

Nordic Theravāda

I was invited to come and live in Norway by 'The Skogskloster group' after my first few visits to Norway. I came to teach three retreats and stayed in a cabin outside of Oslo for five weeks on one of these occasions, with daily visitors bringing me food and discussing Dhamma practice. My impression over this time was that Theravāda Buddhism could match very well with the culture and environment in Norway. Theravāda Forest Monasticism seeks to establish peaceful places where people can meditate, live simply and reflect on their lives with the support and guidance of Monastic residents. Learning that over half the population in Norway have cabins, often in very secluded places, made me imagine that in such a Monastic base people who were interested could learn how to practice meditation and contemplation for themselves and use some of their periods of solitude for a spiritual purpose. Judging by the retreats people seemed to be quite reserved and have an aptitude for meditation compared to other places I had been. There also seemed to be a high standard of moral conduct here, nobody was questioning the rules never mind bucking against them, people were very gracious and polite, more polite than the English even.

Perhaps we can also find an acceptance in society thanks to the popularity of the mindfulness movement, I sensibly thought.

This then, I now ambitiously thought, was a way in which Nordic Theravāda Buddhism could come about. Echoing the silence of the Fjords, perhaps. It could begin in the cabins and perhaps then find its place in Norwegian society as truly enlightened individuals returned to their families or work places, I rather joyously thought. Of course it hasn't happened just yet! Most of the Norwegians I meet are the busy office workers of the Oslo group. To the locals here in Skiptvet it seems that we look like a Thai thing. Certainly with our dear Thai supporters making regular visits and helping us along in the start up phase it looks like this. Yet there is no obligation for Western visitors to take on Thai customs. The monks and other residents keep to a code of conduct and therefore have certain boundaries but visitors are very welcome, there is no particular expectation on visitors other than you might expect in any Norwegian home.

As time passes we would also expect the place to organically take on a Nordic flavour, just like our monasteries in England or around the world have different characters of their own.

On special ceremonies maybe those hats with the horns could be allowed, for example, risking a silly English joke to finish this off on a light note.

I offer this for your reflection.

Ajahn Kalyāno

<http://www.openthesky.co.uk>