



Norway

cultural note

the Norwegian Trygve Lie was the first Secretary General of the United Nations.

Country Background

History

The Vikings (also called Norsemen) were feared for their raids throughout northern Europe from the eighth to eleventh centuries. These Vikings eventually became the Norwegians, the Swedes, and the Danes.

Political power became concentrated in Denmark, which came to rule much of Scandinavia, including Norway. Eventually, Sweden became a rival power. Denmark sided with Napoleon during the Napoleonic Wars. To punish Denmark, the postwar Congress of Vienna took Norway from Denmark and gave it to Sweden in 1815.

The fishermen, sailors, and merchants of Norway had little in common with the aristocrats of Sweden. Friction developed. Fortunately for the Norwegians, their rugged, rocky nation could not be divided up into the vast farming estates preferred by the Swedes. After a century of Swedish occupation, Norway peacefully gained its independence in 1905. The Norwegian parliament invited a Danish prince to become their constitutional monarch, so King Haakon VII became the first king of Norway.

Norway remained neutral in World War I. However, despite its neutrality, Norway was occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II. For this reason, the Norwegians shifted from a belief in neutrality to one in collective security. Norway signed the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 and participated in the foundation of the United Nations.

Type of Government

Norway is a multiparty (hereditary) constitutional monarchy. There are three branches of government. The executive branch is made up of the king, who is chief of state, the prime minister, who is the head of government, and the cabinet, or Council of Ministers. Executive power actually resides in the Council of Ministers in the name of the king, or King's Council. The prime minister sits on this council. The prime minister is chosen by the leading political parties. The legislative branch is a modified unicameral parliament, known as the Storting. Members of the Storting are elected according to a system of proportional representation. They serve for four years. There is a Supreme Court.

Norway became a major oil and gas producer in the 1970s. The income from this sector allowed it to further advance its social welfare system. Today it hopes to make the

non-oil sector of its economy more efficient and less dependent on subsidies. The United States is Norway's fourth most important trading partner. Norway is currently deciding whether or not to join the European Union.

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the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded in Norway.

Language

The official language of Norway is Norwegian, which is a Germanic language related to Icelandic, Danish, and Swedish. It has two forms, a "book language," known as *Bokmål* used in schools and broadcasting, and a commonly spoken language, known as *Nynorsk*. According to law, *Nynorsk* must sometimes be used in instruction and in the media. The principal minority language is Lappish (also called "Sami"), spoken by Lapps or Laplanders. This group is also known as the Samis, although some find that term derogatory. Most Norwegians have studied English. English is widely spoken in business circles and in major cities.

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as in the other Scandinavian languages, Norwegian's additional letters (versions of "æ," "ø," and "å" with diacritical marks) are listed at the end of the alphabet. Remember this when searching for words beginning with such sounds or letters in a telephone book.

Religion

Norway has complete religious freedom, but it does have an official state church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, or Church of Norway. About 94 percent of the people belong to this church.

Demographics

The population of Norway is 4.3 million. About 65 percent of the people live along the coast. Oslo, the capital, has about 456,000 people. Today, many foreign workers and immigrants come to Norway, and about 2,000 people obtain citizenship per year.

Cultural Orientation

Cognitive Styles: How Norwegians Organize and Process Information

The Norwegians are generally cautious toward outside information. New products and new ways of doing things are viewed with circumspection. Their education is becoming more abstractive, and people are beginning to process information conceptually and analytically. Although they are deeply concerned with social welfare, their individualism dictates that all be subject to the same rules and regulations.

Negotiation Strategies: What Norwegians Accept as Evidence

Norwegians' faith in the ideologies of the social welfare state dictates the truth in most cases. This is usually supported by objective facts rather than subjective feelings.

Value Systems: The Basis for Behavior

Norway is a highly nationalistic culture with a liberal philosophy of tolerance for dissent and deviation. The following three sections identify the Value Systems in the predominant culture—their methods of dividing right from wrong, good from evil, and so forth.

Locus of Decision Making

There is a strong belief in individual decisions within the social welfare system. There is an emphasis on individual initiative and achievement, with a person's ability being more important than his or her, station in life. Although the dignity and worth of the individual is emphasized, there is a strong feeling of obligation to help those who are not able to help themselves.

Sources of Anxiety Reduction

Life's uncertainties are accepted and anxiety is reduced through a strong social welfare system. Life is given stability and structure by a strong nuclear family. Young people are encouraged to mature early and take risks to develop a strong self-image.

Issues of Equality / Inequality

Nationalism transcends social differences, and a largely homogeneous population minimizes ethnic differences. Norway is a fiercely democratic and egalitarian society in which those at different power levels have an inherent trust in people. It is basically a middle-class society that strives to minimize social differences. Husbands and wives share the responsibilities of child care.

Business Practices

Appointments



punctuality

- Always be punctual. Tardiness in business is interpreted as a lack of respect.
- Punctuality is expected for social events as well.
- Remember that many Europeans and South Americans write the day first, then the month, then the year (e.g., December 3, 1999, is written 3.12.99). This is the case in Norway.
- When you deal with a Norwegian firm, the secretary of the firm will make an appointment for you.
- The workweek is Monday through Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. Business people leave their offices promptly and go home for dinner, which is typically held at about 5:00 P.M.
- It is best to avoid business trips to Norway at Easter time and in July and early August—most people take vacations then.



Negotiating

- When writing to a Norwegian firm, it is gracious to use the name of the division head, even if you do not know the person.
- Norwegians are relatively informal (far more so than the neighboring Swedes).
- You can introduce yourself to the executive with whom you are meeting, rather than waiting for the secretary to introduce you.
- It is a good idea to set a time limit on the meeting.
- Norwegians are wary of the American concern with legal matters. Written confirmation of business deals is sufficient; if you must mention bringing in a lawyer, be discreet.
- Scandinavians appreciate knowledge about the differences among the countries of their region.
- Avoid personal topics (employment of you host or family members, salary, and social status).
- Hobbies, politics, sports, and travel are good topics for conversation.
- Avoid criticism of other peoples or systems. The Norwegians stress tolerance. Chastising Norwegians for permitting the hunting of whales will not win you any friends.
- Avoid comparisons between Norway and the United States, especially concerning the cost of living. Norwegians are bored with hearing how expensive their country is.
- Norwegians appreciate nature and are proud of their clean environment.



Business Entertaining

- If you have a late morning meeting, you can invite your Norwegian colleague to lunch.
- The person who extends the invitation pays for the meal.
- Lunch is a light meal but, if it is used for business, it will usually be a hot meal rather than just sandwiches.
- In most Norwegian restaurants, alcohol is served only after 3:00 P.M. and only from Monday through Saturday.
- You may discuss business at any time during the meal.

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norwegians enjoy discussing sports—cross-country skiing began in Norway.

- In restaurants, raise your hand to call the waiter over.
- Norwegians usually eat dinner at 5:00 or 6:00 P.M.
- When you go to a Norwegian home, wait to be asked in; wait again until you are asked to sit down. At the table, wait until the host invites everyone to begin eating.
- Some Norwegians have a cocktail before dinner; others do not. It is possible that you will be directed to the dinner table as soon as you arrive. Arrive on time.
- The fork is held in the left hand; the knife remains in the right hand.
- Hands should not be kept in the lap at the table.

- It is preferable to finish what is on your plate.
- A dinner in a Norwegian home may have numerous courses and last several hours. Pace yourself.
- At the end of the meal, people thank the hostess by saying *takk for maten*, or "thank you for the food"; you will please your hosts by saying this in Norwegian.

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there was a turn-of-the-century fashion in Norwegian interior design for disguising interior doors. You may have to search for a door in older homes; do not be surprised if the door is covered by wallpaper. Doors are traditionally kept shut.

- You should initiate your own departure, as your hosts will not. Expect the evening to end around 10:00 P.M. in the winter. However, in the summer, the sun does not set until around midnight. Your hosts may suggest a walk after dinner, followed by a final drink. In the summer, expect to leave around 11 P.M.

Time

- Norway is one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T. + 1); or six hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (E.S.T. + 6).

Protocol



Greetings

- The handshake is the standard greeting for men and women.
- People greet each other by saying "Morn" (which means "morning") at any time of day.
- Norwegians are a fairly quiet people. Avoid speaking loudly.



Titles / Forms of Address

- The order of names is the same as in the U.S.: first name followed by surname.
- The use of first names is not as common as in the United States. Follow the lead of your hosts. Indeed, many men are addressed solely by their surnames, without even a "Mr." in front.
- Among older people, titles are used; among younger people, usage varies. In general, professional titles (Doctor, Engineer, Professor, and so forth) are used, followed by a surname; business titles (Director, President, and so forth.) are not typically used. With government officials, it is appropriate to use titles. Oddly, lawyers and clergymen do not use titles.



Gestures

- A toss of the head means "come here."
- Norwegians do not always rise when another person enters the room. Don't be offended by this.

- However, do rise when you are being introduced to someone.
- Talking with one's hands in one's pockets is considered too casual.
- The North American "O.K." gesture (thumb and forefinger forming a circle) is considered insulting.

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some Norwegians believe in an old fishermen's superstition that spitting at a departing person (towards them, not hitting them) brings that person good luck.



Gifts

- Flowers, liqueurs, wine, liquor, or chocolates are appropriate gifts for your hostess when invited to a Norwegian home.
- When giving flowers, avoid the following, since they are all used only for funerals: lilies, carnations, and all white flowers, as well as wreaths.
- Alcohol taxes are high, so alcohol makes a prized gift.
- It is not appropriate to give a business gift at the first meeting.
- If you give a business gift, be sure it is wrapped in good-quality paper. Make the gift neither too extravagant nor too skimpy.



Dress

- In general, Norwegians dress more informally than American business people; however, visitors should dress as they would in a business context at home.
- Men should always wear a tie for business appointments, but a sports jacket rather than a suit is usually acceptable.
- Women may wear dresses or pants.
- Clean blue jeans and t-shirts are standard casual wear, but torn clothes are unacceptable. Shorts are worn for hiking; they are not common in urban areas.