

THE LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

From the boutique hotels and high-end shopping and dining in Oslo to wild forests, fjords and mountains in the north and west, Norway really does have it all. Whether you have just a weekend or unlimited time, Mona Bristol has handpicked the very best of this northern gem – get set to awaken your inner explorer

The Norwegian midnight sun highlights the dramatic peaks of the Lofoten Islands

Often named as the world's best country to live in – Norway enjoys a high quality of life. The capital Oslo did lack the coolness of Copenhagen and the aristocratic feel of Stockholm, but in the last couple of years, a cultural boom combined with new architecture has boosted the city. Meanwhile, on the culinary scene, Oslo is on a par with other foodie cities with lots of new restaurants opening, plus the first Norwegian restaurant to receive three stars in the *Michelin Guide* – Maaemo – is worth the trip alone. In the summer, people enjoy the long days that never seem to end; north of the Arctic Circle the sun merely touches the horizon before it starts to rise again...

In the winter, prepare to be impressed by the Aurora Borealis and great skiing. Fly to Longyearbyen in Svalbard to participate in Spitsbergen North and South – 398 miles of skiing through the land of polar bears.

The fjords in the west are worth visiting whatever the season. Gazing at the mountains, sapphire-blue fjords, waterfalls and the pure nature – it is bliss for any stressed-out soul and it's clear why this landscape is included in Unesco's list of World Heritage sites.

Whatever the season you choose to visit, *Elite Traveler* has your itinerary sorted – just pack your hiking boots or even your skis, your coat and your sense of adventure and enjoy the ride.



EXPLORE NORWAY

A weekend in... Oslo

Fly to Gardermoen and approximately 30 minutes later your driver will arrive at the artsy hotel The Thief at Tjuvholmen – a newly built part of town by the sea, with art galleries and restaurants just around the corner. Check into the 1,011 sq ft Oslo Suite, with its private terrace boasting 360-degree views of the city, outdoor shower and four-poster bed.

In the afternoon, take a short stroll over to see the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, housed in a modern building designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano, then stop for a coffee and pastry at the newly opened bar Vingen.

Afterwards, relax in the hotel spa or indulge yourself with a treatment in your room before heading out for a pre-dinner cocktail at trendy Torggata Botaniske. Dinner at Maaemo awaits, a chance to savor avant-garde Nordic cuisine at this Michelin-starred restaurant ranked 29th in the *Elite Traveler* Top 100 Restaurants in the World for 2016, or if you prefer, go to Sawan for an Asian-fusion inspired meal. The beautiful summer light makes it hard to go to bed, so stop by Sørenga Sjøbad – swimming pools in the sea – for a late-night dip on your way back to the hotel. In winter, you can try ice bathing, but make sure the sauna boat is waiting for you so you can warm up.

Next morning, book a boat to pick you up at the docks outside the hotel and go to Bygdøy to see authentic Viking ships in the Viking Ship Museum and then on the way back enjoy the view of the Opera House from the sea. If you just can't get enough of the fresh air, go to Ekebergparken Sculpture Park and walk in the fascinating little woods filled with surprising modern art, then enjoy lunch and the city views from the Ekeberg Restaurant.

At the Munch Museum you can see one of Norway's most famous residents – The Scream

by Edvard Munch. If you prefer something more energetic, then book a running class with former world champion Ingrid Kristiansen; meet up at Frogner Park and you will be able to tick off another one of Oslo's most important attractions on your list. While you stretch out for the class, you can study the human-like sculptures posing in even more impressive poses than yourself. In winter, you can practice cross-country skiing here. There is a whole range of former world champions giving classes; they will share tips and tricks on how to improve your skills.

Go to Paleet shopping mall for some retail therapy or head to the concept store YME, with art, books and unique pieces for both men and women from Saint Laurent to Rick Owens. Within walking distance you will also find Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Acne Studios and Hermès stores.

Have a late dinner at Solsiden and try out their famous seafood platter. Or go for a more low-key option at Sentralen, run by the former Ylajali head chef Even Ramsvik.

Oslo is said to serve some of the best coffee in the world. On Sunday morning it's worth a trip to the hidden neighborhood gem OsloK to enjoy a cup of the city's best coffee. You can relax and feel like a local in this quiet area, with its cobblestone buildings dating back to the early 19th century. Remember to pick up some of the beans from Noma's coffee provider Tim Wendelboe.

Finish off the weekend with a helicopter ride over the town and catch a glimpse of the famous ski jump at Holmenkollbakken.



Below: The main street of Oslo – Karl Johans gate
Right: Juvet Landskapshotell in its magical setting

A week in... Oslo, Brumunddal, Sjusjøen, Stavanger, Geirangerfjord, Ålesund

For a longer stay, combine visiting Oslo with a trip to the Norwegian woods, just a few hours' drive from the capital. To get closer to nature, stay for a night or two in Brumunddal in Tree Top Hut's cabins that sit 26 feet up in the trees. The cabins are deep in the woods and during winter you will definitely have a *Fargo* feeling on the snowy, deserted roads. In the summer, don't be afraid as the king of the woods – the moose – strolls by. The amenities are as good as they get in the woods; a local firm can bring you dinner, while the birds and squirrels will entertain you.

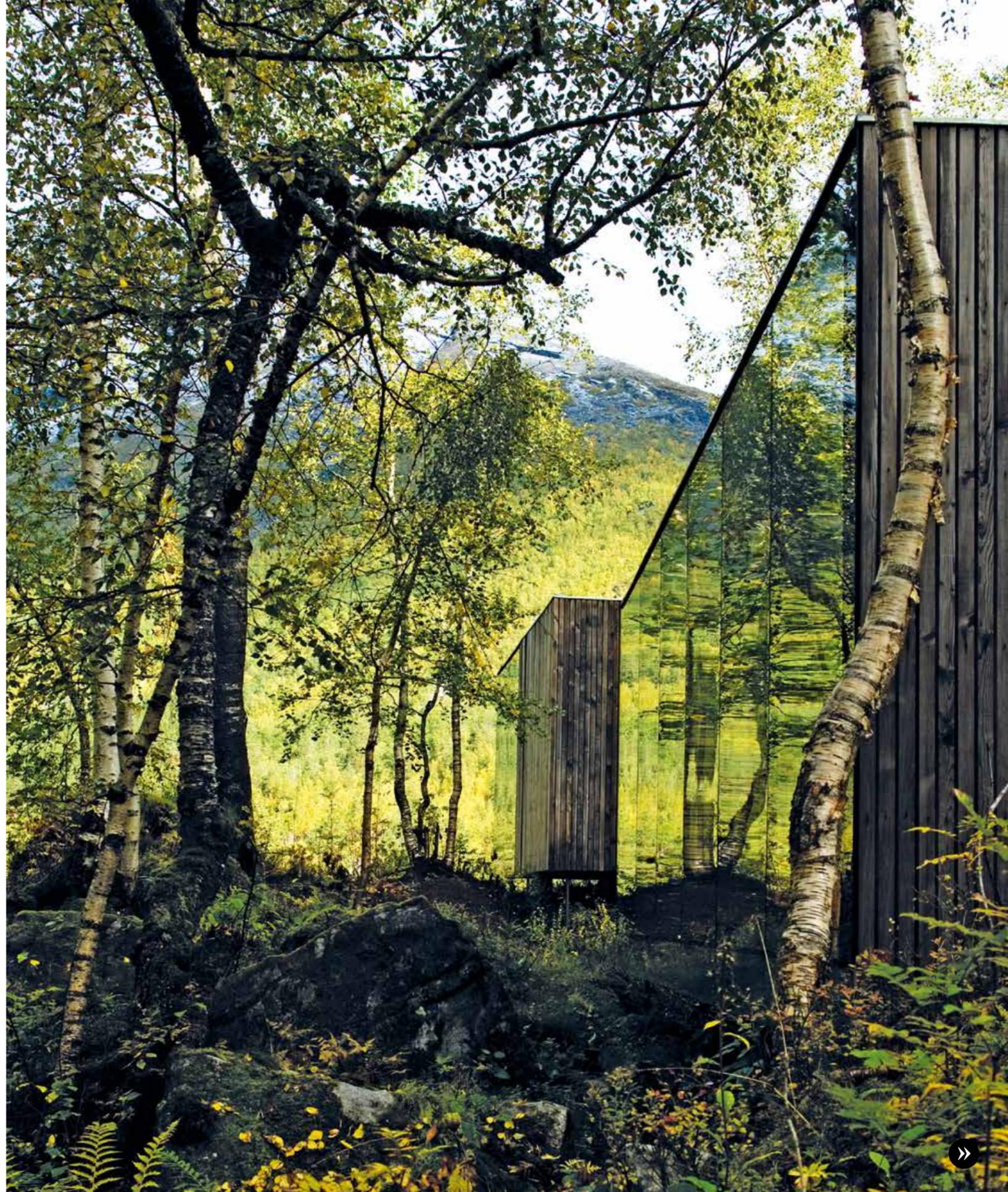
If you want more action, in winter you can enjoy the best cross-country skiing Norway has to offer in Sjusjøen, an hour's drive north from Brumunddal. Stay at your private winter lodge in Sjusjøen and perfect your skills, or go for classic downhill riding on the Olympic slopes nearby.

Then it's time to go west – first to Stavanger – the oil capital of Norway, via a day's hiking to Prekestolen – Pulpit Rock – and if you dare go near the edge, take a scary selfie. Spend the night at Sola Strand Hotel, located on one of Norway's most beautiful beaches.

The next morning, travel north to the Geirangerfjord. Experience rafting, fishing, canyoning and climbing while staying at the breathtaking Juvet Landskapshotell. The landscape is beautifully green and lush. The hotel owners at Juvet promise to find the perfect activity for you; so put on your hiking gear and go out to explore.

For amazing views of the fjords, take a helicopter to the next destination, Ålesund – a small town with Art Nouveau architecture, set across several islands in the Norwegian Sea. From Ålesund Airport you can say goodbye to Norway for now and head for home.

Photos: Tuukka Koski, BRY, Getty Images, CH/Visitnorway.com



Left: The distinctive scenery of the Lofoten Islands

Longer in...

Oslo, Brumunddal, Sjusjøen, Stavanger, Geirangerfjord, Ålesund, Bodø, Lyngen, Svalbard

Fly up to Bodø and continue your journey with Hurtigruten. From there the Norwegian cruise line has a voyage further north along the coast. Travel on the recently refurbished MS Spitsbergen and book the Expedition Suite. You are not expected to dress formally onboard ship, not even for dinner, so you really can relax. On your way up to Tromsø, you will pass a group of islands called Lofoten. Relish your ringside seat to admire the dramatic mountain peaks, the white beaches and untouched lands. The Lofoten Opera Hotel is being built here, which will make a spectacular stopover when it opens. Meanwhile, in nearby Risøyhamn, you can go on a whale safari.

In Tromsø, leave the ship and drive up to the Lyngen Lodge. The area has amazing skiing, with pistes from the summit to the sea. The ski season here lasts from March to June. While in summer, try glacier walking or go fishing by boat or in the nearby rivers.

Round off your trip with a flight to Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago situated between mainland Norway and the North Pole. The communities on these remote islands were primarily established because of the coal mining industry and the area has been used as a base for Arctic exploration since 1890. During summer, take a dog sledding tour or a kayak expedition. In the winter, try a private snowmobile safari. But whichever you do, there are rules that must be followed. Svalbard's nature is beautiful, but unpredictable. The climate is rough, weather changes rapidly and the polar bear threat is ever present, so on an expedition it is mandatory to be accompanied by an armed person, and always make sure you have adequate clothing.

For the particularly adventurous, Hurtigruten has a 10-day expedition cruise around Svalbard on MS Fram – a ship with the same name as the ship polar pioneers Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen used on their world-famous expedition.

In Svalbard's main settlement, Longyearbyen, stay at the new Svalbard Hotel in the Polar Bear Suite. Dine at Huset – Norway's northernmost gourmet restaurant, which has an impressive wine collection of over 20,000 bottles – *skål!*



Head to Maaemo for scallops



CONCIERGE SERVICES

Executive handling at Gardermoen Airport, Oslo and Sola Airport, Stavanger executivehandling.com

Oslo Concierge Service is an Oslo-based company that will not only help you with all your travel details while visiting the capital, but can also help you build the perfect itinerary to see the sights all over Norway. Originally a chauffeur service, it can now arrange everything, from boat trips to helicopter services and restaurant bookings to personal shoppers. osloconcierge.no

THE DETAILS THE WEEKEND...

Astrup Fearnley Museum afmuseet.no
Cross-country ski instructors learn2ski.no
Ekebergparken Sculpture Park ekebergparken.com/en
Ekeberg Restaurant ekebergrestauranten.com
Frogner Park visitoslo.com
Maaemo +47 221 79 969, maaemo.no
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Training with Ingrid Kristiansen

ingridkristiansen.com
Torggata Botaniske [facebook.com/Torggata Botaniske](http://facebook.com/TorggataBotaniske)
Viking Ship Museum khm.uio.no/english/visit-us/viking-ship-museum
Vingen vingenbar.no

ONE WEEK...

Ålesund Airport avinor.no
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LONGER...

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