

THE CITY'S HARBOUR AND AKER BRYGGE PROMENADE ARE A LIVELY MEETING PLACE (TOP RIGHT, BOTTOM LEFT). THE CITY IS HOME TO AN INTRIGUING MIX OF ARCHITECTURAL STYLES – FROM THE MODERN OPERA HOUSE (MIDDLE LEFT), CHRISTIANIA SQUARE'S BRIGHT SCULPTURES (BOTTOM RIGHT) AND IMPOSING UNIVERSITY (LEFT, THIRD FROM TOP). WANDER PAST PASTEL-COLOURED HOUSES AND EXPERIENCE THE WELCOMING CAFE SCENE (TOP LEFT)

48 HOURS Oslo

A city brimming with arty attractions, Esme Fox explores the galleries and museums of the Norwegian capital

Why go now? Located at the head of the picturesque Oslofjord and surrounded by thick woodland lies Norway's cosmopolitan capital. Boasting an inspiring mix of art and culture, the city's bustling café scene is punctuated with numerous galleries and museums. Visit in May and join in the Constitution Day celebrations. Dressed in the country's national costume, children take part in a huge street parade. Watch the festivities from the main street of Karl Johans Gate or the Royal Palace, where you might spot the royal family.

What to do Start at Oslo cathedral on Stortorget. While it may not look like much from the outside it is worth stepping inside to marvel at the elaborate stained glass windows, painted ceiling and altarpiece depicting the Last Supper. Nearby, walk down Karl Johans Gate and you will pass the elegant yellow-brick Stortinget (parliament buildings), built in 1866, and the National Theatre (nationaltheatret.no), which was originally constructed for the works of the famous Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. A short walk away is the National Gallery (nasjonalmuseet.no), home to Edvard Munch's renowned painting *The Scream*. Head to the harbour and take a stroll along Aker Brygge, the waterfront is dotted with seafood restaurants. After lunch, hop on a ferry to the Bygdøy Peninsula, the crossing only takes 10 minutes and the region's fascinating museums chart the history of Norwegian sea-faring expeditions. Visit the Viking Ship Museum to see some of the world's best-preserved Viking ships, built in the 9th century. Oslo's new Opera House (operaen.no), a stunning marble and glass building situated in the harbour, is a beautiful place in which to pass an evening. At the edge of the city, Vigeland Park is an open-air museum exhibiting the work of one of Norway's most famous sculptors, Gustav Vigeland. The green space is filled with approximately 200 sculptures made from granite and bronze and has plenty of spots to relax in.

To learn more about the sculptor's life and works, visit Vigeland Museum (vigeland.museum.no), a short walk away.

Where to stay Radisson SAS Scandinavia Hotel (00 47 23 29 30 00; radissonsas.com) is located in the heart of the city, near the Royal Palace. The summit bar on the 21st floor boasts spectacular views of the city and fjord, and serves some of the best cocktails in Oslo. Or try Grims Grenka (00 47 23 10 72 00; grimgrenka.no), a luxury five-star Design Hotel its contemporary rooms are painted in bright bold colours. Dine in the Asian fusion restaurant or simply relax in the rooftop lounge.

Where to eat and drink Seafood is found in abundance here – join the locals and buy fresh shrimps direct from the fishermen in Aker Brygge or head to Lille Herbern. Open from May to October, the waterfront eatery is a real find (00 47 67 10 99 70; sult.no). Located inside the Opera House, Argent (00 47 22 00 25 00) uses local ingredients in dishes such as crab ravioli with horseradish, shellfish bisque and pan-fried cod. Ekeberg's hill-top location is the perfect place for a relaxing brunch. Expect seasonal dishes and innovative desserts (00 47 23 24 23 00; [Kongsveien 15](http://Kongsveien15.no)). The Michelin-starred Bagatelle (00 47 22 12 14 40; bagatelle.no) is one of Norway's top restaurants – try the scallop quenelles or ocean crayfish tails. Take a break, sit back and relax with coffee and cake at Theatercaféen (00 47 22 82 40 00; theatercafeen.no), Oslo's legendary Vienna-style café. Choose from an array of pastries or opt for waffles with cloudberry jam and ice cream.

Time running out? Hire a bike and cycle along the river, Akerselva, to Lake Maridal, passing waterfalls and many of the city's unique bridges. Oslo Citybike has pick up and drop off points across the city.

Trip tip Buy an Oslo Pass, which grants entry to the city's museums and free travel on public transport. See visitoslo.com

Travel information

The average daily temperature in May is 10°C. Currency is the Norwegian kroner (£1=NOK 9.61). Oslo is one hour ahead of GMT and a two-hour flight from London.

Getting there

SAS (0871 521 2772; flysas.com) and **British Airways** (0844 493 0787; ba.com) fly to Oslo daily from Heathrow. **Ryanair** (0871 246 0000; ryanair.com) flies from Stansted.

Resources

Norwegian Tourist Board (020 7389 8800; visitnorway.com). Visit the website for travel information.

Visit Oslo (00 47 81 53 05 55; visitoslo.com). Head to the tourist centres at the Central Station and next to City Hall.

Further reading

Cooking the Norwegian Way by Sylvia Munsen (Lerner Publications, £11.99). Easy-to-follow recipes with a section on the country's traditions and festivals.

Did you know...

In August 2004, Edvard Munch's masterpiece *The Scream* was stolen from the National Gallery; the thief left a note mocking the lax level of security. The picture was later recovered in good condition.