



# A NEW NORWAY

Long a destination for adventurers, road trippers and nature lovers, Norway has become an unlikely hot spot for modern luxury, thanks to the debuts of two five-star properties and a cultural boom in its cutting-edge capital, Oslo. BY NIKKI ERLICK

**OUR BOAT DROPPED** anchor at **Hitra** island, where the navy blues of the fjord waters meet the lush greens of the trees on shore and the fire-engine reds of the buildings lining the harbor. Here, passing through the door of top seafood restaurant **Ansnes Brygger**, we are greeted by an unexpected feast of scallops, crawfish, shrimp, lobster, pepper crab and more. This elaborate meal is the welcome conclusion to a day spent with my guide cruising the archipelago of approximately 5,000 islands—many uninhabited or with only a few residents—of which Hitra is a part. From our base, in the small city of **Trondheim**, we had zipped across the fjord on a high-speed RIB, bouncing up and down with each passing wave, to the island of **Sula**, where we climbed to the lighthouse and sipped lemonade infused with wildflowers at the home of a local family. After trading our RIB boat for a more traditional vessel, we continued sailing through the islets to our final stop, Hitra.

This was a taste of old Norway: rustic, charming, easygoing, proud of its dramatic natural beauty. But urban development and the arrival of chic, upscale properties is creating a new, increasingly luxe and contemporary Norway, and any journey to the country today would be incomplete without exploring both.

## ON THE WATERFRONT

Walking along its shoreline, dotted

with high-rises and contemporary art venues, it's easy to feel that Oslo is in the midst of evolution. Over the past decade, the Fjord City project has reimagined the once-industrial waterfront, replacing shipyards and highways with museums, apartment buildings and trendy public spaces. The recently completed **Harbour Promenade** stretches nearly six miles along the shore, wending its way through such highlights as the new Sørenga district, where kayakers paddle in a calm inlet and locals swim in a seawater pool, and Tjuvholmen island, site of the Renzo Piano-designed **Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art** and the sleek **Thief** hotel, popular with celebrities and creative types.

The epicenter of Oslo's evolution is the **Bjørvika** neighborhood, an up-and-coming cultural hub that includes the striking harborfront **Oslo Opera House**—whose roof slopes down to ground, inviting pedestrians to climb up and enjoy the city views—as well as the **Barcode Project**, a series of multiuse high-rises. The sheer amount of construction underway here is a sign of what lies ahead. A new branch of Oslo's **Deichman Library** is slated to open this year, housing not only books but also a cinema, a gaming zone and a restaurant. And two venues are scheduled to open in 2020 that will undoubtedly raise the city's art and design profile: The **National Museum** will be the Nordic region's

largest cultural center, uniting the collections of the National Gallery, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in one institution, while the **Lambda** museum will provide a home for approximately 28,000 paintings, photographs, drawings and sculptures that Norwegian artist Edvard Munch bequeathed to the city. Oslo's hipster side, previously concentrated in neighborhoods like the Brooklyn-esque **Grünerløkka**, can now be experienced along the fjord, as well, thanks to the shopping complex at **Aker Brygge**, the warehouse-style **Vippa Oslo** food court and a series of nomadic art installations.

Just north of Bjørvika, on Jernbanetorget Square, is **Amerikalinjen**, Oslo's latest luxury property. Opened this spring, it occupies the early 20th-century headquarters of the Norwegian America Line, a former cruise ship company that sailed between Norway and the United States. This connection gave the hotel its name as well as its aesthetic, which draws from America, and New York City in particular (its eclectic art collection ranges from an Obama campaign poster to Alex Katz paintings). The 122-key property is trendy and contemporary, but the past is always present in such touches as framed memorabilia from the original ships, reproductions of midcentury furnishings and the Pier 42 bar, named after passengers' point of entry in New York and serving



1920s-inspired cocktails. Other stylish social spaces include a library, a European brasserie and a basement jazz club inspired by the old speak-easies of the Big Apple.

## A NEW REASON TO GO NORTH

Arctic Norway has always been popular with winter travelers in pursuit of the Northern Lights, but the reopening of the *grande dame* **Britannia Hotel** adds new allure to the region. The property is in Trondheim, which is set on a fjord of the same name about 300 miles north of Oslo. Norway's third-most-populous municipality, home to some 200,000 residents, it is also one of the oldest Scandinavian cities, founded by the Viking king Olav Tryggvason in 997 and serving as Norway's capital until 1380. Trondheim lays claim as well to the world's northernmost medieval cathedral: the **Nidarosdomen**, which is built over the grave of St. Olav, Norway's patron saint, and is a destination for pilgrims, who still adorn the saint's altar with stones acquired during their journeys. (Interestingly, the cathedral's western façade was reconstructed in the early 1900s, and the faces of many of the new statues were modeled on those of the sculptors, their family members and even famous artists; the archangel Michael bears Bob Dylan's visage.)

Britannia was founded in 1870 to accommodate "salmon lords," British aristocrats who came to fish in the fjords (a recreation still practiced by summer visitors today, who can rent rods from a local seafood restaurant). After a three-year, \$160 million renovation, the hotel reopened this spring under the ownership of Norwegian mogul and Trondheim native Odd Reitan, who envisioned it as both

an upscale destination for travelers and, in continuation of its longtime role in the community, a home-away-from-home for locals. The hotel's reincarnation captured the country's interest, and the renovation even became the subject of a docu-series for one of Norway's national television channels.

With its waterfront setting, it's no surprise that Trondheim, in addition to being a source of seafood for many of the world's top restaurants, is a haven for lovers of marine delicacies. This year, *Michelin* stars were awarded to two of its restaurants: **Fagn** and **Credo** (the latter helmed by Heidi Bjerkan, former head chef for Norway's royal family). Britannia itself has six bars and restaurants, ranging from a French brasserie to a Japanese grill. Of these, **Speilsalen**, set in a mirrored salon, provides the most gourmet experience, offering patrons six- and 10-course tasting menus comprising such dishes as Jerusalem artichokes with Brussels sprouts and black garlic and Norwegian salmon with horseradish and mussels. And the hotel has the added culinary distinction of serving Trondheim's first afternoon tea.

Britannia's other amenities include a 15,000-square-foot spa and fitness center where guests can retreat for a dip in the pool and a massage after riding the waves in an RIB and exploring the islands scattered throughout the fjord. This, in other words, is the perfect place to enjoy Norway's new-found luxury after making the most of its rustic adventures. ■

Oslo Opera House. Clockwise, from left: Trondheim's historic district; a guest room at Amerikalinjen; a dish at Britannia Hotel's Jonathan Grill.



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