



Travel letter from Hotell Bondeheimen



DE HISTORISKE



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The sun is shining as we wheel our suitcases off the Airport Express Train and into the bustle of Oslo Central Station. Some have just arrived, while others are hurrying on towards trains, buses and new destinations. All around us, sounds mingle – the quick footsteps of business travellers with purposeful expressions and briefcases in hand, and the voices of travellers of all ages making their way to visit friends and family or setting off on new holiday adventures.

We have come to Oslo to visit our historic member, Hotell Bondeheimen – and to enjoy a few lovely summer days in the Norwegian capital.

Full of anticipation, we make our way towards Karl Johans gate, passing the iconic tiger standing guard outside the station. Oslo's main street is buzzing with tourists, shoppers and street musicians. At the far end, we pass the historic Grand Café, where guests have settled into tables outside, enjoying the sunshine with something refreshing in their glasses. Just a few steps further, right around the corner, stands the beautiful historic building that is home to Hotell Bondeheimen.



“It is the dream we carry within us, that something wonderful will happen.”

The building has stood proudly for more than a century, still owned by Bondeungdomslaget i Oslo, just as it was when it first opened as a home and gathering place for young people from rural Norway in 1913. Even before we step inside, we sense the hotel's strong connection to Nynorsk – one of Norway's two official written language forms, rooted in Norwegian rural dialects and cultural traditions. The slate paving stones outside are inscribed with short quotations from champions of the language and poets such as Ivar Aasen, Olav H. Hauge and Halldis Moren Vesaas – a warm welcome to guests and passers-by alike.

Just outside the entrance, we come across a familiar line of verse:

“It is the dream we carry within us,
that something wonderful will happen.”

As we make our way towards the reception, more lines of poetry begin to appear. On the wall behind the reception desk, the familiar poem by Olav H. Hauge unfolds in full – a poem once voted Norway's greatest of all time:

“at det må skje –
at tidi skal opna seg,
at hjarta skal opna seg,
at dører skal opna seg,
at berget skal opna seg,
at kjeldor skal springa –
at draumen skal opna seg,
at me ei morgonstund skal glida inn
på ein våg me ikkje har visst um.”

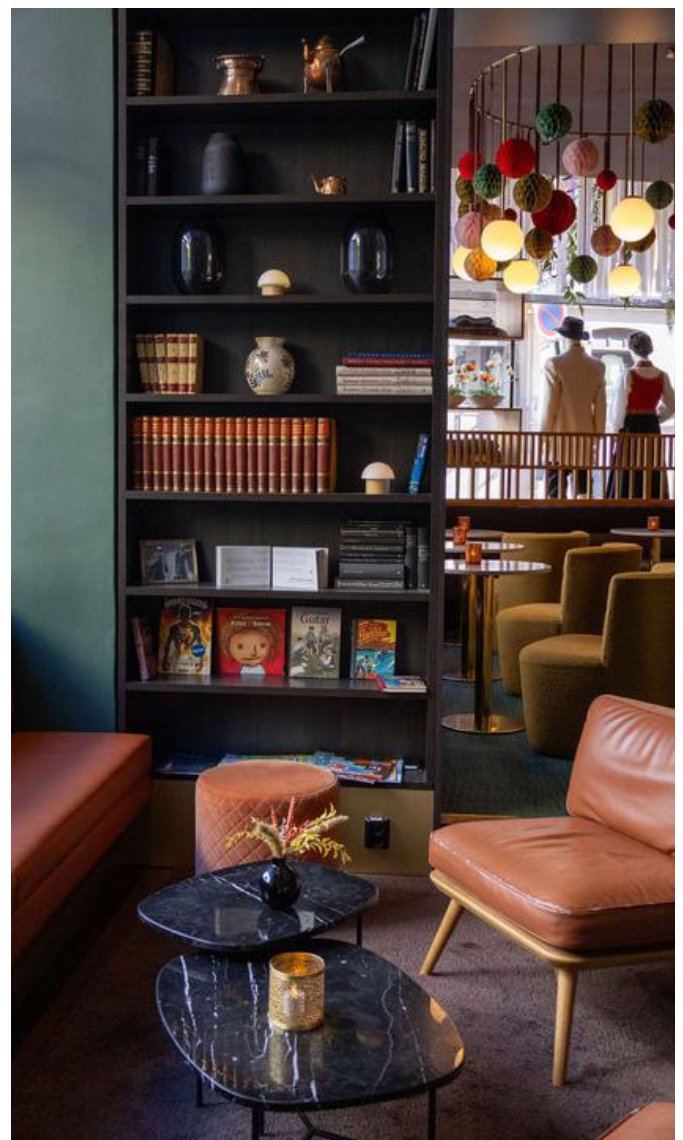
It translates like this; A quiet hope that one day, time and heart, doors and mountains, will open before us – that hidden springs will begin to flow and dreams will unfold, carrying us one morning into unknown waters, towards a place we never knew was there.

At reception, we are warmly welcomed by a smiling receptionist, who hands us our room keys and wishes us a pleasant stay.

Before heading to our rooms, we take some time to look around. The reception area includes a cosy lounge, inviting guests to relax for a while. In the windows, two mannequins dressed in traditional Norwegian bunads from Heimen Husfliden catch our eye – fittingly, their sewing workshop is also located in the building. The bookshelves are filled with an eclectic mix of timeless decorative pieces – candles, vases, pictures and small ornaments – alongside framed historical photographs. Among them, we spot a portrait of Hulda Garborg and a quote by Ivar Aasen:

“Ein god gjest gjer husbonden glad.”
(A good guest makes the host happy.)

A friendly nod from the past to today's travellers.





The shelves also hold books for guests to enjoy – a wonderfully varied collection ranging from classics by Mark Twain to the Norwegian Encyclopaedia of Bunad, from the story of Ivar Aasen to German translations of Jon Fosse. A little treasure trove of reading material, perfect for a quiet moment in one of the lounge chairs.

We have both been given rooms on the fifth floor, and on our way to the lift, a sign by the staircase catches our eye: “Take the stairs, and along the way you can enjoy these verses, written especially for Hotell Bondeheimen by Kjartan Fløgstad.”

Here, it seems, they are promoting not only Nynorsk, but a healthy lifestyle as well. With two suitcases in tow, however, we decide to save that particular experience for later.

The rooms are spacious and bright, decorated in a Nordic style and equipped with everything you need for a comfortable stay. There is a selection of coffee and tea, a small fridge, a safe, a TV with Chromecast and a desk – handy if you need to catch up on a little work in between adventures. The bathroom has a shower, a separate hairdryer and a selection of toiletries from Rituals.

The literary theme continues here as well. As part of the “Room for Literature” project, each of the hotel’s 145 rooms is dedicated to a writer or cultural figure with a connection to the hotel or Bondeungdomslaget. Quotes and portraits, accompanied by short biographies, are displayed on the walls.

In my room, pride of place is given to Gunnhild Øyehaug – a fellow native of Sunnmøre who, like me, has left her home region and made Bergen her base.

“The deer stood at the edge of the forest, feeling miserable. It seemed as though there was little point in anything, as though he might as well simply give up.

”Here I am, day after day,” thought the deer, “and no one ever sees me.”





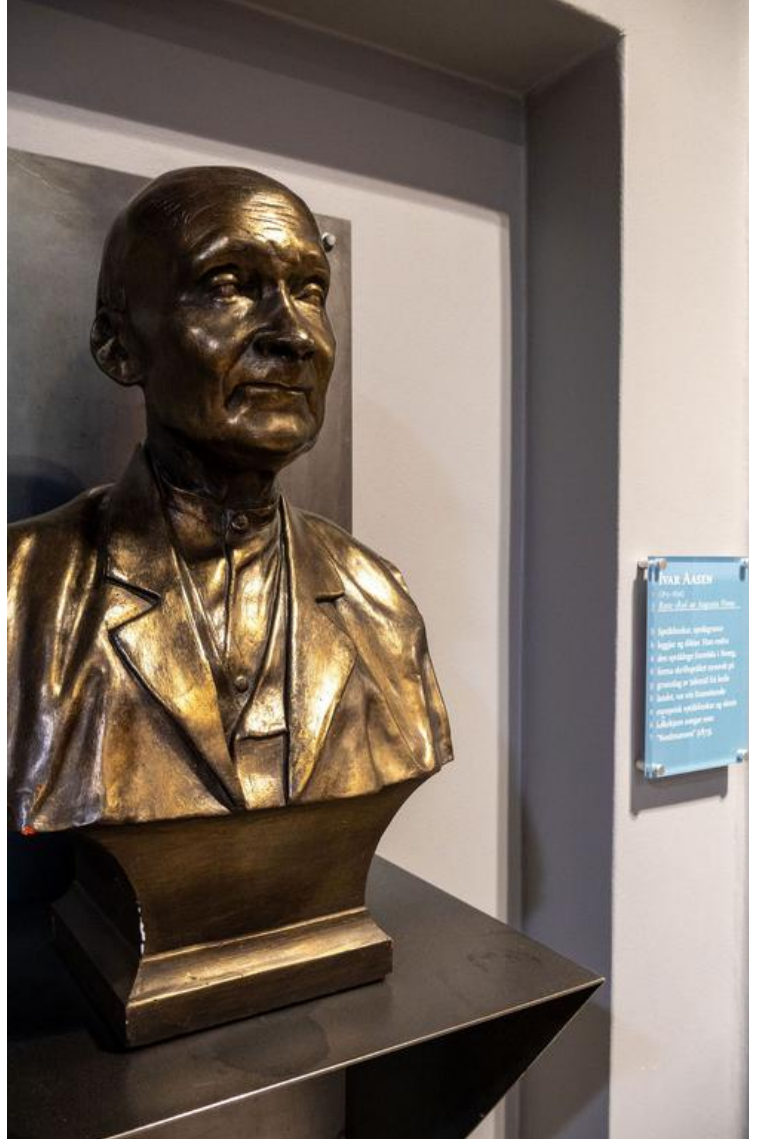


I make myself a cup of coffee and settle down at the desk. It is easy to let the mind wander and imagine all the literary figures who have walked these corridors before us. Perhaps some of them found inspiration right here, at Hotell Bondeheimen.

Over the years, the hotel was a favourite haunt of writers such as Knut Hamsun and Sigrid Undset, and legend has it that Hamsun spent an entire year at the hotel following a heated argument with his wife, Marie.

It was also here, at Bondeheimen, that the writers Halldis Moren and Tarjei Vesaas first met.

After a short break, we meet again outside our rooms and compare notes on the writers and quotes we have each been given. We then take the lift up to the seventh floor, and this time,

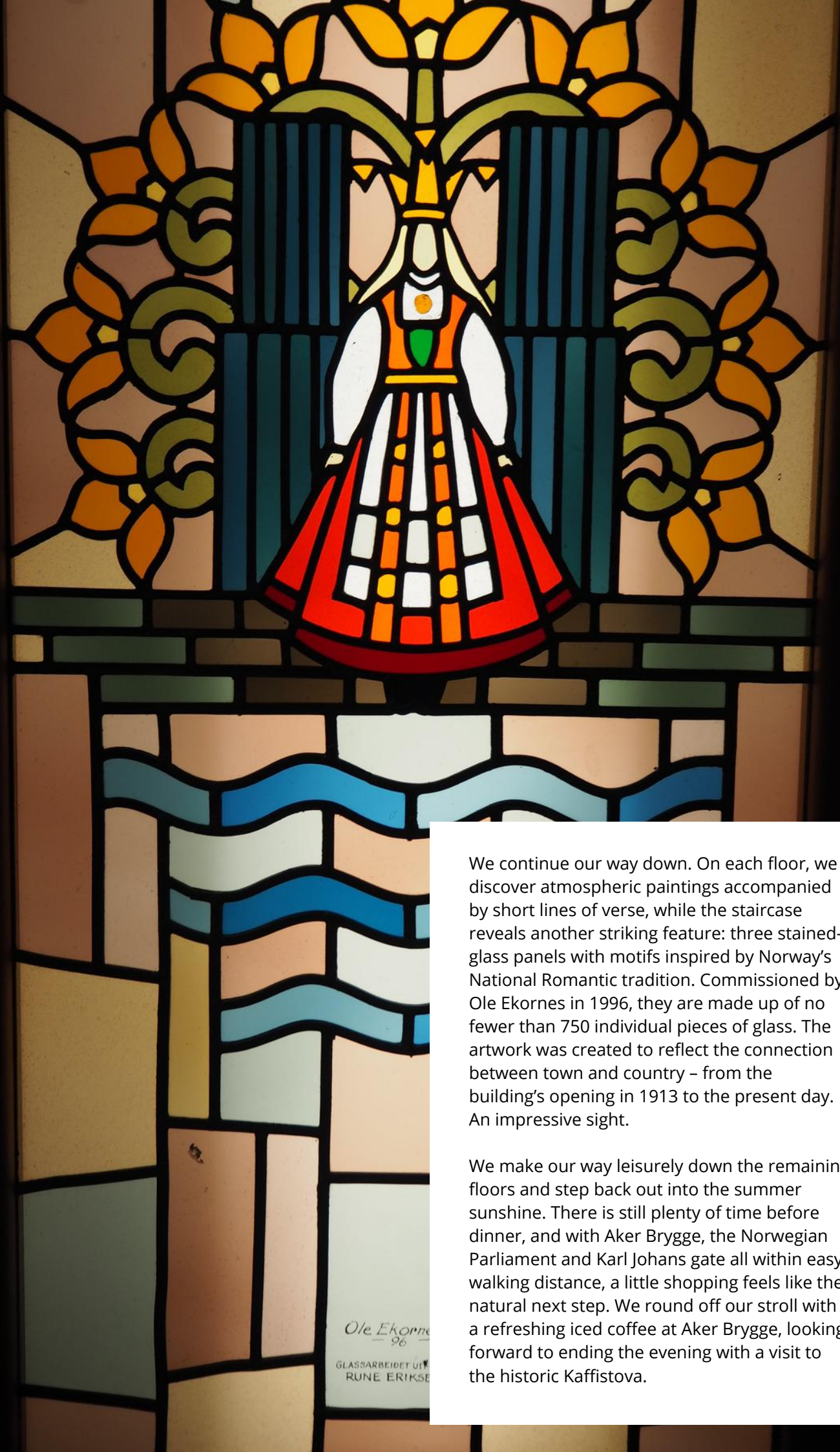


we make our way back down the stairs, reading Fløgstad's verses as we go.

Along the way, we also discover the hotel's meeting room, Tingstova – a warm and inviting space with a long table, perfect for board meetings or smaller gatherings. Just across the street are the hotel's larger conference facilities, making Bondeheimen a popular choice for business travellers as well.

We pass a bust of Ivar Aasen, known as the father of Nynorsk, created by Augusta Finne in 1868, and nearby hangs a self-portrait by the artist Aksel Waldemar Johannessen.

There are always little details to catch the eye here – from subtle works of art on the walls to decorative touches that hint at the hotel's long history. Each floor has a character of its own, and it is easy to find yourself drawn in.



We continue our way down. On each floor, we discover atmospheric paintings accompanied by short lines of verse, while the staircase reveals another striking feature: three stained-glass panels with motifs inspired by Norway's National Romantic tradition. Commissioned by Ole E Kornes in 1996, they are made up of no fewer than 750 individual pieces of glass. The artwork was created to reflect the connection between town and country – from the building's opening in 1913 to the present day. An impressive sight.

We make our way leisurely down the remaining floors and step back out into the summer sunshine. There is still plenty of time before dinner, and with Aker Brygge, the Norwegian Parliament and Karl Johans gate all within easy walking distance, a little shopping feels like the natural next step. We round off our stroll with a refreshing iced coffee at Aker Brygge, looking forward to ending the evening with a visit to the historic Kaffistova.

Ole E Kornes
96
GLASSARBEIDET UT
RUNE ERIKSE



A social gathering place for generations

As we step into Kaffistova, we are immediately embraced by a warm and welcoming atmosphere. The design is timeless yet modern, while the historic photographs on the walls tell stories of the generations who have passed through these doors before us.

One of the first images to catch our eye is a black-and-white portrait of Kjell, a much-loved regular who passed away in 2018. The restaurant manager tells us that he always had his favourite spot by the window – just as we see him in the photograph. A touching and personal tribute.

Kjell is just one of many people who have spent a significant part of their lives here.

Since opening in 1901, Kaffistova has been a gathering place where people from rural Norway could enjoy food and drink at an affordable price. But it soon became popular with a much broader crowd too – journalists, businesspeople, government ministers, actors, theatre-goers, tourists and students.

The food was intended to offer the comfort of a home-cooked meal, with wholesome, traditional Norwegian fare at its heart. The menu still features classics such as Norwegian meatballs, raspeball – traditional potato dumplings – fish gratin, and flesk og duppe, a traditional dish of pork served with a creamy white sauce.

It is said that the rice porridge once served every Saturday was also a favourite of Norwegian pop singer Morten Harket, who would often stop by with his own pot to take a generous helping home.

And of course – no meal is complete without dessert. From the very beginning, Kaffistova has been known for its homemade cakes and desserts, including classics such as Norwegian-style mille-feuille, apple cake and riskrem – a traditional rice pudding dessert with whipped cream – along with many other favourites from the Norwegian culinary tradition.

At the heart of the restaurant, today's tempting selection of cakes and sweet treats is on display, all handmade by Kaffistova's own pastry chef. It is hard not to be tempted.





Before we sit down for dinner, we are invited into the kitchen to meet the chefs in the midst of the action. The atmosphere is relaxed and spirits are high; they hum tunes and joke with one another, while still finding time to pose for the camera. Vegetables are chopped with precision, fish and meat are cooked to perfection, and sauces are prepared with careful attention to detail – all at a pace that makes it clear this is second nature to them, yet with a genuine sense of joy in what they do.

In the past, the menu was largely centred around traditional Norwegian home cooking, but in recent years the kitchen has evolved. The former set daily menu has now given way to an à la carte menu that puts quality Norwegian ingredients firmly in the spotlight. Alongside the time-honoured classics, you will find tempting smaller dishes such as fish soup and pulled lamb wrapped in traditional potato flatbread, as well as more familiar favourites such as burgers and pizza.

The pizza menu offers plenty of variety, with local toppings including Tronfjell cured ham and marinated reindeer. Fish lovers can choose from Arctic char, tusk and salmon, while the meat dishes include tempting options such as braised reindeer shank, beef tenderloin and traditional moose patties.

There is also a set three-course menu with an optional wine pairing, as well as an enticing selection of desserts. It is clear that the kitchen team has plenty to keep them busy!

The restaurant manager receives each plate with a steady hand and carries them out to the eagerly waiting guests. A plate of juicy pork tenderloin and a fresh, crisp Caesar salad make their way to the tables.

We can feel our own appetites beginning to stir, so we follow him back into the restaurant, where several new guests have already settled in and are enjoying something refreshing in their glasses.

We settle in at a cosy table by the window. Outside, darkness is beginning to settle over the capital, but the street is still bustling with life – a lively backdrop to our evening meal. We begin with a sparkling aperitif and take a moment to watch the world go by, a luxury that earlier generations here had to do without.

So deeply rooted was the establishment in its traditions that Kaffistova did not actually receive its licence to serve alcohol until 2018. In the early days of Bondeungdomslaget, alcohol was regarded as a potential danger to young people arriving from rural areas and finding their feet in the big city. All gatherings were therefore alcohol-free – a tradition that continued for more than a century. Today, Kaffistova is fully licensed and is happy to serve a glass of wine or beer with your meal, without losing sight of its roots.

The menu offers something for every taste, but we have already made up our minds. After all, we could hardly visit Kaffistova without trying their famous Norwegian meatballs.

We wait with anticipation, and we are not disappointed. The restaurant manager approaches with a smile, carrying two plates piled high with generous homemade Norwegian meatballs, served with creamed peas, potatoes and rich brown gravy – just as they should be. One bite, and we are transported straight back to childhood. It is easy to see why they are such a favourite.

Sadly, we have to abandon our plans to try one of the homemade cakes for dessert. We have both underestimated just how filling a proper Norwegian Sunday dinner can be, and have to admit defeat. Luckily, we still have another full day in the capital.



Did you know..

Bondeheimen's meatballs are so popular that they serve an incredible four tonnes of them every year. Stack them on top of one another, and they would reach an impressive 625 metres into the air!



Vi lagar
nydelige
smaker
på
bestilling.

Det er bare
en smake, for
det er så godt
og det er bare
en smake
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The Early Bird Catches the Worm

The next morning, I am woken by my alarm. It is half past six, and we have agreed to go for a run before breakfast. We pull on our workout clothes, fill our water bottles and lace up our running shoes. Outside, we are greeted by the fresh, cool morning air.

The sun has only just begun to appear above the rooftops, and the streets are quiet, as though the city were still asleep.

We run down Karl Johans gate, where the pavement cafés are still closed and the first stirrings of city life are beginning to appear. From there, we continue towards Aker Brygge, around the Opera House and back again, passing people on their way to work, cyclists and fellow runners. Every step feels fresh and light as the city slowly wakes around us.

Energised and rosy-cheeked, we return to the hotel for a shower and to get ready for breakfast. Our reward awaits in the form of a generous breakfast buffet laden with cheeses, muesli, freshly baked bread and a wide selection of cold cuts, spreads and vegetables.

Behind the counters, the chefs keep the hot dishes well stocked with scrambled eggs, potatoes, sausages and bacon.

We find a table on the lower floor of Kaffistova, a space that can also be reserved for private events. The interior is stylish and inviting. At the far end of the room is a separate bar, while a cosy seating area with a bookshelf and electric fireplace is tucked into one corner.

The walls feature artwork inspired by nature and wildlife, giving the room a character all its own. It is an ideal setting for company parties and celebrations of life's special occasions – and, for us, a peaceful and pleasant place to enjoy breakfast.

After breakfast, we meet outgoing hotel director Bjarte Lunde in reception for a tour and a chat.

He takes us on a tour of the different rooms, sharing stories from the hotel's long and fascinating history along the way.

Time flies. It is nearing 11 o'clock, and it is time for us to head back out into the streets of Oslo. Today, we have plans to enjoy lunch at another of our historic members, Festningen Restaurant.







Sea food and Cannon Salutes

We make our way down towards Oslo City Hall Square and stroll leisurely along the harbour towards Akershus Fortress. The sun is shining, and the streets that were almost deserted earlier this morning are now bustling with life.

Before long, the fortress appears ahead of us in all its splendour. We stop along the way to learn a little about its history and take in the panoramic views from the top, before following the fortress walls down to Festningen Restaurant.

The spacious outdoor terrace is already buzzing with guests chatting and laughing as they enjoy lunch in the sunshine.

We are welcomed by Lene and Elvira from Fursetgruppen's marketing team, who show us to a lovely table outside in the sun. We decide on a sharing menu and order a tempting selection from the summer menu: focaccia with a golden crust, a charcuterie board with cheese and cured meats, a fresh and colourful summer salad, and succulent langoustines.

The perfect summer lunch. Conversation flows easily until, out of nowhere, the boom of a cannon salute makes us all jump in our seats.

It takes us a few seconds to work out what is happening. It is noon, and today is Crown Princess Mette-Marit's birthday. Of course the occasion is marked with a cannon salute – that is simply how things are done at the Fortress!

After a lovely meal, and with our heart rates safely back to normal, we are invited inside for a look around the main restaurant. The restaurant reopened in May this year after being closed for two years and has undergone an extensive renovation.

The once dark interior is now filled with light surfaces, warm wood tones and exposed brick details, creating a fresh and spacious atmosphere. Large windows let in plenty of natural light and offer views across the Oslofjord. A wonderful setting for good food and long conversations.

We say our goodbyes and, with the sun warm on our faces, make our way back into the city centre. We each have separate appointments to get to, so we agree to meet again for dinner. I still have half an hour to spare before my next appointment, so I find a bench and sit down with a freshly bought ice cream, gazing out across the fjord and enjoying a quiet moment.

It pains me slightly to admit it, but as an adopted Bergenser, I have to concede that Oslo has a certain charm of its own.





A historical meal

A few hours later, we meet again outside Gamle Raadhus, a true landmark in Oslo's history. The building was constructed in 1641 under the direction of city councillor Lauritz Hansen, with financial support from King Christian IV, who contributed an impressive 1,000 riksdaler. In addition to serving as the city's town hall, the building was a gathering place for Oslo's citizens – while down in the dark cellars, criminals served their sentences after judgement had been passed.

In 1856, Oslo's first restaurant opened here, and the premises have been home to a restaurant ever since. Today, Gamle Raadhus is run by owner and chef Jørn Lie together with his wife, Pernille.

Gamle Raadhus is perhaps best known for its lutefisk, attracting guests every year in search of what many consider to be the best in the city. With trusted suppliers and chefs who are passionate about this quintessentially Norwegian delicacy, lutefisk takes centre stage when in season. The restaurant is also certified by Norske Akevitters Venner – the Norwegian association dedicated to aquavit culture – making it easy to find the perfect accompaniment in your glass.

During the summer months, the courtyard opens and the grill is fired up, creating a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Indoors, the cosy fireplace room offers a more intimate setting for private gatherings or a coffee and digestif enjoyed in front of the flames.

As we step into the main restaurant, it almost feels as though we have entered another era. White tablecloths stand out against the dark wood, heavy red curtains frame the windows, and candlelight casts a warm glow across the room. Old paintings line the walls, while the patterned chairs seem to tell stories of their own. The atmosphere is elegant, yet warm and welcoming.

Jørn himself comes over to greet us before we settle in at a lovely table by the window.





The menu takes us on a tempting journey through locally sourced ingredients. Mussels, creamy fish soup and veal tartare are among the enticing starters, while the main courses showcase the very best of Norway's seas, forests and mountains. The dessert menu tempts with local cheeses, vanilla-poached plums, crumbles, ice cream and sorbet. It is enough to make your mouth water!

Still a little full from lunch, we decide to skip the starters and head straight for the main courses. We settle on reindeer and monkfish, accompanied by wines carefully selected by the sommelier.

Our waiter arrives with a smile, carrying dishes that look every bit as inviting as they taste. The reindeer is beautifully tender and succulent, served with reindeer sausage from Røros, wild mushrooms, carrot purée and a silky-smooth game velouté.

The pan-fried monkfish is perfectly firm and succulent, complemented by creamy wild mushrooms, spinach and a rich porcini sauce that brings together flavours of both sea and forest.

Around us, the room fills with conversation and laughter, the clinking of glasses, and attentive waiters making sure everything runs seamlessly.

As the evening unfolds and we savour the last sips in our glasses, it is easy to understand why Gamle Raadhus has been a gathering place in the city for more than 160 years. Here, history and tradition come together with a love of good food and a warm, inviting atmosphere.

We leave the table full and content, with the feeling that we have just been served a little taste of Oslo's cultural heritage on a plate.



Back at Bondeheimen, it feels especially good to curl up in the soft bed. Optimistically, I try to watch a little TV, but the day has taken its toll, and before long my eyes begin to close.

The lights go out, and a peaceful silence settles over the room.

The next morning, we enjoy one last delicious breakfast before checking out, thank the hotel for a wonderful stay.

Oslo has certainly shown us its best side – with historic gems, memorable flavours and those little moments that stay with you long after the journey is over.

Thank you for having us. We hope to see you again soon!

Read more about Hotell Bondeheimen and book your stay [here](#).





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