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A Worldly Enriching Perspective of Norway

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A Worldly Enriching Perspective of Norway

Having been in Norway almost four months, it feels like much longer if I'm honest; I've gotten used to the massive cultural shift that impacted daily life. Everything from time, temperature, weight, scale, and dates are measured differently here- things I thought were universal in some parts. In the small town where I live, a lot of aspects were frustrating at first as some things like medical care, transportation, etc. aren't set up for systems outside Scandinavia let alone outside the EU. However, this also permitted me the unique opportunity for true cultural integration that I wouldn't have gotten in a city like Oslo where everyone speaks English and has more accommodations for internationals. The majority of my friends here are Norwegian and are just as happy as I am to talk politics and cultural differences or show me all things unique to Norway. Essentially, this was a very long winded way of saying I didn't conduct a specific interview with a person. The questions asked in this assignment are phrased in such a manner of my opinion rather than theirs anyways and I have so much input from so many different people that I'll try to do them all justice in this assignment.

Starting off with the smaller things, food is vastly different- I have yet to understand Europeans' fixation with paprika... But it's also forced me to eat a bit healthier, well still unhealthy by Norwegian standards, but healthier for me at least. They consider the Middle-Eastern dish kebabs to be some of the worst junk food and while I haven't looked into how it's made, it seems reasonable and not likely to be giving any heart attacks. White bread is very uncommon to have in the house, but bread as a whole is a large part of the Norwegian diet. Not

necessarily anything on it- just bread. In the morning, you might have jam or brunost on a slice of bread then take similar contents for lunch, known as a matpakke.

Culturally, I've noticed that religion plays little to no part in prejudices against minority groups, and there's actually not many people I've met of a religious nature at all. There's also a general respect for the Sami (indigenous people) who, as is with all cultures, were horribly oppressed until the late 80s. By this I mean the country as a whole tends to hold value for them as being part of their cultural heritage and actively support their trades. Connection and knowledge with the outdoors tends to be somewhat of a norm here; everyone has some skill relating to it whether that be skiing, hiking, foraging, or wood carving. Regardless, Norwegians tend to follow a general unspoken rule of go big or go home. Now, I don't mean this in the American sense of being outspoken (though the northerners do tend to be) but in the sense of being very quiet and mild in daily life but becoming completely disordered and rowdy on the weekends when it comes to drinking and partying. I'm somewhat amazed that any of them have made it past their 20's with some of the stories I've heard...

As a disclaimer for this last and most major point, this has nothing to do with my own personal political ideology nor do I intend to insult either country- this is purely observational and subjective to my experience. Regardless, the largest cultural difference is, genuinely, a sense of safety. This applies both under a societal context from a lack of violence but also, and especially, as a woman who is used to taking extra precautions to avoid altercations. The feeling of this difference goes both ways, I feel how odd it is being able to do a lot more without fear; and my friends are shocked at the norm I describe. Obviously, this will vary from city to city, and even situationally, but as a general whole, people have what they need, and violence is so uncommon it shakes the country when something large happens. All the women I've talked to

have never been followed and stalking itself is near unheard of in most towns. Granted, this is not to say it never happens, and there's plenty of other problems they experience, but walking alone at night is not one of them. This has actually even led to some minor conflict; once with a friend of mine who didn't understand the severity of some political issues just from viewing it through a different ethnocentric lens. (And no that was not meant as an insult). It also put me in a bit of a strange position of interpreting some behaviors and norms of people as threatening when not intended to be. Despite that, the experience living here has given me a lot of hope in life, seeing what potential is out there and how happy I can be living a simple life. It's kind of amazing how available they make education and how provided for young people getting out of school are.