

# Norway's capital filled with texture



**Rick Steves**

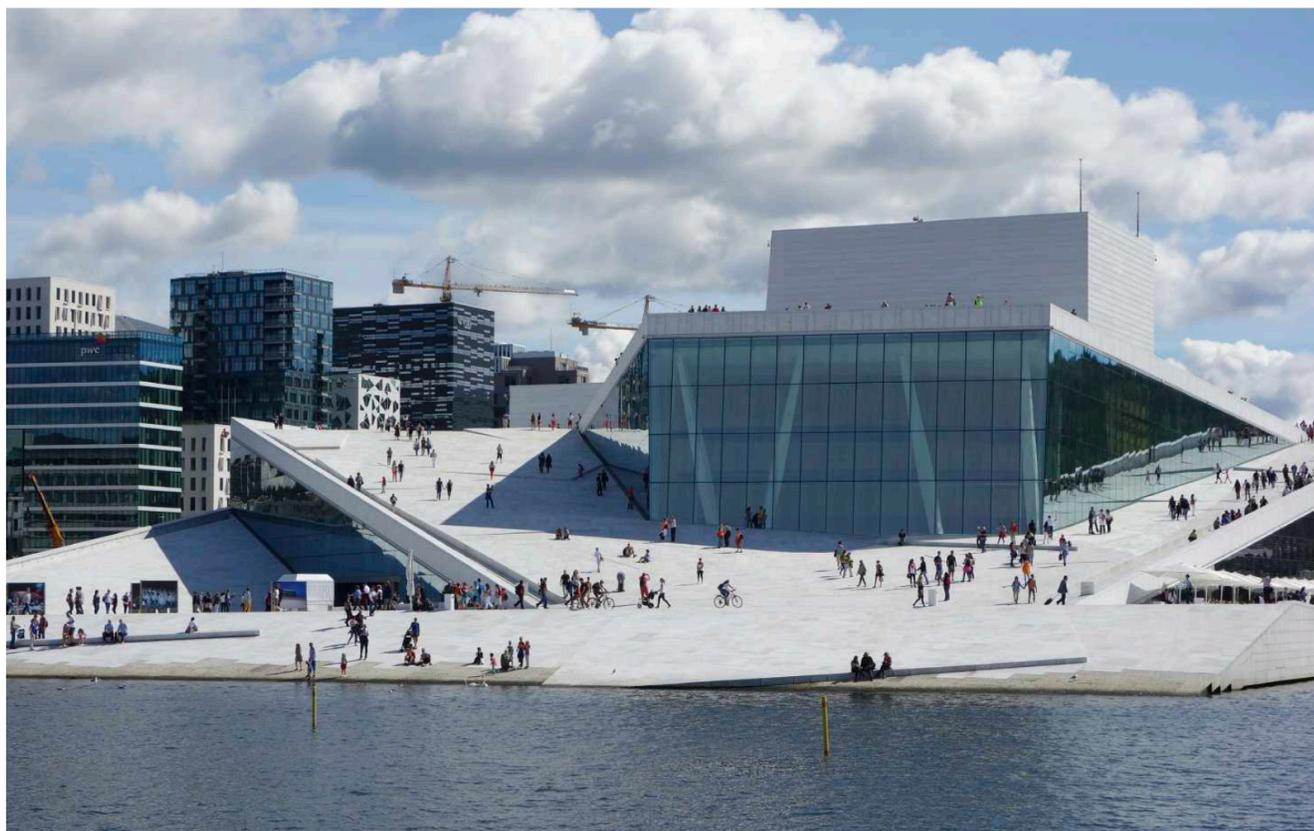
A big statue of a tiger sits in front of the train station of Norway's capital, Oslo. A local once explained that Oslo is nicknamed "Tiger City" because, in the 19th century, when country boys would visit this wild and crazy "New York City of Norway," it would "make a mark on their soul."

I find Oslo more of a kitten than a tiger. Its mix of grand Neoclassical facades, boxy '60s-style modernism, pastoral parks and homogenous culture have always felt a bit tame for my taste. But dig deeper, and you'll find more texture here — from wild new buildings on its people-friendly harborfront to troubled artists.

The city's grand boulevard, Karl Johans gate, cuts from the train station through the center of town to the Royal Palace. It's lined with restaurants, parks, and landmarks — including Oslo Cathedral, Parliament and Stortorvet Square, with its lively flower and produce market.

A boulevard highlight is the venerable Grand Café, once the meeting place of Oslo's intellectual and creative elite. At the back of the café, a mural shows Norway's literary and artistic clientele enjoying this fine hangout, from playwright Henrik Ibsen (who came in every afternoon) to Edvard Munch, Norway's most famous and influential painter.

Munch's work is featured on Oslo's waterfront, in the new Munch museum — the biggest art museum in Europe dedicated to a single artist. Munch helped to pioneer a new style, Expressionism, using lurid colors and bold lines to "express"



Rising like an iceberg from the sea, Oslo's Opera House is one of many ways the city has revitalized its waterfront. **RICK STEVES**

inner turmoil and the angst of the modern world. His most iconic painting is *The Scream*, which he described as "the work of a madman."

The Munch building is one example of Oslo's efforts to make its fjord more people-friendly. In the past, you would have dodged several lanes of traffic to get here — but now, most traffic has been diverted through tunnels. As in many European cities, residents are reclaiming their waterfront.

Next door to Munch is the marble Opera House, which seems to rise like an iceberg from the sea. This is the only opera house in the world that doubles as a public plaza, with a roof designed to be a theater itself — where

locals gather to enjoy the sun, fjord views and concerts. Opened in 2008, this creative cultural venue is a huge hit. I once joined 8,000 others on the rooftop to watch a fast-rising pop band perform on ... the water. (Their stage was a raft anchored just offshore.)

Farther west along the harbor stands Oslo's striking City Hall, famous for hosting the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony. Completed in 1950 to celebrate the city's 900th birthday, the building was an avant-garde thrill in its day. Entering here, I'm reminded that in this most highly taxed corner of Europe, city halls (rather than churches) are the dominant buildings. While the state religion is Lutheran, people rarely go

to church. Instead, they seem to almost worship good government ... In fact, the main hall actually feels like a temple.

Walking — or cycling — along Oslo's harbor is a great way to enjoy the city's fjord-side setting and re-envisioned harborfront. A series of information kiosks creates an inspiring DIY tour route, celebrating how Oslo turned an industrial wasteland into a thriving, green and welcoming residential district.

The fjord itself is another top attraction. There are plenty of expensive private cruise options, but the best deal is just to hop on a ferry. These public boats do a roughly hour-long loop of the Oslo fjord, and you can decide whether you want to stay on for the

whole thing (this works great with a picnic lunch), or hop off to explore any of Oslo's five islands. If you're short on time, Hovedøya, featuring the ruins of a 12th-century Cistercian Abbey, is the most worthwhile. Rides are just \$4 (free with the Oslo City Pass), and depart from in front of City Hall.

Once you've docked back in Oslo proper, head to Frogner Park — a short tram ride away. This not only offers a peek at locals at play, but also features a fine sculpture garden showcasing a lifetime of work by Norway's greatest sculptor, Gustav Vigeland.

From 1924 to 1943, Vigeland created a world of bronze and granite statues — around 600 nude figures in all. The centerpiece is a monolith of life,

with 121 figures carved out of a single block of stone rocketing skyward. Vigeland left his beloved city a park filled with stony and thought-provoking insights into the bitter-sweet cycle of life.

Norwegians don't get much summer, so they practically live outdoors when the weather turns nice. And, from its new people-friendly waterfront to spacious Frogner Park, Oslo has made it easy for locals and travelers alike to enjoy a delightful urban mix of the city's unique story and outdoor spaces.

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## CELEBRITY TRAVEL

### Winter draws on music of Bulgaria

By **Jae-Ha Kim**  
Tribune Content Agency

Six-time Grammy-winning saxophonist Paul Winter is back with his latest album, "Horn of Plenty."

"It is the literal meaning of cornucopia, the traditional Thanksgiving symbol of abundance," the musician said. "I have always referred to my soprano sax as a horn, and I've aspired to produce a voice on saxophone that is similar to that of a French horn."

Winter, 86, resides in northwest Connecticut.

This interview with Winter has been edited for length and clarity.

**Q: Did any of your travels inspire "Horn of Plenty"?**

**A:** Pieces on the album have been inspired by my experiences in Brazil, Ireland, Russia and Bulgaria, as well as the ocean and the Grand Canyon.

Of the 13 tracks on the album, "Harvest Faire" was inspired by my years of listening to Bulgarian music and my love of the unique rhythms of Balkan cultures. "Primavera (Spring)" traces its origins to my jazz sextet's 1962 tour of Latin America, when I met the song's composer, Carlos Lyra. Many years later, I was blessed to have the opportunity to record "Primavera" with the great Brazilian guitarist Oscar Castro-Neves.

And there are reinterpretations of several iconic chestnuts from my musical journey, including Ralph Towner's composition,



Pieces on Paul Winter's album "Horn of Plenty" were inspired by his experiences in Brazil, Ireland and Russia. **BILL ELLZEY**

"Icarus," which has been (my group) the Consort's theme song for over 50 years.

**Q: Do you have any upcoming trips planned?**

**A:** I'm looking forward to returning to Brazil, Japan and also California.

**Q: What are your hopes for the upcoming year?**

**A:** My perennial wish is that more and more people, especially of the younger generations, will return to the world of nature.

**Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?**

**A:** Brazil. I love the music, beaches, climate and people.

**Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?**

**A:** When I was perhaps 5 years old, our family drove to Niagara Falls. The Falls were pretty scary to me, but very exciting.

**Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your travels?**

**A:** My ongoing experience from a lifetime of travels to all 50 of our states and to 52 countries of the world is that we are all part of a great family of life.

**Q: If you could only pick one place to eat, would you prefer a food truck or fine dining?**

**A:** I'd prefer a vegan food truck, so I could then sit outside and eat.

**Q: Where are your favorite weekend getaways?**

**A:** The woods near our home.

**Q: If you've ever gone away for the holidays, which was the best trip?**

**A:** Since 1980, the Consort and I have had the great privilege of being artists-in-residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. For 40 years, we presented our Winter Solstice Celebrations there, with many guest artists from around the world and the world's largest gong to represent the return of the sun. Those celebrations were always the best trip! Also, for the past 45 years I've played at the Cathedral on Christmas Eve.

**Q: Do you have a knack for picking up new languages?**

**A:** I don't. I've been to Brazil many times, but I still speak Portuguese like Tarzan.

**Q: When you go away, what are some of your must-have items?**

**A:** Noise-canceling headphones for plane trips.

**Q: What kind of research do you do before you go away on a trip?**

**A:** I learn as much as possible about the geography of the region, so I have a mental map and don't have to rely on GPS.

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### Turo claims renter damaged car covered in mud at pickup

By **Christopher Elliott** | King Features Syndicate

I rented a car through Turo in Edmonton, Canada, and returned it in the same condition, but the host accused me of causing a scratch. The car was covered in mud when I picked it up, making it impossible to inspect for existing damage. At drop-off, it was dark and snowy, and my phone was dying, so my photos were too dim to prove anything.

The host admitted that the damage could've happened after I left the car in an unsecured parking spot. He refused to meet in person to discuss the alleged damage. He rented the car out again immediately, and Turo backed his \$1,200 claim despite mechanics saying that the scratch was minor.

Turo ignored my evidence and raised the charge by \$400 for "hidden damage" that was found after other renters used the car. As a student living on less than \$2,000 a month, this fee is devastating. Did I just become a victim of a Turo scam?

— Bartosz Jusypenko, Olszanica, Poland

**A:** Turo, which is like Airbnb for cars, should have ensured that the host followed its own policy requiring vehicles to be clean at pickup. A dirty car prevented you from documenting pre-existing damage, violating the company's terms. (Turo's guidelines state that hosts must "clean the vehicle before each trip.")

Alberta's Consumer Protection Act also requires businesses to act in good faith, which Turo ignored by rubber-stamping blurry photos and refusing to address your evidence.

But you made a few mistakes, too. First, you shouldn't have accepted a muddy car. If you had no choice, you should have spoken with your Turo host about the difficulty of documenting any preexisting damage. (For me, knowing what I know about damage claims, I would have been

highly reluctant to accept anything other than a written waiver from the host.)

You should have taken better photos at drop-off. But the host's refusal to allow an inspection — and Turo's failure to mandate one — tilted the process unfairly. Always keep a detailed paper trail, as you did, and escalate to executives if a company stonewalls you. I've published Turo's contacts on my consumer advocacy site, [Elliott.org](http://Elliott.org).

Before I get to the resolution of this case, I wanted to note that I agree with Turo and the host on one issue. If a renter damages a car while they have it — even if it's not their fault — they are responsible. In other words, if someone scratched your car, and you didn't notice, it doesn't matter. You're still on the hook.

But the evidence in this case was as muddy as the side of your Turo car. The

photos were inconclusive. Turo didn't follow its procedures, and neither did the car's owner. The company needed to take another look at your case.

I contacted Turo on your behalf. The company admitted that the host's photos were "unclear" and voided the claim. "We remind all hosts and guests of the importance of clear trip photos," a representative told me.

Moral of the story? Never let a company pressure you into paying for damage that was not visible at the time of pickup — and always snap those pre-trip photos, even if it means borrowing a flashlight.

*Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at [elliott.org/help](http://elliott.org/help) or [chris@elliott.org](mailto:chris@elliott.org).*