

Tønsberg

Vestfold and Telemark County · Norway

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Tønsberg is usually called Norway's oldest town. It sits at the head of a sheltered fjord arm, about 100 km south of Oslo. The history is easy to see: castle ruins on a hill above the centre, a famous Viking ship burial mound just north of town, and a harbour where boats have landed for more than a thousand years.

The town is small and relaxed. In summer, life moves to the wooden waterfront, Brygga, and out to the islands of Nøtterøy and Tjøme, where bridges lead to smooth rocks, beaches and Færder National Park. Tønsberg suits a calm two- or three-night stay that mixes Viking history with time by the sea. Chess champion *Magnus Carlsen* was born here.

When to visit

June to August is the best time to visit. Days are long, the sea is warm enough to swim, and boats run to the islands. Spring and early autumn are quiet and pleasant for walking, though many island services close outside summer. Winters are dark and cold, with snow in some years.

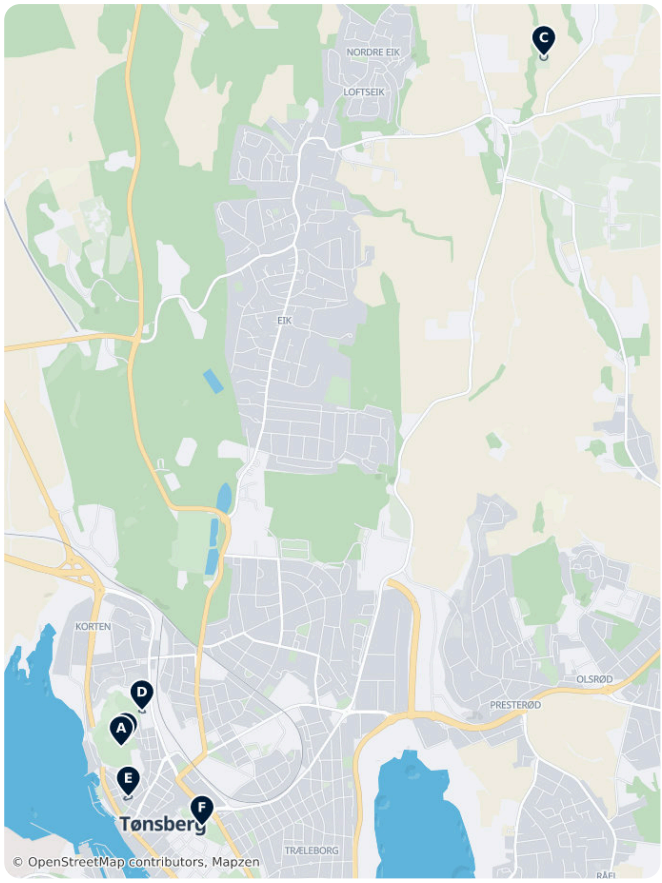
The biggest annual event is the **Slottsfjell** music festival in July. It brings big Norwegian and international acts to a site near the waterfront, and hotels fill up early.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for sightseeing	0° / 7° Feels like -5°	-4° / -14°	13 rainy days · Dry air
February	Poor Poor for sightseeing	1° / 7° Feels like -4°	-3° / -12°	Dry air
March	Poor Poor for sightseeing	5° / 11° Feels like 0°	-1° / -8°	Dry air · Calm winds
April	Poor Poor for sightseeing	10° / 16° Feels like 6°	3° / -2°	Dry air · Calm winds
May	Good Good for sightseeing	15° / 22° Feels like 12°	8° / 3°	12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
June	Good Good for sightseeing	19° / 25°	12° / 8°	12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
July	Great Great for sightseeing	21° / 27°	14° / 11°	13 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
August	Great Great for sightseeing	20° / 25°	14° / 11°	13 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
September	Good Good for sightseeing	16° / 20°	11° / 7°	12 rainy days · Dry air
October	Poor Poor for sightseeing	10° / 15° Feels like 7°	6° / 1°	14 rainy days · Dry air
November	Poor Poor for sightseeing	5° / 11° Feels like 1°	2° / -4°	15 rainy days · Dry air
December	Poor Poor for sightseeing	2° / 8° Feels like -3°	-2° / -12°	14 rainy days · Dry air

Best months: July, August

Climate data: NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5-Land and ERA5 · 1996–2025

Top sights



A Tunsberghus is the ruin of a medieval royal castle on Slottsfjellet, the hill above the centre. It was one of Norway's main fortresses until Swedish troops destroyed it in 1503. Today you walk among low stone walls and church ruins, then climb B Slottsfjelltårnet, a granite tower from 1888, for a view over the town and the fjord.

C Oseberghaugen is the burial mound where the Oseberg ship was found in 1904, about 5 km north of the centre in Slagen. The grave dates from 834 and is one of the richest Viking burials ever found. The ship itself will be shown at the new Museum of the Viking Age in Oslo, which has not yet opened, so check before you go. Come here for the quiet landscape and the sense of place.

D Slottsfjellsmuseet sits at the foot of the castle hill. It covers local history, whaling and seafaring, and it displays a large whale skeleton. Behind it, the open-air Vestfoldtunet shows old farm buildings moved here from around the county.

- **Brygga** is the long waterfront along the canal, lined with restaurants and bars in old wharf buildings. It is the centre of town life on summer evenings.
- **Saga Oseberg** is a full-size, sailing copy of the Oseberg ship. It is usually moored at Vikingodden in the harbour, except when away on summer voyages.
- E Tønsberg domkirke is a brick church from 1858 in the town centre, with a pulpit from 1621.
- F Haugar kunstmuseum shows older and contemporary art in a former seamen's school. Next to it are the Haugar mounds, where kings were once proclaimed.

Tønsberg – Plan Your Trip

Turn the places from this guide into a real itinerary, with smart routing, time estimates, and everything you need for a perfect trip.

3M+ downloads · **4.6 stars** · **15 years of trip planning**

App Store · Google Play

Scan to download the app

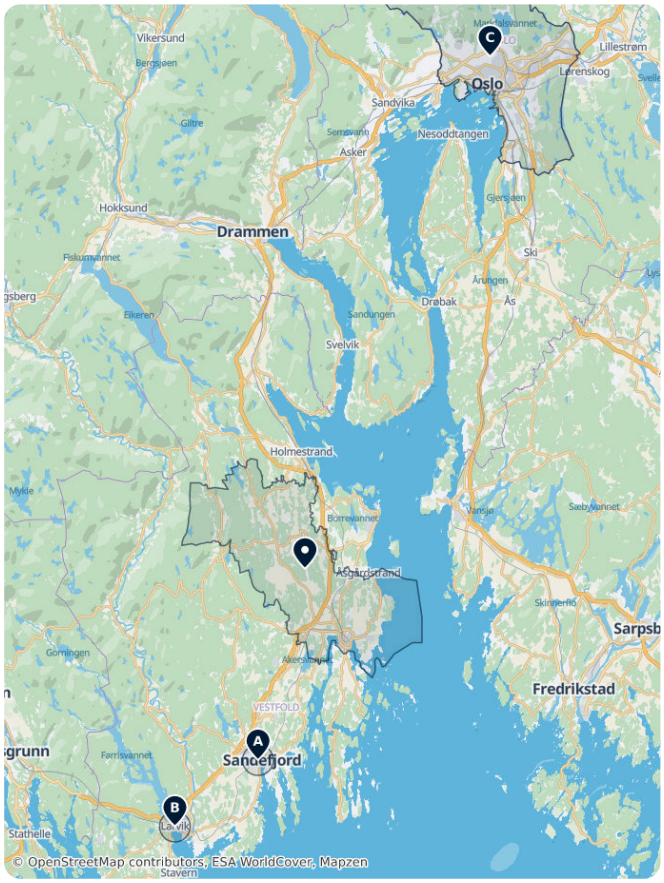
What to experience

Most local traditions happen in summer, and most of them happen on the water.

- **Slottsfjell festival:** Join the crowds for concerts near the waterfront in July.
- **Boat trip into the archipelago:** Take a summer sightseeing boat or a taxi boat from the harbour to the islands and skerries of Færder National Park.
- **Swim from the rocks:** Do as locals do and swim from the smooth rocks and small beaches on Nøtterøy and Tjøme.
- **Evening on Brygga:** Join the summer evening crowd on the waterfront, when boats tie up along the quay and people eat outside until late.

Day trips

The islands and the coast are the main reasons to go out for the day. Larger towns are easy to reach by train.



- **Verdens Ende (World's End)** — about 30 min by car, or by bus with one change. The rocky southern tip of Tjøme sits in Færder National Park, with a reconstructed tipping lighthouse and open views to the sea.
- **Åsgårdstrand** — about 20 min by car. A small summer town on the fjord where *Edvard Munch* painted; his small house is now a museum.
- **Borre Park, Horten** — about 20 min by car. A large field of Viking-age royal burial mounds, with the Midgard Viking Centre and a reconstructed Viking hall.
- Ⓐ **Sandefjord** — under 30 min by train. A former whaling town with the Whaling Museum and the Gokstad ship mound nearby.
- Ⓑ **Larvik** — under 1 hour by train. A coastal town with beaches and the beech forest of Bøkeskogen.
- Ⓒ **Oslo** — a little over 1 hour by train. The capital has the country's main museums, galleries and a harbour front.

Where to explore

Tønsberg is part of the Vestfold coast, a chain of old harbour towns along the western side of the Oslofjord.

- **Along the coast:** Sandefjord and Larvik are short train rides to the south-west.
- **Further south-west:** Skien is at the end of the Vestfold Line and is the start of the Telemark Canal.
- **Across the fjord:** Fredrikstad has a fortified old town. By car, the ferry from Horten to Moss crosses the fjord in about 30 minutes.
- **The capital:** Oslo is the main gateway for most visitors.

Getting there

- **By air:** Sandefjord Airport Torp (TRF) is the nearest airport, about 25 km away. A shuttle bus runs from the terminal to Torp station, then a short train ride takes you to Tønsberg. From Oslo Airport Gardermoen (OSL), the train takes about 1 h 40 min.
- **By train:** Trains on the Vestfold Line run about once an hour from Oslo and take a little over 1 hour. The same line continues to Sandefjord, Larvik and Skien. Buy tickets in the Vy app or at Vy.
- **By bus:** Express buses link Tønsberg with other towns in eastern Norway.
- **By car:** The E18 motorway from Oslo takes about 1 hour.

Getting around

- **On foot:** The centre, Brygga, the castle hill and the cathedral are all within a 15-minute walk of each other.
- **Local buses:** VKT buses connect the centre with Slagen, Nøtterøy and Tjøme. Buy tickets in the VKT app, or on board. Plan trips at VKT.
- **Boats:** In summer, small passenger boats and taxi boats go from the harbour to the islands of the archipelago.
- **Cycling:** The town is fairly flat and a bike works well for reaching the Oseberg mound and the nearest beaches.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

The centre, the waterfront and the castle hill are all within a short walk of each other.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Moderate

Fairly flat, and a bike is handy for the Oseberg mound and the nearest beaches.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?** Not for the town itself, which is compact and walkable. A car helps for the islands and the coast, where buses are infrequent.
- **Parking:** Parking in the centre is paid. Check the signs for the payment app or machine before you leave the car.
- **Tolls:** Main roads into the region use automatic plate-reading tolls with no barriers. Rental cars are billed through the rental company.
- **Summer traffic:** The roads to Tjøme and Verdens Ende can be slow on warm summer weekends.

Food & drink

Seafood is the local strength. In summer, look for fresh shrimp (reker) eaten with bread, mayonnaise and lemon, a classic along the Oslofjord coast. Fish soup and fish cakes are common lunch dishes.

Most good eating is on **Brygga**, the waterfront, where restaurants and bars line the quay with outdoor tables in summer. The streets around the main square, Torvet, have cafés and bakeries for a quieter meal.

What to eat & drink

DINNER

Fårikål
Lamb and cabbage stew simmered with whole peppercorns; widely regarded as Norway's national dish, especially in autumn.

Cured salmon · Gravlaks
Salmon cured in salt, sugar, and dill, served thinly sliced with a mustard-dill sauce.

Fermented fish · Rakfisk
Trout fermented for months, eaten cold with flatbread, sour cream, and onion. A strong-smelling acquired taste.

Dried salted cod · Klippfisk
Cod salted and air-dried, then rehydrated and cooked into stews such as bacalao.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Brown cheese · Brunost
A caramel-colored whey cheese with a sweet, slightly tangy flavor, typically sliced thin onto bread or waffles.

Potato flatbread · Lefse
A soft flatbread made from potato, rolled up with butter and sugar or cinnamon.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Waffles · Vafler
Heart-shaped, thin waffles served with sour cream and jam, a common café treat.

DRINKS

Caraway spirit · Akevitt
A potato-based spirit flavored with caraway and other spices, traditionally aged in oak sherry casks and served at holidays.

Tønsberg – Plan Your Trip
Turn the places from this guide into a real itinerary, with smart routing, time estimates, and everything you need for a perfect trip.
3M+ downloads · 4.6 stars · 15 years of trip planning
App Store · Google Play
Scan to download the app

Safety & health

Tønsberg is a very safe town with little crime aimed at visitors. Use normal care with bags in busy bars on Brygga during festival nights.

The main risks are outdoors. Ticks are common on the islands and coastal paths in summer, so check your skin after walks in tall grass. The sea stays cool even in July, and rocks near the water can be slippery.

History

By tradition, Tønsberg existed by 871, which is why it calls itself Norway's oldest town. The real start was probably a market place near Haugar, where the Vestfold assembly met and kings were proclaimed. Not far away, at Oseberghaugen, two women, one probably of very high rank, were buried with a ship in 834.

In the Middle Ages the town became a royal centre. Kings built Tunsberghus on the hill, and King *Håkon V* died there in 1319. In 1503 Swedish troops destroyed the castle, and it was never rebuilt.

In the 1800s, local man *Svend Foyn* invented the harpoon gun that made modern whaling possible. The whaling story, and much more, is told at Slottsfjellsmuseet.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Norway at a glance:

CURRENCY
NOK kr

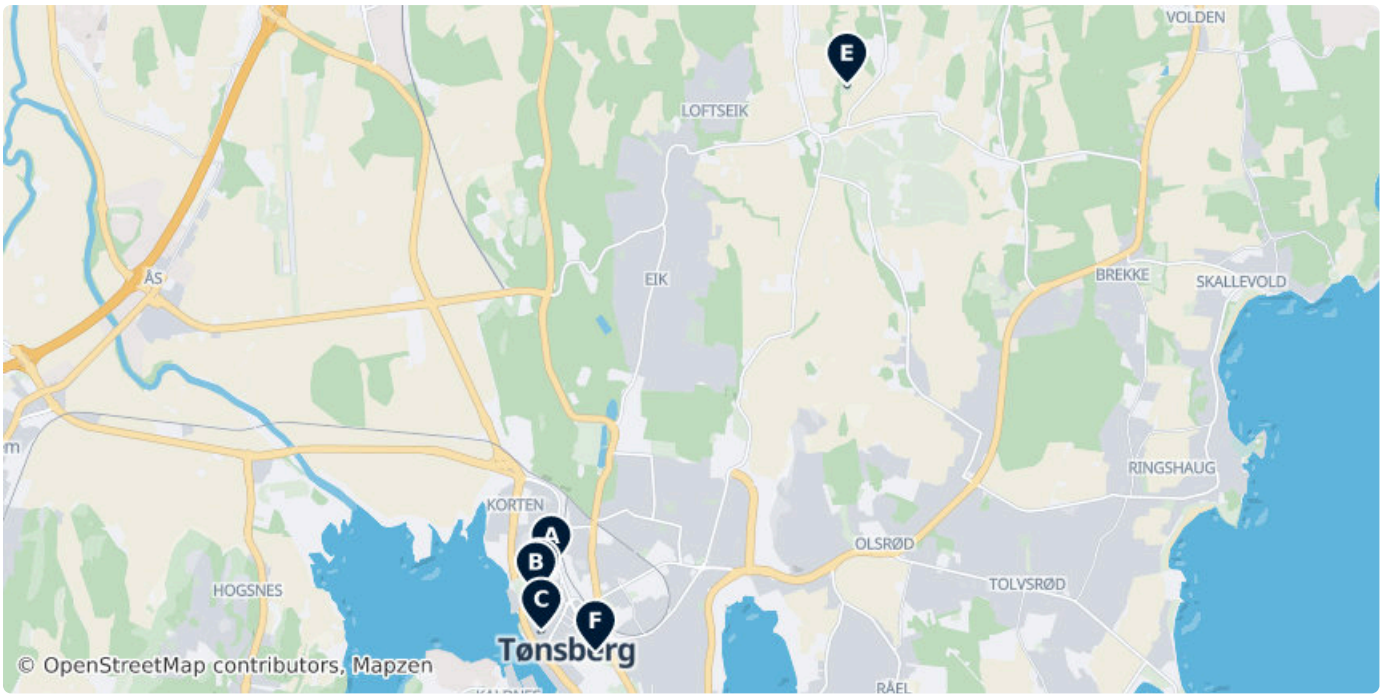
ELECTRICITY

Type C / Type F
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
Norwegian Bokmål,
Norwegian Nynorsk

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Top sights





A Slottsfjellsmuseet

Cultural-history museum at the foot of Slottsfjellet, founded in 1939 as Vestfold's county museum, with an open-air farmstead section and a 27 m whale skeleton.

32 Farmannsveien, Tønsberg 3111, Norway (59.27367, 10.40596)

slottsfjellsmuseet.no, 33 31 29 19



B Tunsberghus

Ruins of a medieval royal fortress on a hill above the town, once Norway's largest castle of the 13th century, destroyed in 1503. A memorial tower from 1888 now marks the site.

Tønsberg 3111, Norway (59.27180, 10.40385)



C Tønsberg Cathedral

Brick Gothic Lutheran cathedral completed in 1858 on the site of a medieval church. It has been the seat of the Diocese of Tunsberg since 1948 and seats about 500.

Kongegaten, 3111 Tønsberg, Norway (59.26919, 10.40458)

tonsberg.domkirke.menighet.no



D Slottsfjelltårnet

Granite lookout tower and memorial from 1888, 17 metres high, standing among the ruins of a medieval castle. It is the landmark of Tønsberg.

18A Dronning Blancas gate, Tønsberg 3111, Norway (59.27197, 10.40430)



E Oseberghaugen

Viking Age burial mound in the Slagendalen valley where the Oseberg ship burial was excavated in 1904. The grave dates to 834 and held two women and a rich set of grave goods.

3114, Norway (59.30769, 10.44682)



F Haugar kunstmuseum

Art museum focused on Norwegian contemporary art, housed in a former navigation school built in 1918–21 on a hill that was a Viking-age assembly site.

17 Graabrødregaten, Tønsberg 3110, Norway (59.26766, 10.41207)

Mo	Closed
Tu–Fr	11:00–16:00
Sa–Su	11:00–18:00

vestfoldmuseene.no/haugar-kunstmuseum/, 33 30 76 70

DATA SOURCES

Map data	© OpenStreetMap contributors, ESA WorldCover, Mapzen
Data	© OpenStreetMap contributors, Wikidata, Wikipedia, Tripomatic, Official websites

IMAGE CREDITS

- Slottsfjellsmuseet — "Notteroyhuset 1" by Anne of Tunsberg, cc-by-4.0
- Tunsberghus — "Tunsberghus festning aerial photo1" by Lars Åge Kamfjord, cc-by-sa-4.0
- Tønsberg Cathedral — "Tønsberg domkirke, 2022" by Ssu, cc-by-sa-4.0
- Slottsfjelltårnet — "Slottsfjellstårnet, Slottsfjellet, Tønsberg, Norway 2011-08-13" by Bent Tranberg, cc0
- Oseberghaugen — "Osebergschiff" by Unknown authorUnknown author, pd
- Haugar kunstmuseum — "Haugar Vestfold Kunstmuseum Sjømannsskolen architects Andreas Bjercke Georg..." by Wolfmann, cc-by-sa-4.0

A free travel guide — not for sale. Travel guide generated with AI on November 19, 2026. Text and layout by Tripomatic, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors, available under the ODbL. Photos are under their own licences, as credited on this page.