



ACTIVE
travel

BY DANIEL SCHEFFLER

SOMETIMES BEING
INACTIVE IS THE
MOST ACTIVE YOU
CAN POSSIBLY BE

The goodness
OF NORWAY



Known as the open-air capital of Europe, Oslo has its roots in health. The city, with long classical vistas and architecture dating back to the 19th Century, makes for a quiet place to fully rejuvenate, Nordic-style.

Established in 1000AD, Oslo is believed to rank No 1 in terms of quality of life, and it's evident with the number of parks, public pools and fresh air in the city. Before breakfast, locals are spotted biking, walking and doing stretches in and around the garden and water spaces.

Their activity is inviting, and it wasn't long before I joined in. And this made me consider that the very idea of wellness isn't an arbitrary thing that you "do", but rather something that becomes a part of who you are, no matter where you are in the world.

Wellness is our current buzzword, infiltrating every

sector and industry. In fact, Euromonitor predicts that health and wellness will be a trillion-dollar industry within the next two years. Besides the food, drink and nutrition retail component, there is a growth in fitness facilities (gyms, pamper stations, revitalisation hot spots, open-air facilities and even rooftop running tracks) in every major city on the planet. Seemingly everyone is re-evaluating what wellness and wellbeing mean in their own context, and everyone wants to know how they can access them.

You may be interested to know that the word "wellness" has been used in the context of alternative medicine since Dr Halbert L Dunn employed the phrase "high-level wellness" in the 1950s. But it is really a product of the 1970s, what we generally understand to mean a "healthy balance of the mind, body and spirit that



results in an overall feeling of wellbeing”.

Since then the word has taken over our lexicon, with people starting to pursue wellness as a form of self-improvement and expression. What it really encompasses, according to Wellness.com, is “mental, physical, spiritual, social, occupational and environmental health conditions”, and means that wellness is the quest for a “more optimal, holistic and balanced state of being”.

As much as being active is part of the allure of being in Norway, one of the most extraordinary aspects of the country is how it celebrates stillness – not in the traditional Eastern way of meditating or sitting quietly in the lotus position, humming, but in a rather Western manner of sinking deep into a tub, with the finest water in the world coming straight off the glaciers in the north.

In fact, the western part of Norway, just a quick drive from Oslo, is where the famed fjords rise above the icy sea. And so it is here where many Norwegians spend their weekends and vacations, indulging in serious spa time – beyond pampering, to heal from all kinds of ills and aches.

I usually favour meditation and yoga when it comes to bringing myself back into balance, but I decided to embrace a different way of accessing the same stillness. The Solstrand Hotel near Bergen has, for over 100 years, played host to visitors on a quest to find the finest retreat. By integrating Scandinavian bathing rituals and holistic ideas of wellness, the spa has become a haven for seekers of wellbeing.

I stretch out in the hot tub, my monkey mind still dancing and reeling from my recent travels and a busy life. I sit quietly and breathe in the landscape. The starkness and open views start to quiet my mind and, even with my eyes open, I slip into a deep, static state. Rooted right to the spot, the water takes me back to the womb and I feel a sense of calm.

Back in the city is where Artesia has two spas. The first is located inside the Grand Hotel, and the other in Majorstuen, a fine Western neighbourhood of Oslo. “Spa (as we know it today in a modernised sense) has not been an established concept in Norway until recently,” explains Emil Engebretsen, head of PR and marketing at Artesia Spa.

Artesia Spa was a pioneer, creating a full-service spa in 2002. The owners took inspiration from ancient Greece, where spa and wellness possibly originated, and used a world-leading Norwegian architectural firm, Snøhetta, to design the facilities. Artesia then took over the spa at the historic Grand Hotel, providing an inner-city experience. Currently the hotel is going through a renovation and will soon

offer a new concept of wellness that blends Western ways with ancient philosophies from the East.

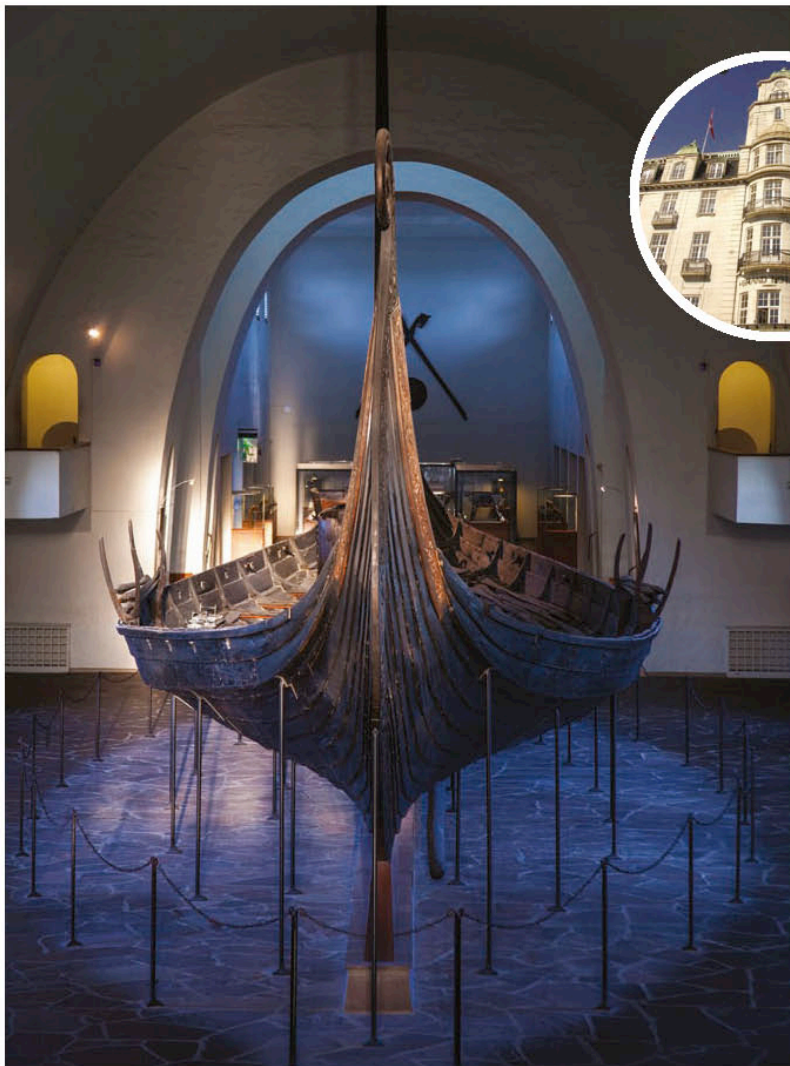
“The spa trend, and wellness itself, are global trends within tourism,” says Engebretsen. “The new generation want unique experiences, and for them luxury is an experience for all senses.” The Artesia Spa offers just that – a holistic experience where it is possible to “disconnect” from the rest of the world and just connect with yourself.

But Oslo isn’t just about the spa. Somehow the air is better here, the sky a little lighter and the attitude of the people a little nicer. Hopefully the city not only inspires its residents to live a healthy lifestyle, but also energises its tourists to return home with a new emphasis on holistic wellness. It might not save the world, but it might just save you.





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Where to stay

The Grand Hotel (www.grand.no) offers suites overlooking the ancient capital. The spa, with all of its facilities, is close by, but there are also in-room facilities available for a "spa where you sleep" option.

How to get there

Air France and KLM both offer daily flights to Oslo via Paris and Amsterdam respectively. With a new La Premiere class on Air France, the trip comes with the finest champagne and a perfect night's rest. KLM's Crown business lounge in Schiphol airport is set to re-open in a few months – with more world-class facilities. To book, visit airfrance.com.mx and klm.com/home/mx.

For more

For everything up-to-date on where to spa and how to incorporate holistic wellness into your travels, Norway Tourism and Innovation Norway has it all:

<http://www.visitnorway.com/> ■