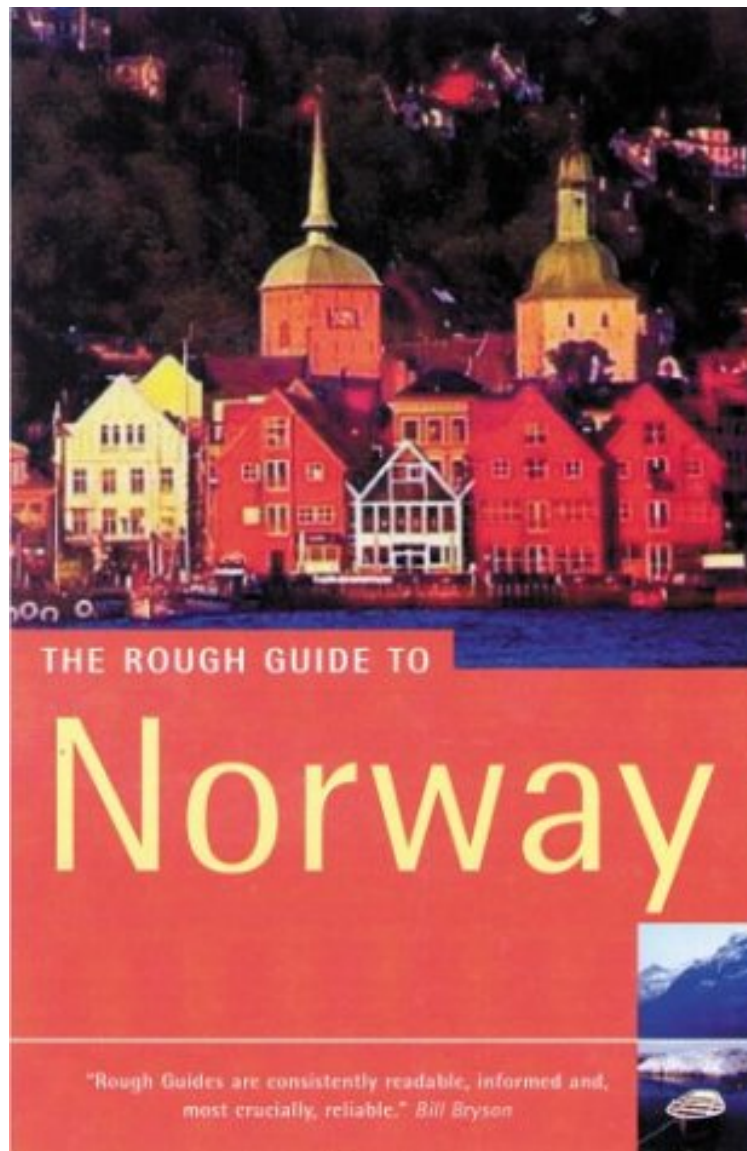


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Rough Guides : The Rough Guide to Norway 3 (Rough Guide Travel Guides) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Rough Guide to Norway 3 (Rough Guide Travel Guides):

"The Rough Guide to Norway" covers everything from urbane Oslo to the remote Arctic town of Tromso and from the

idyllic off-shore islands to the awe-inspiring fjords. It contains a 24 page, full-colour photographic introduction, previewing the country's highlights as chosen by the author. The guide includes insights into the cosmopolitan city of Oslo, with pertinent descriptions of museums and art galleries, and uncovers Norway's dramatic scenery - some of the wildest in Europe. The contexts section contains illuminating coverage of Norway's culture and history - from its picturesque medieval wooden churches to Oslo's contemporary art scene.

A SUPERB SERIES THAT NEVER MISSES A BEAT New York Newsday About the Author Phil Lee has written and contributed to many other Rough Guides, including Britain, Belgium, Mallorca and Canada. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

WHERE TO GO Norway is one of Europe's most sparsely inhabited countries, and for the most part its people live in small towns and villages. Almost inevitably, the country's five largest cities are the obvious initial targets for a visit, beginning with urbane, vivacious Oslo, one of the world's most prettily sited capitals, with a flourishing café scene and a clutch of outstanding museums. Beyond Oslo, in roughly descending order of interest, are Trondheim, with its superb cathedral and charming, antique centre; the beguiling port of Bergen, gateway to the western fjords; gritty, bustling Stavanger in the southwest; and northern Troms. All are likeable, walkable cities worthy of your time in themselves, as well as being within comfortable reach of some startlingly handsome scenery. Indeed, each can serve as either a base or a starting point for further explorations: the trains, buses and ferries of Norway's finely tuned public transport system will take you almost anywhere you want to go, although services are curtailed in winter. Outside of the cities, the perennial draw remains the western fjords a must, and every bit as scenically stunning as the publicity suggests. Dip into the region from Bergen or Nordalsnes, both accessible by direct train from Oslo, or take more time to appreciate the subtle charms of the tiny, fjordside villages, among which Balestrand and Mundal are especially appealing. This is great hiking country too, with a network of cairned trails and lodges (maintained by the nationwide hiking association DNT) threading along the valleys and over the hills. However, many of the country's finest hikes are to be had further inland, within the confines of a trio of marvellous national parks: the Hardangervidda, a vast mountain plateau of lunar-like appearance; the Rondane, with its bulging mountains; and the Jotunheimen, famous for its jagged peaks. Of these three, the first is most easily approached from Finse, Rjukan or Kinsarvik, the others from the comely town of Otta. Nudging the Skagerrak, the south coast is different again. This island-strewn shoreline is best appreciated from the sea, though its pretty, old whitewashed ports are popular with holidaying Norwegians; the pick of these towns are Arendal and Mandal, the proud possessor of the country's finest sandy beach. Away to the north, beyond Trondheim, Norway grows increasingly wild and inhospitable as it sprawls across the Arctic Circle on the way to the modern, workaday port of Bodø. From here, ferries shuttle over to the rugged Lofoten islands, which boast some of the most ravishing scenery in the whole of Europe: tiny fishing villages of ochre- and red-painted houses tucked in between the swell of the deep blue sea and the severest of grey-green mountains. Back on the mainland, it's a long haul north from Bodø to the iron-ore town of Narvik, and on to Troms. These towns are, however, mere urban pinpricks in a vast wilderness that extends up to Nordkapp (North Cape), the northernmost accessible point of mainland Europe, and the spot where the tourist trail peters out. But Norway continues east for several hundred kilometres, round to remote Kirkenes near the Russian border, while inland stretches an immense and hostile upland plateau, the Finnmarksvidda, one of the last haunts of the Sami (formerly Lapp) reindeer-herders.

WHEN TO GO Choosing when to go to Norway is more complicated than you might expect. The summer season when the midnight sun is visible north of the Arctic Circle is relatively short, stretching roughly from the beginning of June to the end of August. Visit out of season, and you'll find that tourist offices, museums and other sights have reduced hours, hotels withdraw their generous summer discounts, and buses, ferries and trains run on less frequent schedules. Nevertheless, late May does have its attractions, especially if your visit coincides with the brief Norwegian spring, though this is difficult to gauge. Springtime is especially beguiling in the fjords, with myriad cascading waterfalls fed by the melting snow, and wildflowers in abundance. Come before that from late March to early May and you're likely to encounter the unprepossessing residue of winter, when the last snow and ice lies soiled on the ground, asphalt dust from studded tyres pollutes the city air and the landscape is blankly colourless. Autumn is a much better bet, with September often bathed in the soft sunshine of an Indian summer. There are also advantages to travelling during the winter, providing you steer well clear of the winter solstice, when the lack of light depresses even the Norwegians, and aim instead for early February up to mid-March. The big incentive to visit at this time of year is the range of winter sports from ice-fishing to dog-sledging and, most popular of all, cross-country and alpine skiing. There are skiing packages to Norway from abroad, but perhaps more appealing and certainly cheaper is the ease with which you can arrange a few days skiing wherever you happen to be. Furthermore, if you are equipped and hardy enough to reach the far north, between November and February there's an above average chance of seeing the phenomenal northern lights (Aurora Borealis) beyond the Arctic Circle, and a possibility of glimpsing them as far south as Oslo, too. As regards climate, the Gulf Stream keeps all of coastal Norway temperate throughout the year, with the warmest months being July and August. Inland, the climate is more extreme: bitterly cold in winter and hot in summer, when temperatures can soar to surprising heights. January and February are normally the coldest months in all regions. Rain is a regular occurrence throughout the year, particularly on the west coast, though there are

significant local variations in precipitation.