

The Hurtigruten's MS Nordlys takes travelers through awe-inspiring fjords on the coast of Norway.



The streets of Bergen, Norway, are set up like hilly San Francisco.



PUT A FJORD IN YOUR FUTURE WITH A VISIT TO NORWAY

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Sailing under the midnight sun for five days last August aboard Hurtigruten's MS Nordlys, I discovered that a cruise is a particularly effective way to explore Norway. It combines the convenience of unpacking once with the thrill of exploring new territory every day. It's a restful way to cover a lot of miles in a short amount of time. It passes vistas so gorgeous that words like breathtaking and spectacular seem inadequate—after all, this cruise is billed as “the world's most beautiful voyage.” Plus, it's a whole lot of fun. On a route that included 34 ports of call sailing south from Kirkenes to Bergen, our group took advantage of disembarking whenever possible and also signed up for several excursion bus tours in order to explore Norway. Among the highlights:

Vardøhus Fortress is the world's northernmost and Norway's easternmost fortress. Constructed from 1734 to 1738, it's surrounded by low, stone-clad earthen walls that are arranged to form an eight-pointed star. Though today the fortress is primarily a flag hold and salute station, an onsite museum and nine picturesque buildings make it worth a visit. The fortress is located in Vardø, the only city in Europe located in the arctic climate zone.

North Cape, the northernmost tip of the European continent, is a cliff rising 920 feet out of the Arctic Ocean. The site houses a restaurant, coffee shop, monuments and

a wide-screen movie theater that plays a film profiling the region. From the gift shop, I sent home a postcard that was then postmarked to prove I stood at 71° 10' 22" N—and while that's still about 1,000 miles from the North Pole, it's likely to be as close as I'll ever get.

The small peninsula of **Trondeneshalvøya** is home to **Trondenes Kirke**, a white medieval church that's filled with art and is considered to be a premier cultural heritage site from the late Middle Ages. Next door is the **Trondenes Historical Center**, with exhibits from the Viking Age to present day.

Aboard a ferry crossing the **Gullesfjord** at mid-morning, we were treated to coffee and trays of Norwegian pastries. The addictive light and fluffy lefse tasted like an elegant, grown-up interpretation of a brown sugar cinnamon pop-tart. Throughout the journey from **Harstad to Sortland**, the photogenic view included quaint farms, dramatic mountains, crystal clear lakes and stunning fjords.

Located north of the Arctic Circle at the 67th and 68th parallel, the island group of **Lofoten** boasts beautiful scenery with steep mountains, colorful fishing villages, calm bays and white sandy beaches. Home primarily to generations of fish industry workers, Lofoten also attracts artists from around the world, and their work is showcased at the **Henningsvaer Art Gallery**.

Trondheim, Norway's third largest city (after Oslo and Bergen), is known as the country's technological capital and home to many university students. It houses the world's northernmost cathedral, **Nidaros**,

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE

Delta flights from Atlanta to Oslo include stops in Copenhagen or Amsterdam. SAS Scandinavian Airlines offers nonstop flights to Copenhagen from the Dulles Washington DC and JFK New York airports.

WHEN TO GO

Hurtigruten sails 365 days a year. (Thanks to the Gulf Stream, Norwegian coastline waters never freeze over.) North- or south-bound and round-trip itineraries are available. If a particular port most interests you, it's possible to plan an itinerary that allows you to disembark and stay on land for a few days and then board the next ship that sails through to continue the cruise route.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

A valid passport is required to enter Norway. The Norwegian currency is the kroner. Most Norwegians speak English. Hurtigruten has operated for more than 100 years and currently sails eleven ships up and down Norway's coast. Hurtigruten ships comfortably accommodate passengers, but are primarily working ships that carry cargo to the various ports of call—these aren't like the big luxury party ships common in the Caribbean.

MORE INFORMATION

- **Hurtigruten**
800-323-7436
www.hurtigruten.us/norway.asp
- **Visit Norway**
www.visitnorway.com
- **Visit Bergen**
www.visitBergen.com

The sun-kissed purity of nature in Norway is ethereal.



PHOTOS/COURTESY OF VISIT BERGEN AND HURTIGRUTEN

Norway's National Sanctuary built over the grave of sainted King Olav Haraldsson. Constructed entirely of soapstone, the cathedral's roman and gothic architecture is unique in Norway.

Built into a steep mountainside, **Bergen** is reminiscent of San Francisco, with streets and walkways climbing sharp inclines. It's also a world heritage city with great restaurants and bars (like Bryggen Tracteursted, Beyer'en Bar & Restaurant and the Femte i Andre Bar), extensive retail outlets, impressive museums (including Trolldhaugen, honoring composer Edvard Grieg), comfortable accommodations and active entertainment options (such as fjord rafting, glacier walks and more). Colorful architecture alone would make Bergen picturesque, but it also happens to overlook a gorgeous fjord. It's another perfect city in Norway that's worth visiting again and again. **SP**