Introduction to Norway

The Kingdom of Norway is located on the western edge of Scandinavia in northern Europe. Norway is bordered by Sweden on the east, and seas on all other sides. Norway’s land also includes Jan Mayen Island and the Svalbard archipelago, a group of islands located north of Norway in the Arctic Ocean.

Population: 5,267,146
Capital: Oslo
Language: Norwegian
Currency: Norwegian krone

History

Humans first settled in Scandinavia around 10,000 years ago, when the glacial ice covering the region melted enough to reveal the land. The settlers, called Norsemen (men from the North) soon began raising livestock and farming the land, living in small, independently ruled groups.

As the population grew larger and less land was available, a group of Norsemen built ships and sailed off in search of new homes and riches – which they often took by force. Norwegian Vikings, as they became known, journeyed across the North Atlantic, ending up in Iceland, Greenland, and even on the coast of North America.

Toward the end of the ninth century, the separate groups started to join together and became united under the same king, Harald the Fairhaired. Christianity was established as the sole religion, and Norse traditions were soon replaced by Christian ones (ex. the Norse holiday of fertility and good harvest called “Yuletide” became celebrated as “Christmas”).

Over the next 700 years, Norway experienced a series of wars and unions with its neighboring Scandinavian nations of Denmark and Sweden. In 1905, the last union was dissolved and Norway elected its first king as an independent nation. Syttende mai, (the 17th of May) is celebrated each year as Norway’s independence day.

During World War I, Norway declared itself neutral, and tried to do the same through World War II. However, it was invaded by Nazi Germany in 1940, and occupied through the end of the war. The Norwegian King and government were able to escape to England, and the majority of Norwegians remained loyal to them, resisting German rule. Norway was liberated when the war ended in 1945, and the king returned home.

Geography and Climate

Norway is essentially made up of one long mountain range, with a rocky coast and the fertile valleys and rivers further inland. Instead of a line of unbroken cliffs, the coast of Norway is broken up by fjords. When the glaciers covering the land melted and the water drained to the sea, it cut long channels through the rock and filled with seawater, creating fjords. The longest fjord, Sognefjord, stretches 127 miles inland from the coast!

Though the west coast of Norway is warmed by waters from the Gulf Stream, the average temperature is very moderate. The summer months rarely exceed 70°F, and winter months are no colder than 27°F. In the northernmost parts of the country, the sun never rises above the horizon for most of the winter. In the summer, the opposite happens: the sun only dips below the horizon and never truly sets. Norway has a short summer and only experiences this “midnight sun” for about two months. The wet climate, which rushes rain down thousands of rivers and waterfalls from the high mountains, means Norway
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produces more hydroelectric power than any other country in Europe - enough to provide 99% of the country’s electricity. Large deposits of oil and natural gas exist underneath the North Sea off Norway’s coast. Combined, these resources make Norway one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

People and Culture
Although the official language of Norway is Norwegian, there are actually two different versions of written Norwegian. Bokmål (Book Language), was developed from Danish. Nynorsk (New Norwegian), is made up a mix of many Norwegian dialects. Norwegian children learn both languages in school.

Norwegians take great pride in the country’s long literary tradition, dating back nearly 6,000 years. The first literary verses were carved in stone using runes, or symbols. The Vikings took Old Norse sagas with them on their journeys, sharing the stories orally. In more modern times, two Norwegian writers, Knut Hamsun and Sigrid Undset, have won Nobel Prizes for literature.

Norwegians also enjoy sports, especially winter ones. Norway has hosted the Winter Olympic Games twice (in Oslo in 1952 and Lillehammer in 1994), with the mountains and plentiful snow make it easy to find places for downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, and speed skating.

Food
Fish is a major export of Norway, and fish is very common in Norwegian cuisine. Smoked salmon and gravlaks (salmon cured in a mix of sugar, salt, and dill) are very common, made from the abundant Atlantic salmon in the region. Cod, mackerel, herring, and trout are also frequently eaten—fresh, smoked, salted, pickled, or even in a fish soup. Perhaps the most notable dish is Lutefisk (pronounced LEWD-uh-fisk), which is dried cod that has been rehydrated in a lye bath. People tend to either love it or hate it, as it is known to “stir the heart of any true Norwegian.”

Open-faced sandwiches are also common at Norwegian tables. Unlike typical sandwiches, they only use one slice of bread, topped with spreads, cheese, meat, fish, or vegetables.

Coffee also plays an important role in Norway. Norwegians are the second-highest consumers of coffee in the world, and coffee is consumed throughout the day, not just in the morning—no social visit is complete without a cup of coffee and sweet pastry or cookie, and a cup of coffee often follows the dinner meal as well.

Additional Resources
Norway Facts for Kids

Science Kids: Norway Facts for Kids
http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/countries/norway.html

Learn more at www.artsmidwestworldfest.org