



17

Ways to Celebrate Syttende Mai Close to Home

On May 17 (Syttende Mai), we celebrate Norway's national day to commemorate the signing of the country's constitution in 1814. It's a time for celebrating Norwegian culture and coming together with family and community. While many in-person parades and celebrations are still on hold, there are plenty of ways you can celebrate close to home. Here are some festive ideas to get the party started.

By Rachel Guyah

Get Dressed

Whether you're heading out or staying in, wear your heritage heart on your sleeve—literally! The traditional bunad folk costume is a dazzling choice, with stunning jewelry and embroidery. But you can also wear, knit or buy a variety of Nordic-inspired apparel. Choose from cardigans, pullovers, socks, neck ties or even face masks (a fun choice for safer social gatherings)—with so many options, it's easy to find Syttende Mai fashion that shows off your love of Norway and personal style.

1

Buy a Nordic-inspired face mask.

2

Sew your own festive face mask.

3

Buy (or knit!) your favorite Nordic wear.

Online shopping ideas:

- **Etsy** ([etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com)): fabric, face masks, clothing, accessories
- **Spoonflower** ([spoonflower.com](https://www.spoonflower.com)): fabric, face mask patterns/kits
- **Vesterheim Museum Shop** (store.vesterheim.org)
- **Ingebretsen's** ([ingebretsens.com](https://www.ingebretsens.com)): yarn, needles, patterns, books
- **Ravelry** ([ravelry.com](https://www.ravelry.com)): A free social networking site for knitters, crocheters and fiber artists. You can search for, save and download patterns for a variety of Nordic folk patterns/motifs.



SweetTeasEtc on Etsy.

Get Cookin'



Whip up your favorite Norwegian dish(es).



Test out a new Scandinavian recipe.



Host a virtual cooking class with your children or grandchildren.



Have a picnic a la Norge.



Organize a potluck swap.

Remember to check out recipes from Sons of Norway's Recipe Box at sofn.com.

Food is a focal point for any Syttende Mai celebration.

If you're craving comfort, you can mix up your favorite Nordic breads, buns, pastries and much more. Feeling adventurous? Use Syttende Mai as an opportunity to test out new recipes! Tickle your taste buds with lamb shank pies, burgers with bacon marmalade, berry porridge (*råkkrem*) topped with crushed almonds, and Norwegian

cookies—what a delicious way to honor Norway's independence.

Whatever you decide to make, feel free to spread the love! There are many ways to eat and celebrate with loved ones, even at a distance.

You can organize a potluck swap, where each person drops off a dish at the other homes. If weather and public health guidance permits, you could consider eating together at a small outside gathering. Otherwise, you

can dine and chat virtually over a video call on Zoom, Google Meet or another video chat app. (Tip: Pair your dessert with a playful game of Norwegian trivia—see page 24.)

May is a wonderful time of year to enjoy a picnic, too. So, whatever you make or bake, pack it along for a visit to your favorite local park or hiking trail—or simply just your own backyard.

Another fun idea: Host a “live” cooking or baking

session via video chat! Invite your friends or family to join. Share the recipe in advance so you can all bake together.

Ice cream and *pølse med lompe* (hot dogs/sausage wrapped in a lefse-like flatbread) are two staples for Syttende Mai celebrations in Norway. Feel free to pack along these guilty pleasures for your backyard picnic or potluck—it's a sweet ‘n’ salty way to celebrate *a la Norge!*

Picnic Favorites

Looking for some recipes to make for your next gathering? Here are some of our favorites from previous issues of *Viking* magazine.



PHOTO: NTB SCANPIX / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Get Outside

9

Walk around your favorite lake or park.

10

Explore a new nature trail.

11

Play Kubb!

12

Find your own *friluftsliv*.

As many know, the great outdoors isn't simply a hobby for Norwegians—it's at the very heart and soul of their collective identity. They even have a word for this lifestyle: *friluftsliv* (life in the open air).

By the time Syttende Mai arrives, spring has firmly sprung—and with it all the wonderful sights, sounds and smells of a world reawakened.

Celebrate Syttende Mai by enjoying your own flavor of *friluftsliv* (enjoyment of the open air)—be it hiking, biking or paddling a canoe. It doesn't have to be rigorous; a simple stroll through the woods is more than enough. You'll not only reconnect with nature, but also with your fellow Norwegians, both ancestral and present day.



Fun Family Game:
If small social gatherings are permitted in your area, why not challenge each other to a playful game of kubb (pronounced “koob”)? This outdoor lawn game naturally allows for safe social distancing and is fun for all ages. The game has exploded across North America in recent years, so it's easy to find kubb sets in stores and online. (Tip: For maximum durability, buy a set that's made from knot-free, shock-absorbent rubber wood.)

PHOTO (LEFT) BY JOHNER IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



WAYS TO FIND NATURE TRAILS NEAR YOU:

- Your state's DNR website
- Your state's official tourism website
- Your city or county's Parks and Recreation Department



Go to Norway (Virtually)

13

Take a 3D tour of Norway's iconic sea vessels.

14

Curate your own custom collection of Norwegian art.

15

Sink into an episode of Norway's famous Slow TV.

Recently, many museums have had plenty of time to innovate and craft virtual, online tour experiences for the public. Get your sea legs ready and hop aboard one of three iconic vessels from Norway's history online in 3D: The mighty polar ship *Fram*, the famed *Kon-Tiki* balsa raft, or the *Oseberg* Viking ship.

Here's a fun idea for art lovers: Create your own virtual art exhibit! Norway's National Museum has digitized 45,000 objects from its collection, including paintings, sculptures, photography, furniture and textiles. By creating a free online profile, you can save objects to your own “personal” collection, then share them with loved ones via a custom

hyperlink. Whether you want to relish the masterpieces or unearth hidden gems, the digital collection is a wonderful way to discover Norway's vibrant art history and culture.

After sunset, wrap up your Syttende Mai festivities with an episode from Norway's revolutionary “Slow TV” movement—a series of sweeping, slow-paced documentary experiences broadcast by the NRK. Settle in with Nordic snacks as you watch immersive, real-time footage of some of Norway's most breathtaking journeys by train or ship. You can also tune in to watch salmon fishing, knitting, and a nine-day expedition around Svalbard.

Virtual Visits



Norway's National Museum
[nasjonalmuseet.no/en/collection](https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/collection)



Slow TV from NRK
bit.ly/3lrLksL



3D Tour of the *Fram*
bit.ly/3qPejIh



3D Tour of *Kon-Tiki*
bit.ly/2OFdcxF



3D Tour of *Oseberg* Viking Ship
bit.ly/38oYUI1

PHOTOS (LEFT TO RIGHT): INGER IN BLACK AND VIOLET (1899), EDVARD MUNCH / NASJONALMUSEET FOR KUNST, ARKITEKTUR OG DESIGN, THE FINE ART COLLECTIONS, COURTESY NRK, ANDREY ANDRONOV / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, ALBUM / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Get to Know Norway's History

16

Learn more about Norway's history online.

17

Test your knowledge with our fun trivia game!

Explore Norway's history:

The Storting (Norwegian Parliament): stortinget.no

The Royal Family: royalcourt.no

The Norwegian Encyclopedia's section on May 17: https://snl.no/17._mai

Perhaps one of the most meaningful ways to celebrate Syttende Mai is to learn more about the events leading up to it—that is, the events leading up to May 17, 1814. Norway's road to a constitution—and eventually, its return to independence—stretches across centuries of triumph and tragedy. Reconnect with your heritage by learning more about the key people and events involved along the way.

It's Trivia Time!

How much do you know about Norway's constitution and national holiday?

1. What happened in early 1814 that prompted Norway to seize the opportunity to draft their own constitution?

- A Sweden had been forced to forfeit Norway to Denmark.
- B Denmark had been forced to forfeit Norway to Sweden.
- C France had defeated Denmark.

2. Which of the following statements were included in the new constitution?

- A Norway is a free, independent and indivisible realm.
- B There should be freedom of religion and of the press.
- C Both A and B.

3. The constitution was adopted by members of the national assembly on May 17, 1814—and with it they elected a king. How many years had it been since Norway was ruled by its own king?

- A 400 years
- B 500 years
- C 350 years

4. Norway's constitution was one of many drafted by different European nations during the tumultuous years of the Napoleonic Wars. How many of those other constitutions still survive today?

- A None
- B 1
- C 2

5. Sweden was not pleased with Norway's attempt to break free. How long after that May 17 constitution did Sweden attack Norway?

- A 2 months
- B 3 months
- C 4 weeks

6. At first, Syttende Mai celebrations were mostly held in private by the upper-middle class. However, a Danish-born merchant led the charge to expand and open up these celebrations to all citizens. What was this merchant's name?

- A Henrik Wergeland
- B Matthias Conrad Peterson
- C Hans Christian Johan

7. The most prominent part of any Syttende Mai celebration is the children's parade. Which beloved Norwegian writer is credited to have organized the first children's parade in 1870?

- A Henrik Ibsen
- B Knut Hamsun
- C Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

Answers

1. A: Denmark had been forced to forfeit Norway to Sweden.

After defeating Denmark's ally, France, in 1813, Sweden pressured Denmark to forfeit Norway over to them under the terms in the Treaty of Kiel, signed January 1814. The people of Norway rejected this treaty, and they leveraged the fragile gap during this transition of power to hatch a plan to assert their own path forward.

2. C: Both A and B.

Freedom of religion and the press were both included in the constitution that was adopted on May 17, 1814. The constitution also stated that executive power should lie with the King, and the legislative power should lie with a popularly elected national assembly.

3. B: 500 years

On May 17, 1814, Norway elected Christian Frederick, then-heir to the Danish throne, to be Norway's first king in 500 years. He had already been residing in Norway as Denmark's appointed Vice-Regent. However, when the Treaty of Kiel was signed and he was commanded to surrender all Norwegian forts and return to Denmark, Frederick refused. He chose to stay and lead the Norwegian resistance.

4. A: None

Numerous constitutions were passed in Europe during those revolutionary years of the Napoleonic Wars, but only Norway's is still in existence today. In fact, Norway's constitution is the second-oldest living constitution the world. (The top spot goes to the United States.)

5. A: 2 months

Norway's newfound liberation was brief: By July 1814, Swedish forces had invaded the country and defeated the defenders. King Frederick was forced to step down as King of Norway as they entered a union with Sweden. However, Norway was able to remain a sovereign state with its own constitution.

6. B: Matthias Conrad Peterson

In 1826, Peterson organized Norway's first citizen parade for Syttende Mai. The parade included thousands of Norwegians from all socioeconomic classes, who marched through Trondheim's streets to proudly celebrate Norway's constitution. Over the years these parades have grown far and wide, not just in Norway but also across North America.



7. C: Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

The beloved patriot, poet and playwright organized the first children's *barnetog* (parade) in Christiania (now Oslo) in 1870. The inclusion of children was—and is—symbolic, as it emphasizes the belief that children hold the key to a strong national future. Bjørnson's poem, "Ja, vi elsker dette landet" (Yes, We Love This Land) also provides the lyrics to Norway's national anthem.



Syttende Mai: Then vs. Now

For a fascinating look at the birth of Norway's constitution and how Syttende Mai celebrations have evolved over the years, check out the Sons of Norway Information Bank #201: Syttende Mai at sofn.com. You'll also learn about the colorful key characters involved in shaping Norway's national holiday.

