of specified airlines, car hire companies and booking agents for independently arranged holidays.

All Clear Insurance (0845 250 5850) <<http://www.allcleartravel.co.uk>>; no age limit

Avanti Travel Insurance (0500 066 5604) <<http://www.avantitravelinsurance.co.uk>>; age limit 85, annual policy 75, skiing 70

EHIC Plus (0845 055 5222) <<http://www.ehicplus.com>>

Flexicover (0800 093 9495) <<http://www.flexicover.co.uk>>; no age limit single trip, annual policy 85

Freedom Insurance (01223 454 290) <<http://www.freedominsurance.co.uk>>; age limit single trip 85, annual policy 75

Holidaysafe Club 65 (0845 658 0570) <<http://www.holidaysafe.co.uk>>; age limit single trip 84, annual policy 74

IC Insurance Choice (0844 557 7688)

Insurepink (0800 022 3213)

Insurewith (0845 230 7159) <<http://www.insurewith.com>>; age limit 85

Intune (0800 022 3192) <<http://www.intunegroup.vo.uk>>; no age limit

JD Travel Insurance (07689 859 102) <<http://www.jdtravelinsurance.co.uk>>; no age limit single trip, annual policy 85

LV= (0800 066 5302)

PJ Hayman (0845 230 5000) <<http://www.free-spirit.com>>; no age limit, must apply by phone if over 79

Preferential (0843 208 1928, expensive rate) <<http://www.preferential.co.uk>>; age limit single trip 80, annual policy 75

RIAS (0845 045 1320)

Saga (0800 015 8055) <<http://www.saga.co.uk>>; policies for over 49 only, no upper age limit

Staysure (0844 277 0844, expensive rate) <<http://www.staysure.co.uk>>; age limit single trip 85, annual policy 80

World First (0845 908 016) <<http://www.world-first.co.uk>>age limit single trip 100, annual policy 74

Financial Ombudsman Service (T: 0845 080 1800): for fact sheet on medical conditions, go to <<http://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk>>, then click on publications, consumer fact sheets, medical non-disclosure in insurance.

Rabies: Norway is largely free of rabies except in Svalbard and eastern Finnmark. If you intend to spend time in the wilderness in these areas, consider vaccination before you go. Seek immediate medical advice if bitten or scratched by any furry mammal. Treatment should be within 24 hours and must be within 6 days.

Sexual Health: The prevalence rate for HIV is about 0.1% of the adult population, half the UK rate. Other sexually transmitted infections are also less prevalent than the UK but the risk is there. CE-marked condoms are widely available.

Smoking (*røyking*): This is prohibited (*forbudt*) on aircraft and other public transport, in public buildings and other places open to the public, in workplaces, in hotels, bars and restaurants. You must be over 18 to buy tobacco products.

Sunburn: Long daylight hours in summer mean there is a high risk of sunburn, even early in the morning or when cloudy. Use sun cream and UV blockers, wear a hat with a brim.

Tetanus: Make sure that your vaccination is up-to-date before travelling.

Water (*vann*): The public water supply is safe to drink throughout Norway. Water from streams and lakes should be boiled vigorously. Take water purification tablets for wilderness camping.