

Norway: Arts & Culture

Norse Mythology: The Viking pagan faith had twelve gods, the *Æsir*, who lived at *Asgard*. *Odin* god of war, wisdom, poetry and magic was conflictually untrustworthy, violent and wise. He was Lord of the *Valkyrie* women warriors at *Valhalla*, the hall of dead heroes. *Odin* created heaven and earth from the body of the giant *Ymir*, man from an ash tree and woman from an alder. His wife *Frigga* was goddess of home and family. *Yggdrasil*, the tree of life, supported the universe and Vikings believed that it would eventually die and both gods and mortals would perish in the *Ragnarok*, the twilight of the gods. Woden is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of *Odin*.

Thor, *Odin*'s son, was the giant short-tempered god of thunder, fire and lightning, frequently fighting the evil frost giants of the *Jotunheimen* with his hammer *Mjolnir*, made by the trolls. His chariot was drawn by two goats that could be killed and eaten at night but were fully recovered the next morning. *Loki* was cunning and treacherous and the other gods chained him beneath a serpent that dripped venom on his face. His wife *Sigyn* held a bowl over his head to catch the venom but whenever she had to empty the full bowl, his squirming caused earthquakes. *Frey*, god of fertility, had a large ship *Skidbladnir* that could carry all the gods but could be folded up into his bag. He lived with elves at *Elfheim*. *Freyja* was goddess of love, healing and fertility. *Hel*, goddess of the dead, lived on brains and bone marrow and presided over *Hel*, under the roots of *Yggdrasil*, where those who died of sickness or old age went. The *Norns* were the three goddesses of fate, Past, Present and Future, who cast lots over the cradle of every new baby.

Folk Culture: Legends and folk tales are still popular in the dark winter nights with trolls, giants, elves, witches, beautiful wood nymphs (*hulder*) who steal milk and lure young men inside a mountain so they can never leave, *vetter* spirits who guard the coastline, a headless fisherman and serpents including the Loch Ness-like Selma of Seljordvatn in Telemark. Traditional costumes are proudly preserved in Norwegian life. Folk music, both traditional and modern fusions, and folk dance have a large following. Native instruments include the lur, selje flute, bukke horn, langeleik zither and hardingfele or Hardanger fiddle. Music was not written down but passed on from one player to the next. Sami music is also enjoying a revival. There are many folk festivals throughout the country; the main ones are at Bergen, Bø and Førde.

UNESCO World Heritage sites in Norway:

Bryggen medieval timber buildings, Bergen.

Oldest stave church, dating from 1135, Urnes, Sogn og Fjordane.

Røros copper mining town, dating from 1644, Sør-Trondelag.

Prehistoric rock drawings, Alta, Finnmark.

Vegaøyan archipelago, Nordland.

Struve geodetic arc, triangulation survey stations on the line of longitude from Hammerfest to the Black Sea, 1816 - 1855.

Geirangerfjord, Møre og Romsdal, and Nærøyfjord. Sogn og Fjordane.

Architecture: Wooden stave churches (*stavkirker*) derive from Viking architecture and date from the 11th century early Christian era. They are named after their vertical support posts, built without nails and have ornately carved dragon head gables reminiscent of Viking longboat prows, intricate carvings of intertwined plants and animals, paintings on wood and a unique pagoda-like shape. About 2000 were built but few remain and several burned down in recent years. Less than 30 survive with the largest at Heddal, Telemark, about 250 other pre-1350 timber buildings are preserved in open-air folk museums. Except for large churches, stone and masonry for buildings wasn't common until after 1350.

The Romanesque style with slightly pointed arches, barrel vaults, cruciform piers supporting vaults and groin vaults, was initially influenced by England, typified by Stavanger's 12th century cathedral. Trondheim's Nidaros Cathedral (*domkirke*) is Scandinavia's largest medieval building, the oldest Romanesque part dating from about 1150 with later Gothic

extensions; it is used for Norway's coronations. Most later churches are Gothic style. Bergen's wooden Bryggen was built by the German Hanseatic merchants in the 16th century. Danish rulers built no significant buildings apart from stone fortresses (later modernised in baroque style) until King Christian IV started a number of Renaissance architecture projects including the rebuilding of Oslo as Christiania in 1624 and Kristiansand. Oslo, Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim still have old town areas with wooden houses and cobbled streets.

At the start of the 19th century, there were only a few architects, mostly military officers trained in civil engineering. Wealthy merchants and landowners commissioned buildings and gardens in neo-classical style. After self-government in 1814, Christiania began an ambitious building program with the Royal Palace, Karl Johans gate, the monumental square surrounded by the University and the Storting, the Stock Exchange, the Bank of Norway and Christiania Theater, all influenced by German architecture which often used red-brick buildings in a revival of medieval styles. Most urban apartment buildings and villas continued in the classical tradition with plastered brick walls. From around 1840, architects started to design wooden buildings in Swiss chalet style which evolved into a variation known as dragon style, combining motifs from Viking and medieval art with elements from the recent past. Building traditions varied by region and type of structure and continue today in vacation cabins in the mountains and along the coast.

After independence in 1905, architects educated in Sweden developed a distinctly national architecture, breaking with German tradition. However, German modernism and town planning continued in early 20th century architecture. The *Jugendstil* variant of Art Nouveau influenced much new construction and Ålesund, after a fire in 1904, was rebuilt almost entirely in this style, along with buildings in Trondheim, Oslo's Historical Museum and Government office building, Bergen's theatre Den Nationale Scene. Cost-effective, sanitary, comfortable housing projects grew in importance, especially with co-operative organisations that built large-scale residential complexes and satellite cities (*drabantbyer*) in the outskirts of Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and other cities. In 1973, the parliament recommended a shift toward small residential houses rather than large apartment buildings. Norwegians often undertake home improvement projects on their own and many have built most of their own homes.

After World War II, much of the reconstruction was functional, typified by Oslo's red brick Rådhus. National and local government sponsored building of hospitals, schools, sports and cultural centre and transport infrastructure such as bridges and tunnels. Tromsø has the strikingly modern Arctic Cathedral opened in 1963 and new religious buildings have been mainly Catholic churches and mosques. Modern architecture is influenced by aesthetics and environment together with access to daylight and fresh air. The Snøhetta Norwegian architectural firm has achieved international acclaim for its low-key, cool, Scandinavian style, including the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt, the new Opera House in Oslo, and the Visitor's Center at the World Trade Center memorial site in New York. Over 2600 buildings throughout Norway have cultural heritage protected status.

Art Galleries (*kunstgallerier*) & Museums (*museer*): Religious art was prominent in the 13th century but stagnated until a revival in the mid-17th century of pictorial artists and peasant art with carved church decoration and in the 18th century, Rococo-influenced *rosemaling* (rose painting) decoration was popular on walls and furniture in the home. Landscape painting developed in the early 19th century, particularly Johan Christian Dahl (1788-1857), and an annual State Exhibition of Art was initiated in 1884. In the 20th century there was a large output of expressionist mural paintings. The best known artists are neo-romantic Nikolai Astrup (1880-1928), impressionists Frits Thaulow (1847-1906) and Edvard Munch (1863-1944) with *The Scream* and sculptor Gustav Vigeland (1869-1943) who was given a lifetime pension by Oslo City Council and created nearly 200 sculptures in Frognerparken in Oslo. Contemporary artists include Rolf Groven, Per Inge Bjørlo, Marianne Aulie and Anne Katrine Dolven.

There are museums and art galleries in most cities and towns, some only of local interest;

many have short opening hours, eg 11.00 to 15.00. There is usually an admission fee, but some are free; for students and those over 67 there may be a discount – always ask. Oslo and Bergen offer a pass for free public transport, admission to museums and other local attractions and discounts at carparks and restaurants. Kristiansund has an annual photography exhibition. 40% of the population go to exhibitions and 42% to museum each year.

<<http://www.kulturnett.no/?&lang=en>> for information on over 850 museums and other cultural sites.

Literature: The sagas are skaldic poetry from the court poets of the 9th and 10th century and eddic poetry of Icelandic origin, originally an oral tradition, eventually written down using a Latin alphabet in the 13th century, comprising legends, heroes' sagas and poetry. Religious poetry emerged in the 13th century. There was a dark age from the 14th to early 19th centuries with the strong Danish influence but Ludvig Holberg and others helped preserve a Norwegian flavour until a nationalist revival by Henrik Arnold Wergeland (1808 - 1845) and others. The end of the 19th to mid 20th century saw a golden age of poetry, novels and drama and international prominence was gained by authors Alexander Kjeiland, Jonas Lie and Nobel prize winners Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832 - 1910), Knut Hamsun (1859 - 1952) and Sigrid Undset (1882 - 1949). Bjørnson wrote on rural life and social problems, Undset is best known for her trilogy *Kristin Lavransdatter* on the life of a 14th century family (filmed by actress Liv Ullman), Hamsun for his 1917 novel *The Growth of the Soil* and other works. There is also a considerable volume of literature by Norwegian emigrants to other countries. Many poets wrote patriotic poems distributed clandestinely during World War II and post-war literature was mainly based on war experiences. Hamsun was imprisoned after the war for his Nazi sympathies.

From 1965, the state purchased 1000 copies of each new Norwegian book for distribution to libraries, creating a flourishing expansion of fiction writing. There is a vast amount of contemporary literature including best-seller *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder, Lars Saabye Christensen's novels including *Halvbroren* (*The Half Brother*) and internationally acclaimed crime writers Karin Fossum and Jo Nesbo. but little has been translated into English. The number of fiction titles published annually has increased to 2200. 27% of women and 18% of men read books every day. Bergen, Kristiansund, Lillehammer and Molde have literature festivals.

Drama: The major cities have drama companies and theatres (expensive) but many close for the summer. The best known dramatist is Henrik Ibsen (1828 - 1906) writing about real social, religious and moral problems. Skien, Ibsen's home town, has a museum and theatre that performs all his plays. Jon Fosse is currently Norway's most popular living dramatist both nationally and internationally with his minimalist plays; he also writes novels, poetry and children's books. Bergen, Harstad, Lofoten and Ålesund have theatre festivals. Half the population visit the theatre at least once per year.

<<http://www.ibsen.net>> for performance details in Norway and worldwide.

Film: Norway's film output is small but internationally acclaimed; Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki* (1951) and Torill Kove's *The Danish Poet* (2006) have won Oscars. Tancred Ibsen, Arne Skouen, Ivo Caprino, Oddvar Bull Tuhus, Nils Gaup, Hans Petter Moland, Jens Lien and Bent Hamer are the best known directors. There are film festivals at Bergen, Grimstad, Haugesund (Amanda award), Kautokeino, Oslo, Trondheim and Tromsø. Cinemas (*kino*) are expensive (two to three times the UK price); non-Norwegian films are shown in the original language with Norwegian subtitles. 67% of people visit the cinema at least once per year.

Music: Prior to the 1700s, there is scant written record of music, but there is a large aural tradition of religious and folk music, particularly in rural areas. Traditional Sami music is a chanting style called *joik*. There is a Nordic dance music tradition using the Hardanger fiddle (*hardingfele*) with its additional sympathetic strings and regional dances include *halling*, *pols*, *springleik*, *rull*, *gangar* and *springar*. The most popular modern Hardanger

fiddle artist is Annbjørg Lien. Other traditional instruments include *bukkehorn* (goat horn), *harpeleik* (chorded zither), *langeleik* (box dulcimer), *lur* (trumpet-like instrument), *seljefløyte* (willow flute), *tungehorn* and *meråker* (clarinets) and Norwegian harp. There is a strong choral tradition with choirs in most towns.

International violinist Ole Bull (1810 - 1880) encouraged both Ibsen and composer Edvard Grieg (1843 - 1907) and revived the interest in folk music. Other well-known composers were Johan Svendsen, Christian Sinding and Johan Halvorsen. Contemporary post-1950 composers include Johan Kvandal, Knut Nystedt, Edvard Hagerup Bull and Egil Hovland, Finn Mortensen, Arne Nordheim, Kåre Kolberg, Alfred Janson and Ragnar Søderlind. Pianist Leif Ove Andsnes and cellist Truls Mørk are current internationally recognised musicians. There are orchestras and concert halls (expensive) in Oslo, Bergen (dating from 1765), Trondheim, Kristiansand, Tromsø and Stavanger and an opera house in Oslo. Music festivals take place in Bergen (including opera and ballet), Bodø, Elverum, Harstad, Haugesund (chamber music), Kristiansand, Kristiansund (opera), Lofoten (chamber music), Nesbyen, Oslo, Risør, Stavanger (chamber music) and Tromsø. 35% of people go to classical music concerts each year, 5% to opera performances and 12% to ballet and dance.

There is a very strong jazz scene including many world class musicians: saxophonist Jan Garbarek, drummer Jon Christensen, guitarist Terje Rypdal, pianist Bugge Wesseltoft, percussionist Paal Nilssen-Love, bassist Ingebrigt Håker Flaten, Mari Boine, Arild Andersen, Nils-Petter Molvær, Håvard Wiik, Kjetil Møster, Håkon Kornstad, Supersilent, Jaga Jazzist, Wibutee, Christian Wallumrod Ensemble, Nils Petter Molvaer. Blues guitarists include Knut Reiersrud and Bjørn Berge; R&B stars are Noora Elweya Qadry, Winta and Mira Craig. Country musicians include Heidi Hauge, Bjørn Håland and Aksi the Hillbillies who write and sing songs in traditional Hallingdal dialect. Black Metal bands are Darkthrone, Mayhem, Burzum, Immortal, Emperor, Enslaved, Gorgoroth, Satyricon, Dimmu Borgir, Ulver, Arcturus; some have achieved notoriety, ending up in jail for church arson and murder. The hip hop scene includes Warlocks, Tommy Tee, Darkside of the Force, Punktum, Klovner i Kamp, Diaz, Gatas Parlament, Tungtvann, Karpe Diem, Paperboys and Madcon. Prominent pop and rock musicians include a-ha, Lene Marlin, Madrugada, Turbonegro and Sissel Kyrkjebø, Røyksopp, Kings of Convenience, Sondre Lerche, Magnet, Erlend Øye, Thomas Dypdahl, Xploding Plastix, Kaizers Orchestra, Ane Brun, Bertine Zetlitz, M2M, Gåte, Bel Canto, Ralph Myerz, Gluecifer, Bigbang, Rebekka Karijord, kaada, Furia Norway, Marit Larsen, Marion Raven, Minor Majority, Briskeby, D'Sound, Maria Haukaas Storeng, Serena Maneesh, Hanne Hukkelberg, Kurt Nilsen, Maria Mena, TNT, Flunk Venke Knutson, Savoy and the Jack Herren Band and Annie. There are jazz festivals in Bergen, Bodø, Haugesund, Kongsberg, Lillehammer, Lofoten, Molde (Europe's oldest), Oslo, Stavanger, Svalbard, Tromsø, Trondheim, Voss, Ålesund; blues festivals in Hamar, Hammerfest, Notodden, Tromsø, Trondheim and Voss and rock festivals in Bodø, Haugesund, Helgeland, Kristiansand, Oslo, Trondheim and Åndalsnes. 47% of the population go to non-classical concerts each year.

Nightclubs, discos, dance and music clubs can be found in cities and large towns but admission is expensive.

The Arts Council Norway provides state funding for many artists and institutions. *Riksteatret* theatre, the *Rikskonsertene* concert series and *Riksgalleriet* exhibition are national touring organisations. For details of the major festivals: *Norske Festivaler* <<http://www.norwayfestivals.com/index.cfm?setlanguage=3>>.

Books: Edvard Munch, by JP Hodin (Thames & Hudson 1972 ISBN 978 050 020 122 0) £7.95
Kristin Lavransdatter, by Sigrid Undset (Penguin 2005 ISBN 978 014 303 916 7) £25, fictional trilogy of Viking times.

The Growth of the Soil, by Knut Hamsun (Souvenir Press 1989 ISBN 978 028 564 878 4) £9.99
Hunger, by Knut Hamsun (Canongate Books 2006 ISBN 978 184 195 819 4) £7.99