

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

U s Norwegians have a saying: There is no bad weather, only bad clothing,” said Harald Hansen, PR manager for Innovation Norway, when trying to persuade me to visit Oslo during February. Though I typically prefer to travel to destinations where I might pack a swimming suit instead of long underwear, I agreed after some gentle nudging. It turns out to have been a great decision: I was able to see the city beautifully blanketed by a foot of fresh snow and found it to be welcoming and engaging. In winter, I avoided hoards of tourists and, thanks to a down coat, I never shivered. Oslo absolutely won me over—so much so, in fact, that I returned in August for a few days and then cruised along the Norwegian coast (look for my report on that trip in the October 19 issue).

That Norway endeared itself to me came as a huge shock. Haunted by memories of the vomitous smell of lutefisk—the lye-soaked cod served on holidays at my Minnesota college to honor its Norwegian founders—I figured that, at best, Norway was a place where I’d starve to death. But like a blind date that was meant only to appease a friend but unexpectedly brought true love, I discovered Oslo is one of the world’s perfect cities. Among the reasons:

#### WORLD-CLASS CUISINE

Not only does Oslo offer the best cuisine in Scandinavia, it’s got talented chefs who rank among the world’s best. Five Oslo restaurants have earned a coveted Michelin Guide rating: Bagatelle, Le Canard, Stadholdergaarden, Feinschmecker and Oscarsgate. Of course, other restaurants also serve tasty dishes: Theatercaféen, a Vienna-style café, is one of the city’s most popular restaurants and became a personal favorite. For dinner, start with the potato griddlecake topped with smoked salmon and chive cream, and then savor a reindeer steak smothered in fried mushrooms, red whortleberries and cream sauce. Another day, explore a range of Norwegian foods at the lunch buffet at De Fem Stuer at Holmenkollen Park Hotel Rica.

#### NATURAL BEAUTY

Since water, mountains and forest surround Norway’s capital city, any direction you look offers spectacular scenery. From the rocky banks of the fjord, it’s “100 kilometers out to the open sea,” said Hilary Sem, tour guide. “The calm harbor is why the Vikings built the city here.” Ships and ferries traverse the fjord year-round; sightseeing boats cruise daily during the summer. Since Oslo boasts 343 lakes, water-based outdoor activities from swimming to kayaking to ice-skating aren’t limited to the popular fjord. Landlubbers can explore the mainland or any of the city’s 40 islands, head to the hills to mountain bike or ski, take a stroll, play a few rounds of golf and much more. Although Oslo is located as far north as St. Petersburg, Russia and Anchorage, Alaska, it boasts a milder climate thanks to the Gulf



Statues in Vigeland Sculpture Park

# ONLY IN OSLO

The Sunday Paper discovers the hidden treasure of Norway



Downhill skiing is very popular in Oslo.

GLEN PHILIP HAGEN/VISIT OSLO



Oslo City Hall as seen from the inner harbor

NANCY BUDNY/VISIT OSLO, STATUES: MATJAZ INTIHAR/VISIT OSLO



Summer and yachting on the inner Oslofjord

GUNNAR STROM/VISIT OSLO

Stream and “is the Scandinavian capital with the most sun,” said Sem.

#### SPECTACULAR ATTRACTIONS

Among the most popular of Oslo’s 50 museums and galleries is the Viking Ship Museum, which displays the three best-preserved Viking ships ever found. The spacious Vigeland Sculpture Park showcases more than 200 bronze, granite and cast-iron sculptures by Gustav Vigeland. The open-air Folk Museum exhibits 155 traditional Norwegian buildings dating from 1500 to the present. Holmenkollen Ski Jump, the main arena for the 1952 Winter Olympics, hosts an annual international ski jump competition and houses a Ski Museum chronicling 4,000 years of skiing history. With 1,600 miles of cross country ski trails, 14 downhill slopes, six lifts and a terrain park, Winter Park Tryvann is the largest ski area in Oslo (Norway’s fifth largest)—plus it’s accessible, within 20 minutes from downtown by bus or train.

#### ACCESSIBLE CITY

It’s very easy to access Oslo’s unique combination of city life and outdoor activities. “Basically, in Oslo, we’d like to get rid of all the cars,” said Sem. “We have very good public transportation.” You can walk around downtown, and it’s typically safe to do so—heated sidewalks even mean you won’t slip on winter ice. Perhaps most impressive is the Royal Palace: Positioned in the center of Oslo without fences, it seems as trusting and friendly as Norwegians themselves. **SP**

#### IF YOU GO

##### ■ GETTING THERE

Delta flights from Atlanta to Oslo include stops in Copenhagen or Amsterdam. For fun, variety and the chance to explore more than one Scandinavian capital on your vacation, consider flying to Copenhagen, then sailing to Oslo aboard one of the many ferry lines that offer daily service between the two cities.

##### ■ WHEN TO GO

Most tourists visit Oslo from May through September; avoid crowds during winter. On Thursdays, stores stay open later into the evening; on Sundays, only cafés are open.

##### ■ KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

A valid passport is required to enter Norway. The Norwegian currency is the kroner. Purchase an Oslo Pass for access to 33 museums and attractions, free travel on public transportation within four zones, free lunch cruise, free winter walks and many discounts. Cards are valid in 24-, 48- or 72-hour increments; a 24-hour card starts at approximately U.S. \$43 for adults, depending on the exchange rate at time of purchase.

##### ■ WHERE TO STAY

Radisson SAS Scandinavia Hotel  
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##### ■ MORE INFORMATION

Visit Oslo  
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