Standing in the Munch Museum in the Toyen district of Oslo, contemplating ‘The Scream’, its black river pouring until existential turmoil on to the head of its protagonist, it is easy to fathom the long, dark Norwegian winter and its effect on the national disposition. OK, it is summer, but outside a very different picture of Oslo is being painted. The city is cracking with regenerative energy and youthful exuberance like the sprockets of a well-oiled engine, fuelled by the black river of oil wealth flowing in from the North Sea.

A morning spent sipping mango smoothies amid Oslo’s bohemian youth at Bugges EFTF on Markveien impressed upon me a sense of kindling vitality. The vibrant and kinetic Grunnerlokka is comparable with London’s Shoreditch or New York’s Greenwich Village in that it is a dilapidated industrial district recently colonised by the young and upwardly mobile and turned chic. Alive with creativity and artistic brio, it seems as if there is a boutique clothing store at every turn. I duly investigate, not being a girl to pass up the opportunity for a spot of retail ‘research’. Sjarm is a trove of vintage treasures with the usual bounty of quirky clothing and accessories as well as a plethora of antique furniture and bric-a-brac clutter. Also worth a look are Fretex Unika, a Salvation Army charity shop specialising in vintage and remastered clothing, and Dukkehiem, a wall-to-wall farrago of second-hand garms.

The Oslo Fotokunstskole is a small independent photographic gallery on Schous Plass showing abstract interpretations of Norwegian landscapes. The work is a little parochial but often pleasingly idiosyncratic and offers an enthralling insight into the way Oslo looks to an insider.

For a more international collection, go to the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, on Akershusstranda, or the nearby National Museum for everything from medieval Norwegian tapestries to visions of futuristic architecture.

Gallery hopping is thirsty work and the banks of the Akereliva River which meanders through Oslo’s east side are replete with vibrant cafes offering al fresco dining. I stop off at Delicatessen for rehydration. It is an artsy Tapas bar with...
artistic murals from floor to ceiling. The food is rich and inexpensive for Oslo, which isn’t saying much in the most expensive city in the world.

Eating out in Oslo really is expensive and the alcohol prices are much to blame. This is a result of high taxes and it’s lucky I am not a beer drinker because at up to 70 NOK (£7) a pop I’d be hitting the road before the bottle... Akvavit, the local poison, affectionately known as aquavit or ‘water of life,’ is a blend of potatoes and caraway seeds, equally likely to have me hitting the road but face first this time.

A short walk south, I stumbled across Hauama, the true beating heart of Oslo’s art scene, from the grotto of Gronnerkula. It is a large square, sequenced with graffiti art and inhabited by a collective of musicians, artists and activists, an urban wasteland made with make-shift theatres, studios and guerilla art. It is reminiscent of the famous Favela art squat in Paris, and is constantly buzzing with festivals, performance dance and film screenings.

The Torpedo bookshop is tucked inapropriously into a dilapidated building next to Hauama. It is an independent book store-come-publishing-house and often affiliates with Hauama in the production of events and exhibitions focusing on contemporary art and visual culture. The vibe is counter-cultural and it’s utbane mural and stark lighting it feels like a more subversive version of London’s ICA.

The main modes of transport in Oslo are the T-Bane, a cute six-line metro, an extensive and clean tram network and ferries that connect the various islands across the fjord. The streets are thronged with ecologically conscientious locals taking advantage of the extensive City Bike scheme and ubiquitous cycle lanes and there is a congestion toll on cars entering the city too with the result that traffic is fairly scant. This gives Oslo a rare serenity, peculiar for such a cosmopolitan municipality.

The city centre is fairly compact and armed with comfortable footwear it is perfectly possible to walk your way around too. I decided a stroll from east to west was the best way to absorb some of the nuances of Oslo’s architecture. The east is a modernist Georgian pastiche, if Havana had been pinched by Oslo and dropped onto an icy basin in the tundra. The striking new opera house near the central station is a Snøhetta designed masterpiece, half-submerged at the waterfront like the cusp of a glacier. I found a two hour sight-seeing boat cruise around the islands of the fjord was the perfect way to see a city. It seems a world away from the bleak despair of March’s famous painting. I sip with a little too much enthusiasm on a Coco La Motte, a cocktail of Munch’s famous painting. I let out a little shriek of my own. My throat burns as the fiery concoction passes and I let

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