



Norway

Europe's northernmost country, the Kingdom of Norway is famed for its mountains and spectacular fjord coastline, as well as its history as a seafaring power. Norway declared its independence in 1905 when the union with Sweden was dissolved. The Norwegians rejected membership of the then European Economic Community in 1972 and of the European Union in 1994, despite being urged by their governments to vote 'yes'. Norway's people value their independence and prosperity highly.

The country enjoys one of the highest standards of living in the world, in large part due to the discovery in the late 1960s of offshore oil and gas deposits. Current key domestic issues include immigration and integration of ethnic minorities, maintaining the country's extensive social safety net with an ageing population and preserving economic competitiveness.

Norway is a nationalistic culture and a largely homogeneous population. It is an egalitarian society in which people strive to minimise social differences. The Norwegians believe people should be on an equal footing and flaunting wealth, for example, is frowned upon. Norwegians are down-to-earth people. They appreciate modesty and solidity rather than status related symbols and speech. The concept of Jante's Law was created by the author *Aksel Sandemose* in his novel and identifies 10 'rules'. Jante's Law teaches Scandinavian people to be modest and not 'think big' nor criticise others.

Norwegians are very proud of their country and live in harmony with nature. Their love of and care for nature is an essential part of the uniqueness. Norwegians admire self-reliance and the ability to put aside personal interest for the common good. They take great pride in individual and national independence.

Norwegians are usually reserved about themselves and can be quite introvert. They listen in good humour but have strong opinions. It takes time to get to know people personally. Entertaining is not an essential part of doing business as it can be in southern Europe. Avoid talking about aspects of personal life. For example, avoid questions such as 'What do you do?' or 'Are you married?'

Business people are not addressed by their titles. Norwegians and Danes are generally less formal than Germans and Swedes and address each other rather informally.

Norwegians do not need long-standing personal relationships in order to conduct business. Nonetheless, they prefer to do business with those they trust and who act with honesty. Relationships develop slowly and depend upon the other person being professional and meeting all agreed-upon deadlines.

Norwegians respect confident, self-assured business people. Appearing over-friendly at the start of a relationship may be viewed as weakness. They are direct communicators and have no difficulty telling their colleagues that they disagree with something that has been said. Their communication is straightforward and relies on facts.

Norwegians work consistently well in teams, preferring group decision-making and implementation. They are strongly consensual and prefer compromise to disagreement. That said, negotiations can be frank. It is imperative to adhere to deadlines and commitments. If you do not you will not be considered trustworthy, which will destroy the business relationship. There is little secrecy about corporate objectives and strategies and your counterpart will normally be able to see your product/service in the strategic perspective of his company. Although top managers make the decisions they will be very reluctant not to endorse the recommendations of project groups or lower managers. Do not over promise, otherwise Norwegians quickly lose interest. To Norwegians, new is not necessarily better. You need to present a convincing case – not based on emotions but usefulness and technical quality. New concepts have to be proven as high quality, practical and already well tested.

If you have made a proposal you will need to stick to it. Changing or adding surprising new elements is generally not popular. It is also hard to renegotiate terms after an agreement has been made, even if circumstances have changed. In Norwegian corporations there may be a low level of individual risk taking – making it difficult to get the final signature even when you have convinced the negotiator. To press for greater speed can easily backfire.

Avoid excessive gift giving or any other action that can be perceived as a bribe. Scandinavia is proud of its corruption-free reputation. Moderately expensive gifts and logo items are acceptable.