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INSIDER'S GUIDE TO GRÜNERLØKKA ...OR WHAT TO DO IN OSLO ON A SUNDAY

Local resident and writer Anne-Sophie Redisch gives you the low-down on the hippest and liveliest neighbourhood in the Norwegian capital and takes us on a little tour of Grünerløkka.

I'm sitting at one of the many sidewalk cafés in Grünerløkka, covered in a cheerful turquoise fleece blanket and cuddling a mug of steaming Earl Grey. Although it's mid-March and spring has definitely arrived, at 5°C there's a bit of a chill in the air. But that's no deterrent for Osloviens eager to feel the sun on their faces and enjoy the hustle and bustle of this vibrant neighbourhood on a Sunday morning.

In the past, tourists would arrive in Oslo on a Sunday and wonder if they had ended up in the *Twilight Zone*. Shops were closed, restaurants were closed, and the city appeared to be a ghost town, although an oddly well-kept one.

Where was everyone? You would find them in marka, the forest that surrounds the city on three sides – out skiing or hiking, depending upon the season.

While communing with nature remains the major Sunday activity for locals, these days, the city centre no longer feels abandoned.

Yet Sunday continues to be a different type of day here in Norway: less commercial. Restaurants now

welcome customers even on a Sunday but most shops are closed, in accordance with a national law making it illegal for shops larger than 100m² to be open on Sundays.

So what to do? If you're a city slicker – or just in the mood for a more urban experience – fear not. There's one area in Oslo that is lively every day. In fact, Grünerløkka is especially lively on Sundays, mostly because of the throngs of people hunting for treasures (think vinyl records, granny's floral dinnerware, and 1960s furniture) at the Sunday market at **Birkelunden**. I chat with Bjørn, who comes every Sunday to peddle his goods. "This is one of only two Sunday markets in Oslo," he says. "The other one is just a few minutes' walk away, at **Blå**. It's a bit different over there, less bric-a-brac, more craft and design."



Around Birkelunden, outdoor cafés abound; they're crowded even in winter. Shops and boutiques proliferate, too, selling weird and wonderful antiques, T-shirts, vintage clothes, and the like. Most are smaller than 100m². And open.



Løkka, as it's affectionately known locally, is a former factory and working-class district turned bohemian and fashionable.

Artists were drawn to this area even before it became trendy, though. Famous Norwegian painter Edvard Munch lived and worked here for many years. If you take a stroll along the Akerselva River banks, you can still see remnants of that industrial history.

You can also swim or go fishing, bike along the trails, wander through the green parks, or lounge at the cool riverside café/club **Blå**.

I like browsing through the selections of retro clothing at **Velouria Vintage** and **Frøken Dianas Salonger**. **Trøye** and **Probat** both sell wacky T-shirts. **Hasla** has jewellery, and **Skaperverket**, a design collective, is the place to go for unique and creative arts and crafts pieces (love their hats). If you're looking for presents for the little ones back home, **Sprell** has toys and **Lillemonster** sells cool Scandinavian kids' fashion.

Have the kids along? They'll adore the trampolines and slides at **Hoppi Havet, Popsenteret**, an interactive museum exploring pop music during the last 100 years; the climbing- and bouldering walls at **Vulkan Climbing Centre**; and **Glazed & Amused**, where everyone can decorate their own pottery.

You'll find exotic gourmet food at **Ostebutikken Deli & Bistro**. An even wider choice of fare is available from the many small-scale producers at **Mathallen**, Oslo's only food hall; the super-fresh fish is worth a special mention. If you're here around Christmas time – and you have the stomach for it – look for *smalahove*. This torched and smoked whole sheep's head is a traditional dish from Western Norway.

Grünerløkka's café and restaurant scene is varied and suits all budgets. **Fru Hagen** has yummy salads and sandwiches. Former world champion barista Tim Wendelboe runs a micro roaster and espresso bar called, well, **Tim Wendelboe**. Mexican restaurants

have never really taken off in Norway, but **Mucho Mas** here in Løkka has been around for nearly 20 years. There's usually a queue in front of **The Nighthawk**, which is decorated like an 1950s American diner and has the cuisine to match (pancake breakfast at 2pm, anyone?) **Tea Lounge** serves 64 different types of teas. **Markveien Mat & Vinhus** and **Südøst** are the local gourmet options.

As morning turns into afternoon, I'm on yet another break from browsing. A blue tram rattles past as I enter **Cocoa**, Oslo's first cocoa bar, boasting 15 flavours of hot chocolate. Orange is my favourite. Their frozen cocoa will have to wait another month or so for warmer temperatures. ☹️





MAY 17

NORWAY'S NATIONAL DAY

If you're in Oslo on **Syttende mai** (May 17), you're in for a treat. Constitution Day is just about the most important day of the year, even rivalling Christmas. People wear *bunad*, the national costume, and wish one another "Happy Birthday". Through every city, town, village, and hamlet, or anywhere where two or more Norwegians congregate, there's a *Syttende mai* parade.



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT



HOVEDØYA

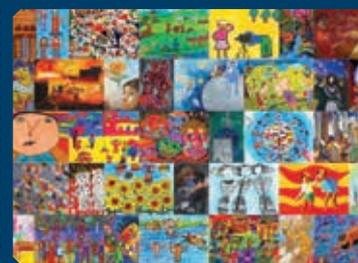
A family favourite in Oslo harbour is Hovedøya Island. Just a few minutes from the city centre by ferry (line 92 and 93 from Vippetangen), you can swim, sunbathe on the beaches, play football, hike in the forest, and explore the ruins of a 12th-century Cistercian abbey and two early 19th-century cannon batteries.

visitoslo.com



SKI SIMULATOR

Oslo's most famous landmark is **Holmenkollen Ski Jump**, where intrepid skiers fly through the air at more than 100kph. Everyone can experience the thrill of the jump during the five-minute ride at the ski simulator next to the hill, a big hit with kids of all ages. skisimulator.no



BARNEKUNSTMUSEET

The International Museum of Children's Art aims to preserve works of art by children from all over the world. Children from 180 countries are represented so far.

barnekunst.no



VAAGHALS

Next to the central station, the brand-new BarCode district houses the newest addition to Oslo's restaurant scene. Run by local celebrity chef Arne Brimi, Vaaghals may be located in a hypermodern high-rise, but the cuisine is old-fashioned local fare. The restaurant serves sharing menus: like being at home where everyone serves themselves from the same platters.

vaaghals.com



FROGNERSETEREN

This classic chalet at the edge of the forest is everyone's refuelling stop before or after hitting the famed forest trails of marka. The locals go for waffles and coffee or hot chocolate in **Café Seterstua**. Or you can splurge at the more formal – but still cosy – **Restaurant Finstua**.

frognerseteren.no



BEGGARS/STREET MUSICIANS

After the Vagrancy Act was abolished in 2006, Oslo has seen its share of international beggars. Some offer services (like a scale for weighing yourself!), some merely ask for money, and others bring the whole orchestra. Every morning as I exit the National Theatre train station, a four-man band (give or take) plays happy tunes as I walk past. Today was a chipper rendition of 'Volare': a cheerful start to the day. 🇳🇴

✈️ FLIGHT FREQUENCY

Qatar Airways has daily flights from Doha to Oslo