

OSLO

LIKE A LOCAL

WORDS DAVID NIKEL

Don't let the expense put you off experiencing the new-look Norwegian capital. It's possible to enjoy Oslo without spending a fortune

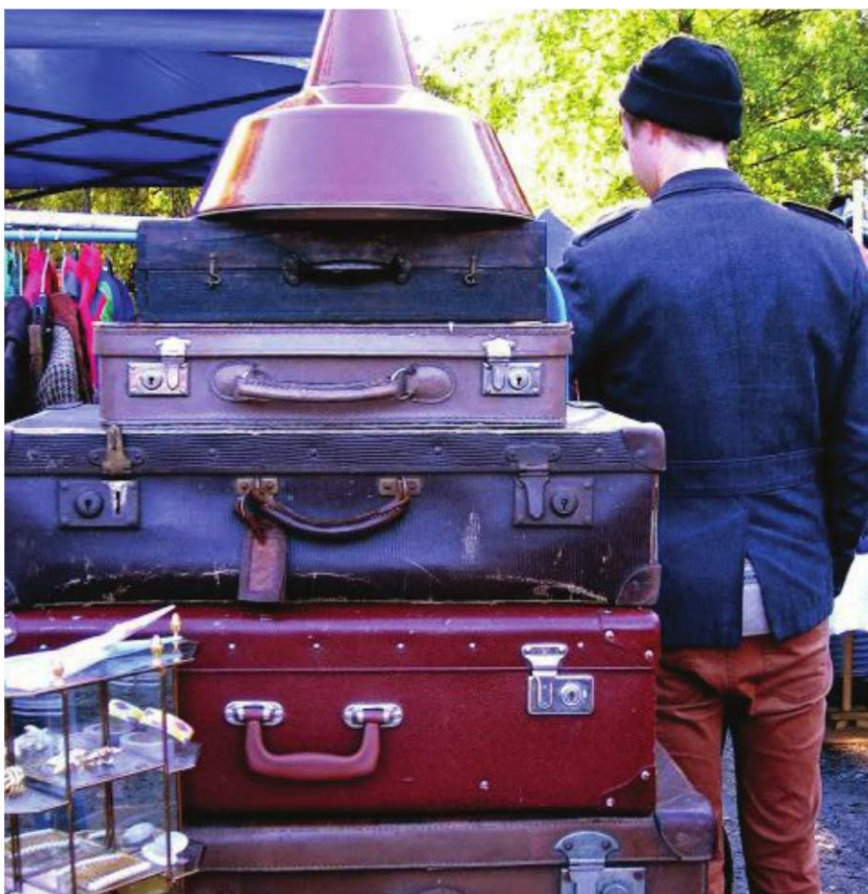
Once a tired, run-down city, a mere shadow of its trendy Nordic neighbours Stockholm, Helsinki and Copenhagen, Oslo has undergone a dramatic renaissance in recent years. Modern Oslo, the leading candidate to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, is reborn as a centre for business, art, culture and sport.

There's no point hiding it, though, the biggest reason keeping people away from the Norwegian capital is the cost.

Norway's vast oil riches prevented the country from suffering the same woes as much of Europe over the past few years, but they also ensure Oslo consistently ranks as one of the world's most expensive cities to live in and visit. A main course in a basic chain restaurant will rarely fall below £20, while a draught beer will set you back around £7.

Yet money-saving opportunities are everywhere, hidden in plain sight. For example, the first opportunity to save money starts moments after landing at the city's Gardermoen Airport. Provided you aren't laden with luggage, choose the NSB commuter train to Oslo instead of the heavily-promoted Airport Express train. The saving on a one-way ticket is around £8. >>





Plan to save

The key to enjoying Oslo on a budget is advance planning, especially about when and where you will eat. Norwegian service-industry staff are some of the highest-paid in the world, so any purchase involving a human element will be pricey. This is especially true in restaurants and at the “budget” end of the market.

Norwegian hotels are known for their lavish breakfast buffets of breads, cheeses and cold cuts, so make the most of it and fill your boots late in the morning. Together with buying fruit, health bars and bottles of water at a supermarket, this will prevent the need to waste cash on expensive (and unhealthy) kiosk food later in the day.

Although Oslo’s public transport network is good value, the city’s compact nature means walking is an excellent way to see the city on a

budget. Certainly avoid the overpriced Oslo Pass, which is only necessary if you plan on taking in several high-priced attractions in one day.

The must do’s

Heading westwards from Oslo Central Station you’ll find Karl Johans gate, the key street to navigating Oslo and home to shopping centres, boutiques, cafés and overpriced restaurants. As Norway celebrates its bicentennial, take time to admire the grand architecture of Stortinget (Parliament), where free English-language tours run on Saturdays at 11.30am. Expect more than a few in-jokes about their former Swedish and Danish rulers.

The building itself opened in 1866 and stands facing a grand open space, towards the National Theatre, the Royal Palace and the nearby National Gallery. The latter affords the

opportunity to see one of the world’s most famous paintings – Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* – without the crowds of Paris or New York. Entry is £5, or free on Sundays.

Guided tours of the neo-classical Royal Palace are only available during the summer, but it’s still worth a visit to watch the changing of the guard and take a stroll through the romantic Palace Gardens. Entirely surrounding the Palace, the Gardens are especially beautiful after a sprinkling of snow, which you can expect from November onwards.

Behind the Gardens starts Hegdehaugsveien, home to Oslo’s most exclusive shopping area. Continue onto Bogstadveien, past a seemingly never-ending series of boutiques and high-street stores, and stop for a break at one of the cafés of Majorstuen. From here you can return on foot, catch the metro or tram back to the city, or turn left down Kirkeveien for a 10-minute walk to one of the city’s highlights: the Vigeland Sculpture Park.

Entirely free to explore, the 80-acre Sculpture Park is located in Frogner Park, Oslo’s biggest green space and a must-see whatever the weather. The Sculpture Park is the life’s work of Gustav Vigeland, with over 200 sculptures in bronze, granite and wrought iron.

There’s a playfulness to many of the statues that means, despite the subject matter (many nudes!), you’re unlikely to take offence. Don’t forget to seek out the park’s most famous resident, the Angry Baby. His hand is golden from the amount of tourists that insist on holding it for a photograph.

The symmetry of the park is spellbinding, set off perfectly by the impressive monolith, a chaotic sculpture of 121 intertwined human figures rising 46 feet into the sky. It’s hard to believe this was created from a single piece of stone.

The park is almost 1km long and it’s easy to spend an hour here, possibly a lot longer. On a sunny day, make the most of surrounding Frogner Park, a great place for a

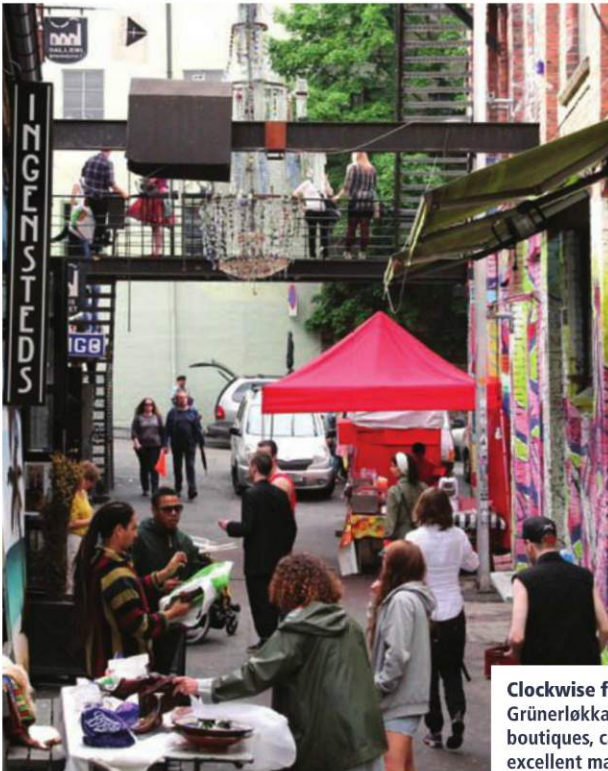
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Previous spread: Oslo is home to the world’s most modern ski jump
Left: Spend Sunday finding bargains at Oslo’s flea markets
Opposite: The unique Vigeland Park is the world’s largest sculpture park made by a single artist

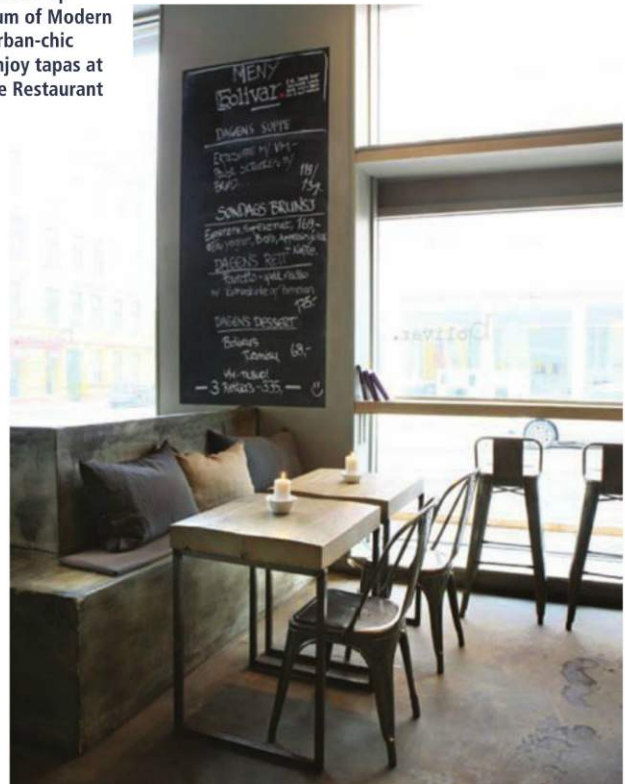
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Clockwise from top left: Grünerløkka Street, with boutiques, cafes and an excellent market; the privately-owned Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art; the cool, urban-chic Bolivar Cafe; enjoy tapas at the Aker Brygge Restaurant



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Storgata 55
 The hotel features 264 comfortable and affordable private rooms from £70, while the adjacent hostel offers dorm beds from £25.
www.anker-hotel.no;
www.ankerhostel.no

THON HOTEL SPECTRUM
Brugata 7
 A good standard budget hotel by the central train and bus stations, offering a generous breakfast buffet. 151 rooms starting at £75.
www.thonhotels.com

OSLO OVERNATTING
Steenstrups gate 1
 Furnished rooms in Grünerløkka, most with kitchenette and bathroom. A good alternative to a hotel for those staying more than three nights. From £50.
www.overnattingoslo.no

BOGSTAD CAMPING
Ankerveien 117
 Year-round campsite 9km from Oslo centre. Close to many sporting facilities including a golf course, Holmenkollen Ski Arena and Oslo Winter Park. 55 cabins starting at £60.
www.bogstadcamping.no



Above, left to right: Anker Hostel & Hotel; Thon Hotel Spectrum



picnic amongst the locals grilling pølser (hot dogs) and playing frisbee. If you're not worn out, take a walk through Oslo's upmarket Frogner district back to the city centre via Frognerveien and Henrik Ibsen's gate.

From medieval to modern

Planned for over a century, Oslo's purpose-built opera house finally opened in 2008. The architecture was met with worldwide acclaim, winning the culture award at the World Architecture Festival in Barcelona and the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture within 12 months of opening.

It's well worth a visit to admire the building itself, even if you have no interest in opera. The beautiful white marble and glass construction

gently rises from beneath the fjord, allowing all-comers to walk up to the roof. The view from the top is not the best because the first step of a comprehensive regeneration of Oslo's Bjørvika area is under way, but fans of urban regeneration will be in their element. Free concerts are often held on the roof or in the foyer. Check out www.operaen.no for more information.

Head to the grounds of Akershus Fortress to be transported back to medieval times, and for a great view over the Pipervika harbour. Go for a stroll around Aker Brygge wharf nearby. Full of expensive restaurants, yachts and coffee shops, this is the best spot for people-watching in the entire city. Cross the small bridge to Tjuvholmen, an even newer development, home to the contemporary Astrup Fearnley art museum, and explore the area. There's a park and even a beach hidden away, if you look closely!

Oslo's playground

No visit to Oslo would be complete without a nod to the national pastime of Norway – skiing. Towering high above the city, the Holmenkollen Ski Arena is to Oslo what Wembley Stadium is to London. A short ride >>

on the T-Bane (metro) brings you to Holmenkollen station from where it's a 10-minute uphill walk to the arena. The centrepiece is the spectacular ski jump, rebuilt in 2011 to accommodate 30,000 spectators. The view from the top of the tower is simply breathtaking but not one for those with a fear of heights. Save money and use the viewing platform at the entrance, which still offers a good view and a chance to explore the ski jump.

A few stops further on the T-Bane takes you into Nordmarka (the northern forest), a vast area of untouched woodland. Frognerseteren, the last stop on the line, is the perfect starting point to explore Nordmarka's miles of marked trails, but be warned, from December to March you are likely to need skis! Contact the Norwegian Trekking Association (www.tu.no) for route maps and details of cabins. For those less keen on hiking or skiing, the Frognerseteren restaurant offers hot cocoa and cakes inside a beautiful wooden lodge with spectacular views across the city and the Oslofjord.

For an alternative entry point

to Nordmarka, take the T-Bane to Sognsvann and its 3.3km trail around a lake. It's another of Oslo's top recreational areas that tourists usually miss.

Alternative Oslo

For those who prefer city life to nature, the eastern side of the city centre is your playground. Head north along Storgata to the Nybrua bridge. From here, take the riverside path along Akerselva, past the Blå nightclub and the new Vulkan development. Pause here for a wander around Mathallen (the Food Hall), but be warned, the smells are hard to resist! Several of Oslo's finest restaurants have outlets here, so it's a great way to preview eating options while enjoying lunch.

Further up the river are the beautifully-preserved brick buildings of the former Christiania Seildugsfabrik sailing-gear factory, now home to the students of the highly-regarded National Academy of the Arts. Walk through the campus and head east along Grunerstubben to the neo-Gothic Paulus Church.

Below: Oslo Opera House is the home of The Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, and the national opera theatre in Norway. The building is situated in the Bjørvika neighbourhood of central Oslo, at the head of the Oslofjord



WHERE TO EAT ON A BUDGET...

DOVREHALLEN

Storgata 22

Traditional Norwegian food is surprisingly hard to find in Oslo. Expect the likes of kjøttkaker (meatballs) and fårikål (mutton & cabbage stew) alongside live music and dancing on weekends. www.dovrehallen.no

CAFE FEDORA

Frognerveien 22

A popular American café, offering hearty breakfasts, brunch and tasty lunches inspired by New Orleans, NYC, Austin and Tucson. Tues-Sun 10am-7pm, www.cafefedora.no



ILLEGAL BURGER

Møllergata 23

Charcoal-grilled homemade burgers with plenty of beer to wash them down. It's popular and seats are few and far between, so expect a wait.

Mon-Thu 4pm-11pm, Fri 4pm-3am, Sat 3pm-3am, Sun 3pm-10pm

RICE BOWL

Youngs gate 4

Great-value Thai food in generous portions. If the 54 seats are full, there are several alternative Thai and Chinese restaurants nearby.

Mon-Sat 12pm-10pm, Sun 2pm-9pm www.ricebowl.no

On the other side of the church is Birkelunden, a pleasant open square reminiscent of London that hosts regular markets and live music. This is your introduction to Oslo's trendy Grünerløkka neighbourhood, home to countless cafés, boutiques and bars. Head south along Thorvald Meyers gate or Markveien to explore, and before you know it you'll be back where you began at Nybrua.

To round off your alternative Oslo experience, check out two of the city's more quirky museums, starting with the Mini Bottle Gallery on Kirkegata, which houses the world's largest collection of miniature bottles. The museum is open from 12-4pm on Saturdays and Sundays only.

Meanwhile, hidden away on the third floor of Munkedamsveien 65b is the Norsk Tryllemuseum (www.tryllemuseet.no), dedicated to Norwegian magicians. It opens on Sundays from 1pm-4pm, the highlight of which is a 2pm magic show.

And magic just about sums up Oslo; a city that delights and surprises in turn.

Below: The former Christiania Seildugsfabrik sailing-gear factory, now home to the students of the highly-regarded National Academy of the Arts.



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