



A village along the Sognefjord. *Photo by Emilie C. Harting*

## WHERE NATURE IS THE CULTURE

Norway is a country of fjords, deep inlets with cliffs and slopes on the sides. I have been there three times, and am already planning to return again.

On a recent hiking trip with friends, I saw the flora, fauna, and geology of Norway up close, often thousands of feet up in elevation from the valleys. We were in Hardangervidda National Park, a huge plateau that is often called “the quiet room of the world” or the “ceiling of Europe.” It has a thousand tiny lakes, rich plant life, and Stone Age sites. We often passed roaring falls and watched the mist rising from the impact of water hitting rock.

Last summer my husband and I also took a land tour of Norway’s highlights. In our travels from one major town or city to the



The village of Aurland on Aurland’s fjord  
*Photo by Emilie C. Harting*

next, we passed through valleys with white farmhouses, red barns, and tilled fields with forests in the background. From a distance we saw water plummeting down from the tops of mountains in straight bands or curves, and racing over rocky creeks alongside roadways.



Going through the Sognefjord, one of Norway's narrowest and deepest fjords  
*Photo by Emilie C. Harting*

If you're intrigued by Norway, here are some not-to-be missed stops that may serve as a fitting introduction to this beautiful country.

Oslo, Norway's capital, set on Oslo Fjord, is a city of parks. From our hotel at Palace Park, the center of the city, we walked everywhere. We meandered from the large open-air Vigland Park with its 200 sculptures by Gustav Vigland, through the Gronland section, with its colorful shops, ethnic food, and sidewalk sculpture, up to the Munch Museum to view its famous "Scream" paintings, and on to the Botanical Gardens, an oasis of flowers and small waterfalls.

The view from the avant-garde town hall, where the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony takes place every December, was quite telling. From the second floor window we looked down to Oslo's harbor, lined with ships and pleasure boats in all directions. "We leave our jobs and head to the country hut as fast as we can," explained a guide.

Without the skiers, Lillehammer, the winter resort town that hosted the 1994 Olympics, has a vacant feeling, even though the restaurants and shops are open and visited by cyclists, kayakers and tourists. The Olympic Museum has an informative exhibit on ancient and modern Olympians, and you can see the training grounds. From the top of the ski lifts, where wildflowers rise in the sun, the vista of the countryside offers much more than a blanket of winter white on the horizon. The village is a cluster of buildings along a silvery strip of lake that runs through the center of the valley.

Maihaugen, the largest open-air folk museum in Northern Europe, is built into the hillside just above the town. An exhibit *We Won the Land* traces Norway's archeological history. Visitors then walk on dirt paths through a restored village of dwellings and shops, ending at one of Norway's best twelfth century stave churches.



Hanseatic League Houses along Bergen Harbor  
*Photo by Emilie C. Harting*

Most eyes looked forward in solemn awe as we took a three hour cruise through the Songnefjorden, one of the most spectacular of the inlets because it is deeper, and more secluded and curved than others. White clouds rose up and down between the navy blue mountains. Occasionally a remote village with white houses and red buildings would appear on a patch of green along the side.

Life in Bergen, Norway's second largest city, centers on the wharf. The Torgt or fish market and the row of fourteenth century Hanseatic league houses, next to each other on the docks, have both been declared World Heritage sites. From early morning until well after dusk, ships pull in and out. Tourists walk up and down visiting shops, museums, and restaurants and the park with a king's hall built in the late 1300s. The more I explored the streets of Bergen, the more there



Street Sculpture in Gronland, Oslo  
*Photo by Emilie C. Harting*

was to discover. Without a marked up map from the tourist center, I could have missed such places as the fourteenth century king's hall at the end of the peninsula, the oldest residential section, the oldest church, or the quaint leprosy museum at the top of a hill.

A few hundred feet Medieval from the town square, just behind the fish market, you can take a five minute funicular ride up one of the seven mountains surrounding the city. From the top you look down at the spread of small, peaked houses, many more than several hundred years old, and the jagged harbor that spreads over the bottom of the mountain and into the sea. A highlight of the trip

was a visit to nineteenth century musician Edvard Grieg's summer villa and museum, set on a lake just outside Bergen, and the return for an evening concert.

I now think of the parts of Norway I have not seen, and I'm planning a boat trip from Bergen north through the Arctic Circle to the land of the Northern Lights. Who knew Norway had so much to offer?

### TRAVELING AROUND NORWAY:

*General Information:* See [www.visitnorway.com](http://www.visitnorway.com) for land tours, fjord trips, train schedules, and winter sports trips.

*Driving:* Roads are excellent in Norway, and there is a new system of tunnels through many mountains. Because traveling in Norway is a bit more expensive than in other European countries, we took one of Globus's four Scandinavian land tours for part of the time.

[www.globusjourneys.com](http://www.globusjourneys.com)

*Hiking:* Individualized trips for families and groups are available through [www.bredeson.com/outdooradventures](http://www.bredeson.com/outdooradventures).

#### NORWAY IN A NUTSHELL:

One to three-day trips through fjords by train, bus and boat go through the most scenic parts of the country. This is a popular way to get from Bergen to Oslo. Visit [www.norwaynutshell.com](http://www.norwaynutshell.com)

#### TWO AWARD-WINNING FJORD INNS:

*Hotel Ullensvang:* set on a fjord in the fruit growing district of Loftus, is surrounded by mountain trails, a fruit trail through orchards, and the famous “Monk Steps,” a rugged trail built by 13<sup>th</sup> century monks to transport food to remote areas. The hotel offers an indoor pool, saunas, fine food, summer music festivals, fishing and boating. [www.hotel-ullensvang.no](http://www.hotel-ullensvang.no)

*Solstrand* is a combination of Norwegian country house and modern resort. Close to Bergen International Airport, yet surrounded by islands and mountains, it offers fine food, a spa, saunas, golf, walking paths, and excursions to Bergen, fjords, and other sites. Visit [www.solstrand.com](http://www.solstrand.com)