



## #203: BUNADS

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## INTRODUCTION

There is something special about owning a bunad and wearing it on Syttende Mai, Norway's National Day. Let's take a look at some of the history behind Norway's national costume. The traditional costume dates its roots back to the Norwegian Romantic Nationalism period in the mid-19th century when, at that time, Norway was determined to secure a solid cultural identity. The Norwegian bunad is unique in that it is recognizable as Norway's official dress, but it is individualized based on regional characteristics of color, pattern, style, and accessories. Since the 19th century the traditional costume has developed with the modern age and Norwegians who are lucky enough to own a bunad are always proud to show it off at significant occasions like confirmations, weddings, funerals and National holidays.

## THE HISTORY OF THE BUNAD

The original costume of Norway has evolved with deep-rooted traditions based on everyday folk attire of rural farming families. *Folkedrakt* or folk costumes which they were commonly referred to at the time did not attain the bunad name until the early 1900's, a name that is so familiar and recognized by many around the world today. These rural farming styles of dress became popularized when Norwegians were yearning for cultural independence. Although there is evidence that the local folk costumes date back to the Middle Ages in Norway the interest for a traditional costume for men and woman didn't spread until the

Norwegian Romantic Nationalist movement, 1840-1870. Norwegians were eager to reinforce their own cultural identity divergent from Danish and Swedish control. Imperative to that cultural identity was obtaining a traditional costume that would symbolize national pride. Around 1900 Norwegians campaigned against a union with Sweden in hopes of grasping that specific Norwegian identity which included the bunad. A strong sense of cultural pride ensued followed by the country's independence in 1905.



Hulda Garborg

By the early 20th century the bunad movement was gaining momentum thanks in part to one woman's inspiration, Hulda Garborg. Garborg was a pioneer in promoting interest in the bunad tradition and rousing a strong Norwegian sentiment for national pride. The appeal grew and eventually distinct regional styles of the costume were fashioned for not only rural folk but for the urban elite as well. The once rural farm dress was revived into a symbol of Norwegian

pride that was cherished and longed for by many. Regions of Norway designed special bunads based on the distinct customs and traditions of their local communities. Descendants must follow stylistic guidelines of their ancestor's origins when making or purchasing a bunad of their



own. Strict requirements are in place by Norway's National Bunad and Folk Costumes Council (The Norwegian Institute of Bunad and Folk Costume) who promote bunad knowledge, sustain traditions of the folk costumes and provide advice in the construction of new bunad models.

Today the bunad is widely recognized as one of the most authentic and popular traditional folk costumes in the world. Making or purchasing a quality bunad can cost anywhere from \$3,000 to \$13,000 so it is often viewed as a status symbol for those who can afford them. The outfits are often passed down in families and typically when adolescents go through confirmation or turn 16 they are given their own authentic bunad. Because of the hefty cost, it is important that costumes can be easily altered for a lifetime of use.

The fabrics used to make a bunad typically consist of wool skirts for women and wool pants and jackets for men. The men's vests and the women's bodices, aprons, bonnets and capes may be contingent on what fabrics were initially available when the bunad was first designed. Silk materials and lustrous woolen fabrics are most common and the iconic white blouse to go underneath is made from either cotton or linen fabrics. The embroidery, color and shape give the bunad the most distinction and character, followed, of course by the accessories and unique jewelry called *sølje* that are key to any genuine bunad. The shoes, which are well recognized as "bunad shoes" by many are typically black leather with a small heel and a silver buckle on top. A simple black shoe, pump or fitted 18th century style boot is also appropriate to accompany the look. For those who are lucky enough to dress in their own bunad it is important for them to remember that this distinct dress is a symbol of their cultural identity, their heritage and the roots their ancestors laid years before. Bunad etiquette is in place in order to preserve the authenticity of this official national costume. Women are to look as natural as possible by not wearing too much makeup. Jewelry and accessories that don't "fit" with the appropriate style are inappropriate although it is acceptable to wear inherited silver jewelry even if your bunad and jewelry are from different regions.

It is truly a beautiful sight to see all the beautiful bunads out in Norway on Syttende Mai. Folks line the streets waving flags, proud to show off their regional costume and excited to celebrate their enduring cultural identity that their ancestors fashioned so long ago.

## RESOURCES

### Husfliden

Locations all over Norway | [Norskflid.no](http://Norskflid.no)

### Heiman

Oslo, Norway | [Heiman.net](http://Heiman.net)

### Bunad Butikken

Ely, MN, 218-365-7745

*Scandinavian Folklore*, Vols. 1 and 2 by Laila Durán, Duran Publishing

Available for purchase at [Vesterheim.org](http://Vesterheim.org)

Norsk institutt for bunad or folkedrakt (NBF)

The Norwegian Institute for Bunad and Folk Costume | [Bunadogfolkedrakt.no](http://Bunadogfolkedrakt.no)

Bunad Magazine

[Bunad-magasinet.no](http://Bunad-magasinet.no)



- There are approximately 450 different types of different bunad designs in Norway.
- The NBF (Norsk institutt for bunad and folkedrakt) was established in 1947 and they contain full documentation for all the folk costume designs in Norway.
- Historically, Norwegian women wore head dresses or hair coverings in many rural towns to signify marital status. (This no longer applies)
- The term *folkedrakt* "folk costume" was labeled to describe the outfits in the mid-19th century.
- The term "bunad" later became the official name of the national costume in the early 1900's.
- Over 50% of woman and nearly 10% of men in Norway own a bunad.
- Norwegians wear their bunad an average of 2.25 times per year.
- Bunads can be made or purchased at a cost of anywhere from \$1,300-\$13,000!

## WHEN TO WEAR THE BUNAD

- Syttende Mai (National holidays)
- Confirmations
- Weddings
- Funerals
- Cultural Events