

UPDATE

Oslo Puts Up a Stop Sign

Starting in 2019, the Norwegian capital will restrict the use of vehicles in its city center, following a global trend to make popular tourist destinations more pedestrian-friendly.



By **Jonathan Wolfe**

Dec. 19, 2018

If you drive a car into the city center of Oslo next month, you shouldn't plan on staying long: There won't be any parking spots.

The Norwegian capital is in the process of eliminating the remaining 700 street parking spots in its city center by the end of 2018 as part of its plan to turn the area into a car-free zone.

"We're doing this to give the streets back to the people," Hanna Elise Marcussen, Oslo's vice mayor for urban development, said during a recent phone interview. "And of course, it's environmentally friendly." (The Scandinavian country, recently recognized as one of the world's most ecologically progressive nations, has plans to become carbon neutral by 2030 and halt the sale of fossil fuel cars by 2025.)

And it's not just Oslo that is turning away drivers. Popular tourist destinations across the globe are removing cars from heavily trafficked areas to reduce congestion, cut down on pollution, and make streets more welcoming to bikers and pedestrians.

Last month, Madrid restricted private vehicle access for nonresidents in its city center. A few weeks earlier, London introduced a plan to bar cars from many of the roads in its financial center, continuing its yearslong plan to combat pollution. And Paris, Athens and Mexico City are attempting to ban diesel cars in their city centers by 2025. (In 2016, when

Paris banned cars for the day, the city saw a 25 percent decrease in nitrogen dioxide and a 20 percent drop in noise.)

In Oslo, the plan to remove cars from the city began in 2015 when a coalition of progressive political parties called for a city center free from vehicles. Similar plans have been met with resistance in places like Dublin, where local officials have proposed expanding that city's pedestrian zone, and Barcelona. Even in ecologically minded Oslo, it wasn't easy.

"There's been quite a bit of public debate, and there's been quite a lot of controversy, and it's been quite difficult to do this in a way that businesses and citizens can accept," Ms. Marcussen said.

The strongest opposition came from local business owners who were worried that fewer cars would mean fewer customers. So the city came up with a compromise: Instead of an outright ban, they would enact regulations that would allow as few vehicles as possible in the city center. The city designated certain streets for pedestrians or public transit only, restricted the ability of nonresidents to drive through the center, and removed hundreds of parking spots from city streets while creating designated parking spots for disabled citizens and businesses that require a car.

Oslo hopes to be a model for other cities looking to restrict cars in densely populated areas, Ms. Marcussen said, adding that soon enough, the policy will seem obvious.

"A couple of decades ago, it was perfectly normal to smoke cigarettes inside," Ms. Marcussen said. "Today, very few would do that. I think it's the same with cars in the city center. One day we will look back and ask ourselves why we ever thought that was a good idea."

Follow NY Times Travel on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Get weekly updates from our Travel Dispatch newsletter, with tips on traveling smarter, destination coverage and photos from all over the world.