

HOTEL INTEL

NEO-NORDIC THIEF REFLECTS CHIC, ARTISTIC OSLO



ROCHELLE LASH

The Thief reflects everything that is chic and cosmopolitan in the exciting capital city of Oslo and that includes elegant contemporary decor, lofty gastronomy, sublime Scandinavian spa life and avant-garde art and architecture.

It was my first visit to Norway and I had imagined people plunging into icy fiords, plus lots of woolly sweaters, Viking ships and skiing.

Those classic attractions prevail, but The Thief is a leading light of innovative neo-Nordic hospitality and an example of the modern opulence of oil-rich Norway. The hotel even has a cameo role on Exit, the Scandinavian TV series about the extravagance of financial world hotshots, a sort-of Billions on steroids.

The Thief is an eco-conscious enterprise in a nation that is considered one of the greenest in the world. (Norway's oil production is deemed relatively clean, e-cars represent about 80 per cent of recent sales, and such cruise companies as Hurtigruten Norway are transitioning rapidly to eco-operations.)

Billionaire developer and environmentalist Petter A. Stordalen, head of Strawberry Hospitality Group, which owns The Thief, has established a program with local food and energy efficient systems for heat, waste and water.

Art theme: The hotel gets its handle from its location on Tjuvholmen, also known as Thieves' Island, in the Oslo Fjord, once a haven for smugglers and robbers.

Today, it's an ultra-gentrified district popping with upscale



The Thief, a luxurious boutique hotel in Oslo, is a leading light of innovative neo-Nordic hospitality and an example of the modern opulence of oil-rich Norway. *THE THIEF*

condos, superb restaurants, fashionable boutiques and rich culture at Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art (hotel guests have free entry) and the outdoor Tjuvholmen skulpturpark. A walkway leads over canals to the Nobel Peace Centre, Oslo city hall and the new National Museum, which has an Edvard Munch exhibition including The Scream, one of the world's most viewed paintings.

For more of the best of Oslo, segue to the Harbour Promenade, a nearly 10-kilometre linear park along the fiord that passes through districts like vibrant Bjørvika. Here you'll see the Oslo Opera House and MUNCH, another museum with many of the master's superb works, as well as special features for children, teens and the visually impaired.

The Thief's collection, curated by former director of the Nation-

al Museum Sune Nordgren, is a smorgasbord of photography, sculpture, digital art and Richard Prince's revalidations (copies and new interpretations) of iconic works by Piet Mondrian and even the Marlboro Man photographs of Norm Clasen.

Interiors: Beautifully designed with a curved glass facade and floor-to-ceiling windows, The Thief glows day and night with light from the changing sky and reflections from the Oslo Fjord. The slate grey and ocean blue walls shimmer with gold, silver and bronze accents, and the sofas are covered in sumptuous jewel-toned velvets. It's an intimate and sensual atmosphere.

The 112 rooms and suites, layered with luxurious down bedding, are equipped with rain showers (some with baths), art on demand on TV, espresso machines and extensive mini-bars. Many have balconies and

some have two. Sweet details include Balmain toiletries, deluxe bathrobes and evening turndown with herbal tea and chocolates.

Food/drink: The Thief Restaurant fuses Norwegian ingredients and French techniques, so the cuisine is market fresh and the sauces delicate, all creatively presented on custom-made tableware and fine white damask tablecloths.

At dinner, starters might be beef tartare, organic smoked salmon, venison or langoustines with beurre blanc. Caviar plays a starring role, with even an affordable choice from Nordic waters. Main courses include sirloin steak, a tender pork cutlet or cod (Norway's staple, cooked to perfection). Light and flavourful desserts are yuzu tarte, chocolate fondant with coffee and cherries or Norwegian cheeses. Watch for beef Wellington on Wednes-

IF YOU GO

Oslo Tourism: visitoslo.com.
Norway: innovationnorway.no.

The Thief: Phone: 47-24-00-40-00, thethief.com. Landgangen 1, Oslo, Norway. Member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts. Accessible.

Price: Rates fluctuate. May to September, from around \$575 Canadian; Oct-April, from around \$480, including buffet breakfast, evening turndown. October-April can be lower.

days and lobster and bubbles on Tuesdays.

Lunch is a feast of such Norwegian specialties as Skagen toast (Nordic shrimp), lobster or oysters, plus salads or burgers.

The Thief Roof Grill and Bar are social hubs with great views, as well as craft cocktails, a connoisseur's selection of rosé champagne and wine, and a signature seafood platter.

I did spot a true-to-life 20th century Viking in the lounge. Norwegian journalist, filmmaker and explorer Ragnar Thorseth conquered the North Pole (through Nunavut), rowed solo across the North Sea and captained a replica of a Viking sailboat around the world.

Spa life: The Thief's wellness experiences include a fitness centre (no charge) and a full service spa (fees apply, \$25-\$38) that encompasses an indoor pool, Turkish steam, a Scandinavian sauna, massaging rain showers, and beauty and body services. Signature treatments include the Ikuo Balance and Calm Ritual, which will soothe travel stress. For a grand finale, Norway-style, The Thief is adjacent to a canal with a staircase if you are pumped for a dip in the Oslo Fjord.

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TRAVEL BRIEFS

'Frozen' fences get spiked in Austria

An Austrian village that is the inspiration for scenes in the Disney movie Frozen has been forced to take down a fence it put up to stop it being overwhelmed by selfie seekers. After a social media backlash, officials in the film-set-pretty alpine village of Hallstatt have torn down the "privacy screen" erected in an effort to curb the number of tourists descending on its narrow streets. As many as 7,000 people a day arrive to take pictures at the beauty spot that inspired the kingdom of Princess Elsa in the movie. The mayor, Alexander Scheutz, said something had to be done to preserve the tranquillity of Hallstatt, which has a population of just 750 and has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site because of its cosy lakeshore location huddled against the Dachstein mountains. Scheutz told the Upper Austrian News website that the two wooden fences — erected at a spot where visitors can be photographed with the lake, the mountains and pastel-coloured houses as a backdrop — have now been removed. "It was just a tryout," he said. "We discussed it in the municipal council. But the plan has now been discarded. There will be no such privacy screen in Hallstatt."

Corks popping over Kiwi wine honour

New Zealand is joining the top shelf of wine tourism destinations after its Hawke's Bay region was named the 12th Great Wine Capital of the world. Joining the likes of the Napa Valley, Bordeaux and Bilbao in Spain, Hawke's Bay — on the east coast of the country's North Island — is highly regarded for its full-bodied Chardonnays and Bordeaux-style reds. It forms New Zealand's second-largest regional wine industry, after Marlborough, and is one of its oldest, dating to 1851 when missionaries planted vineyards to make sacramental wines. The first commercial sale of wines

followed in 1870, and by the 1920s it was a thriving hub of wineries including many that are still operating today. The elevation to wine capital followed a strict selection process weighing its wine tourism, history and business and travel links, among other criteria.

New flights unlock 'magical' destinations

Air Canada has announced a new year-round service between Toronto and Yellowknife as it promotes the "magical attraction" of the country's Far North. The non-stop, three-times-a-week service will allow more visitors to take in the spectacular Northern Lights, as well as providing a valuable link for business travellers. Air passengers will be able to seamlessly connect to other northern destinations, such as Hay River and Inuvik, through a partnership with Canadian North. Air Canada executive Mark Galardo said: "The North has a magical attraction and Air Canada is pleased to make it easier for customers to visit Yellowknife and beyond, beginning at a time when the Northern Lights are on full display. But apart from supporting tourism to the city and region, this new route will also be valuable to business travellers and the economy, linking Yellowknife directly to Canada's financial capital." A spokeswoman for N.W.T. Tourism said the new Toronto-Yellowknife service will allow for convenient connections for international visitors. "We are thankful for Air Canada's continued efforts to increase air access to the N.W.T., and appreciate their support towards the N.W.T. tourism industry, our businesses and our residents," Donna Lee Demarcke said. The new service will begin in December, using Canadian-made Airbus A220 aircraft, and will run alongside Air Canada's twice-daily service between Yellowknife and Vancouver, and its weekly Yellowknife-Edmonton run.

Andre Ramshaw, for Postmedia News



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