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A weekend in... Oslo, Norway

Are you a lying on the sand, followed by a leisurely dip in the warm, green sea kind of person? Is your idea of heaven to drink mai tais while wearing a bikini? If you are, stop reading now. Because we are going to Oslo for the weekend. In January. Yes, really.

What's appealing about that? Think cosy. Think wrapped up warm, looking out over the glittering, icy Oslofjord, drinking a cup of coffee and eating a cinnamon bun as your ship slides through the freezing sea. Think skiing through the silent forest as the sun suddenly dips below the horizon and the evening stars light the sky. Then — after your excursion — consider whitefish caviar, warm blinis, perfectly cooked beef for supper and, the next morning, home-cured salmon for breakfast.

I didn't need converting to Oslo, I confess: I love Norway and all things Norwegian. But a winter weekend at The Thief, the city's swankiest new hotel, put the final seal on my love affair. A hotel called The Thief? It sits on the newly developed peninsula of Tjuvholmen. This was once an industrial area of docks and warehouses and general insalubriousness known as "the thief's quarter": in the 18th century, thieves were executed here. But now, as in many cities (I thought especially

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of the Meatpacking District and the High Line in New York), the waterfront is being redeveloped and The Thief is one of the stars of the show.

The understated, elegant decor — bronzes, browns, dark silvers — is a background for the hotel's impressive art collection; it even has its own curator, Sune Nordgren, formerly a director of the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo. There's an Antony Gormley out front, a couple of Julian Opies in the lifts, a Richard Prince in the foyer.

If that's not enough for you, the new Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, across the street, should keep you going: the beautiful building is designed by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop (in collaboration with the Norwegian architects Narud Stokke Wiig) and contains work by Jeff Koons, Matthew Barney, Cindy Sherman — an impressive list. Once the hotel's spa opens next year there will be little reason to leave Tjuvholmen at all during your weekend — but that would be a shame.

Do as the Norwegians do: wrap up warm and take the air. Get an Oslo Card — it will cover all your transport, all entry to museums and gives you discounts at lots of other places too. Yes, you will be glad of the discounts: there's no point in pretending that Norway comes cheap. But almost always — whether it's in food and drink or clothing and design — your kroner will buy you goods of fine quality. My sushi dinner at Alex Sushi was perfect: my meal in Fru K, The Thief's restaurant, even better — modern food with a Norwegian twist, or Norwegian food with a modern twist, depending on how you look at it.

There's plenty to do. Why not take the Oslo Metro to go skiing? Get on line 1 of the T-bane at the National Theatre — right in the centre of the city — and get out at the last stop, Frognerstøen; hire a pair of skis (if you haven't got your own) and off you go. Go skating at the rink in the beautiful Vigeland Sculpture Park. Or hop on a number 30 bus out to Bygdøy and marvel at Norway's maritime history.

Here, in a sequence of wonderful museums, are thousand-year-old Viking

The budget hotel



Thon Hotel Panorama (thonhotels.com) is in a modern block in the quiet area of Kvadraturen, within walking distance of Oslo central station. It's a good base for sightseeing with the Norwegian Opera, the Royal Palace and Akershus Fort a short walk away. Rooms are modern with bright colours and wood floors, and cost from £127, including breakfast. If you're on an even tighter budget, try Comfort Hotel Express, with rooms from £62 (comfortinn.com).

The luxury hotel



The Thief (thethief.com) has 119 rooms — mine had a comfortable king-size bed, free wi-fi and a gorgeous rainforest shower in the bathroom, as well as a private (though nippy) balcony. The hotel has a cosy open fire, a bar with a talented mixologist and at breakfast, home-made jam and muesli. Every member of staff I encountered was extremely helpful. Rooms start at £225pp per night.



ships whose shapes are uncannily similar to another great Norwegian ship on display here — the *Fram*, Nansen and Amundsen's pioneering vessel of exploration, looking as sound as the day she was built. You will march through a dusting of snow to reach the *Fram* and find it's still rather chilly inside the museum — no bad thing, as it will make you consider the lives of the men who sailed in her. You'll shiver a little, hop back on the bus and return to Tjuvholmen for an ace gin and tonic (Beefeater 24; Thomas Henry tonic, which I'd never tried) by The Thief's roaring fire — and be really very glad that you've stolen yourself away.

Erica Wagner

Need to know

How to get there

Fly to Oslo with Norwegian (norwegian.com) which has flights from £49 one way.

Where to eat

It would be hard to improve on the restaurant Fru Kat The Thief; two courses £74. I had delicious sushi at Alex Sushi (alex sushi.no), which has a couple of branches in Oslo; dinner

for one £50 with one drink. For something a little cheaper, try the Apent Bakeri — again, there are a few of them in Oslo — for coffee, croissants and sandwiches. Delicious. (apentbakeri.no).

More information

I went skiing with Reidun Løvstuen, the owner of Ski Guide Norway; www.ski-guide.no. The website is in Norwegian, but she speaks English, so you could phone or e-mail. For more information about Oslo, head to visitoslo.com where there are links to information about Oslo Passes, bus maps, T-bane and ferry maps.

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