

"Friluftsliv": How an idea of outdoor living could help us this pandemic winter

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Image 1. The Norwegian concept of “friluftsliv” encourages spending time outside in nature, no matter the weather. Photo: Stanislaw Pytel/Getty Images

In Norway, "friluftsliv" means open-air living. Norwegians know the word well.

Friluftsliv celebrates time outdoors. It does not matter if it is cold. For example, Norwegian Alexander Read enjoys snowy walks with his daughter. He loves posting pictures on Instagram.

In 2020, COVID-19 changed life. Friluftsliv might be a way to keep people safer and healthier during winter.

Norwegian Inspiration

Early lockdown kept Norway's COVID-19 case numbers low. Still, there has been a small rise lately. COVID-19 spreads easier inside. Norwegians are planning more outdoor activities.

During summer, people around the world have also moved activities outdoors. Yet winter is coming. Norwegian friluftsliv offers hope.

A Way Of Life

Henrik Ibsen was a Norwegian writer. He made up the word friluftsliv for the 1859 poem "On the Heights." It tells about a farmer's yearlong journey outdoors.

Friluftsliv is a way of life, says Lasse Heimdal. Heimdal helps lead Norsk Friluftsliv. His group organizes 5,000 outdoors groups in Norway.

Heimdal says friluftsliv is not just for explorers. Friluftsliv could be walking the dog in winter.



The Happiness Quotient

Norway is known as one of the world's happiest places. Friluftsliv could explain this. In 2020, the United Nations put out a World Happiness Report. Norway was number five.

Studies show the outdoors helps people stay happy. Even two hours a week in parks helps. The outdoors could really help in the time of COVID-19.

Past diseases left many with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). People with PTSD feel fearful after a past event. Sometimes they might face similar situations. They are troubled when reminded of the event.

Experts warn fears about COVID-19 could cause PTSD. Friluftsliv might be a solution.

Change Your Clothes — And Your Mind

In parts of Norway, winter hides the sun and creates long, cold nights. Yet Norwegians hardly complain about weather. Instead, they say: "There's no bad weather, only bad clothing!"

Kari Leibowitz is a psychologist at Stanford University. She studies people's health. Leibowitz lived in a very cold city in Norway called Tromsø.

Studies show less daylight can cause seasonal depression in places like Tromsø. It often happens during winter. People feel tired and sad. They might go do fewer activities than normal.

Yet people in Tromsø are pretty happy. To Leibowitz, it proves what you believe about winter can change how you feel.

Leibowitz says people should name something they like about winter. It could be how pretty fresh snow looks. Saying something out loud changes the way you think, she says.

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article states a MAIN idea of the entire article?
 - (A) Friluftsliv might be a way to keep people safer and healthier during winter.
 - (B) Early lockdown kept Norway's COVID-19 case numbers low.
 - (C) During summer, people around the world have also moved activities outdoors.
 - (D) Norway is known as one of the world's happiest places.

- 2 What is the MAIN idea of the section "The Happiness Quotient"?
 - (A) The United Nations lists the world's happiest countries.
 - (B) Spending time outdoors can help people be happier in hard times.
 - (C) Some people are fearful of events that happened in the past.
 - (D) Friluftsliv is the solution to the problem of COVID-19.

- 3 According to the section "The Happiness Quotient," WHY is Norway one of the world's happiest places?
 - (A) because people in Norway spend time outdoors
 - (B) because Norway has many parks that people can visit
 - (C) because Norway is working to help people with PTSD
 - (D) because Norway did not have many cases of COVID-19

- 4 HOW does winter affect how people feel?
 - (A) It causes people to complain more.
 - (B) It causes people to feel tired and sad.
 - (C) It causes people to be excited about the snow.
 - (D) It causes people to be happy about new activities.