
Salt, Cod and the Midnight Sun

A working chef's guide to kitchens in Norway

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Before you pack

I have cooked for ambassadors in Tokyo, for soldiers in Afghanistan, for UN staff behind blast walls in Mogadishu, and for tourists who flew halfway around the world to eat cod in a fishing village above the Arctic Circle. The kitchens changed. The heat, the knives and the people who keep a service alive did not.

This guide is for cooks and hospitality people who are thinking about Norway. Not the brochure version, with the fjord, the cabin and the northern lights over a perfectly lit plate. The working version: what the paperwork asks of you, what the pay really looks like, what the kitchens expect, and what a long dark winter in a village of a few hundred people does to a person who is used to city noise.

I worked at an exclusive resort in an old fishing village in Lofoten. I came in as a temporary replacement for the breakfast chef and was offered a permanent place. What follows is what I wish someone had told me before I went, plus the facts you need to check before you sign anything.

Norway will pay you properly and treat you fairly. In return it asks for punctuality, honesty and the ability to be alone with yourself.

Why Norway, and why not

The good

- **Wages that respect the work.** Kitchen pay in Norway is among the best in Europe, and the rules around hours and overtime are taken seriously.
- **Ingredients you will remember.** Cod straight off the boat, lamb that grazed on salt meadows, berries that taste of a

short, violent summer.

- **Kitchens without screaming.** The Nordic kitchen is calmer and flatter than most. Respect is the default, not the reward.
- **Landscape that resets your head.** After a double shift, the view from the staff housing does more for you than any drink.

The honest part

- **Darkness.** In Lofoten the sun does not rise for weeks in December. You will need a routine, a lamp and a reason to get up.
- **Isolation.** Seasonal jobs are often in villages where the nearest shop is a drive away and your colleagues are your whole social life.
- **Prices.** A beer in a bar costs what a meal costs elsewhere. Strong alcohol is sold only in state shops.
- **Weather.** It changes four times before lunch. Bring proper boots and a jacket that has been somewhere.

The paperwork, without the panic

Paperwork is where most good cooks lose their nerve. It is simpler than it looks, as long as you do it in the right order. Always check the official sites before you travel: rules change.

If you are a Nordic citizen

Finns, Swedes, Danes and Icelanders can start working in Norway without registering with the police or the immigration authority. You report your address to the Norwegian population register and sort out your tax deduction card with the Norwegian Tax Administration (Skatteetaten).

If you are from another EU/EEA country

You can move and start working right away, but you must register within three months of arriving: online through the

immigration directorate (UDI), then in person with the police. Registration is free and done once. Book early – in busy seasons the waiting lists are long.

If you are from outside the EU/EEA

You will normally need a work permit before you start, most often the skilled-worker permit. It generally requires a concrete job offer, documented training such as a trade certificate, and pay and conditions at Norwegian level. Read the requirements on udi.no carefully, and never pay anyone for a promise of a permit.

For everyone

- An ID number (D-number or national ID number) and a tax deduction card from Skatteetaten. Without the card, your employer has to deduct a high flat rate.
- A Norwegian bank account makes life easier, although many employers can pay to an EU account at first.
- A written employment contract. In Norway it is the law, not a favour.

Money talk

Norway has no general national minimum wage. Pay is set through collective agreements between unions and employers; in hotels and restaurants the key one is the national agreement for hotel and restaurant businesses. If your employer follows it, you get its rates whether or not you are a union member.

Under the 2026 agreement proposal, the minimum for a cook without a trade certificate on a 37.5-hour week ran from roughly 220 NOK an hour for a beginner to about 242 NOK after ten years in the trade. Cooks with a trade certificate earn more. Senior chefs negotiate above these levels.

- **Ask one question in the interview:** "Do you follow the tariff agreement?" The answer tells you a lot.
- **Overtime** must by law be paid with a supplement of at least 40 %, and many agreements give more.
- **Holiday pay** (feriepenger) is saved from your wages and paid out later, usually around 10-12 %.
- **Staff housing** is common in seasonal places. The rent is deducted from your pay – get the amount in writing before you arrive.

A good employer tells you the rent, the hours and the tariff before you ask. A bad one gets vague. Trust the vagueness.

Inside a Norwegian kitchen

The first thing you notice is the quiet. Nobody throws pans. Orders are called, answered and done. The head chef may chop onions next to the dishwasher, and nobody thinks that is strange. Norwegians call the unspoken rule of not putting yourself above others janteloven, and it shapes kitchens too. Arrogance does not travel well here.

- **Be on time.** Five minutes early is on time. On time is late.
- **Hours are real.** Breaks are taken and rotas are planned ahead. If you are used to sixteen-hour days for twelve hours of pay, you will need to unlearn it.
- **Food safety is public.** The Norwegian Food Safety Authority (Mattilsynet) inspects restaurants and publishes the result as a smiley at the door.
- **Language.** English works in most kitchens with international staff. Swedish and Danish are understood. Learn some Norwegian anyway.

Lofoten: the real thing

Lofoten is a chain of granite islands that rise straight out of the Norwegian Sea. Red fishing cabins on stilts, wooden racks hung with drying cod, mountains that make every photo look fake. One of the most beautiful places I have worked, and one of the most demanding.

At the resort I covered breakfast, lunch and à la carte dinner, and produced the food sold in the shop and café. I was given responsibility for the house cold-smoked salmon, the product guests asked about first. We refined the process until it took less time, cost less and wasted less, without losing what made it worth the trip. That is the kind of work Norway rewards: quiet improvement, done properly, every day.

The seasons decide everything

- **Winter cod season, roughly January to April.** The skrei, the migrating Arctic cod, arrives to spawn. Boats, racks and kitchens all run on cod.
- **Summer, late May to mid-July.** The midnight sun. The sun does not set, tourists arrive in force and your body forgets when to sleep.
- **Polar night, roughly early December to early January.** No sunrise at all. Some places close; the ones that stay open need staff who can handle it.

What to bring

- Real winter boots, wool layers and a windproof shell.
- Your own knives, sharpened, in a proper roll.
- A driving licence. A car turns a remote job into a life.
- A hobby that works in a small room.

Ingredients worth the trip

- **Skrei.** Seasonal Arctic cod, firm, white and clean. Treat it simply and it will make you look good.
- **Stockfish (tørrfisk).** Cod dried in the open air on wooden racks for months. Older than any recipe you know.
- **Cod tongues.** Fried in butter, a local delicacy.
- **Lamb** from coastal and mountain pastures, and **brown cheese** (brunost) – sweet, caramel-like, divisive.
- **Cloudberry and lingonberry.** A short summer, concentrated.

How to get hired

- **Apply early.** Summer seasons are often staffed from January to March. Winter and cod-season jobs are filled in the autumn.
- **Send a clean English CV** with dates, kitchens, your role and covers per service. Short and factual beats long and creative.
- **Expect a trial shift** or a video call with the head chef. Show your knife work, your hygiene and your calm.
- **Ask:** tariff agreement, hours, housing and its cost, travel costs, length of contract.
- **Have references ready** from chefs who saw you work, not only from managers who signed your papers.

Red flags

- Anyone who asks **you** to pay for a job, a permit or a place on a list.
- No written contract, or a contract that differs from what you were promised.
- Wages in cash, or housing deductions that appear only after you arrive.
- Pressure to start before your registration or permit is in order.

Last word

Norway will not make you famous. It will make you better. Cleaner systems, better ingredients, saner hours, and time to think about your food instead of just surviving the next service. If you are ready for that, and for a winter without sunrise, it might be the best move of your career.

If you want help finding the right kitchen, here or anywhere else, get in touch. I recruit cooks, service staff, supervisors and kitchen leaders for restaurants, hotels, resorts, embassies and remote sites across the Nordics, Japan and Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The employer pays my fee. Candidates never pay. Always.

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Facts in this guide were checked in October 2026. Rules, wages and agreements change: always confirm with udi.no, skatteetaten.no, arbeidstilsynet.no and your employer before you travel. This guide is general information, not legal, tax or immigration advice.