

Norway:

fjords, historic cathedrals, museums and living history

Derick McGroarty visits scenic Norway on a cruise from Southampton.

Check-in was easier than at airports and once aboard, the ship was my base for the next seven days, with all meals, activities and entertainment.



Bergen Express

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Norway's number one attraction is the fjords, inlets of calm waters, towering snow capped mountains rising from the still waters and cascading waterfalls; best viewed from the top deck of a ship cruising slowly.

After a full day at sea, first landfall was Stavanger, a commercial port. In an attractive old area are cobbled streets and almost 200 preserved timbered buildings. I was particularly interested in a link with Winchester 1,000 years ago. Stavanger Domkirke (Cathedral), was built in the Anglo-Norman style and completed in 1125 by the then Bishop of Winchester, Reinald,

who took a team of English stone masons to do the actual construction. He became the first Bishop but there is no record of what happened to the masons! The English connection also explains why the cathedral is dedicated to St. Swithun (c 800-862) who was Bishop of Winchester for the last 10 years of his life.



Stavanger

ستافنجر

After another night sailing with excellent meals there was a very early viewing of Sognefjord before arrival at Flam. The Sognefjord 200 km. inland contains some of the most beautiful scenery in Norway.

In Flam the railway is a must! A great engineering achievement through steep, twisting slopes of 1:18 gradient, the 20 km. journey takes an hour in each direction. Frequent services allow time at the top. Breathtaking! In both directions a stop is made to view and photograph a broad cascading waterfall. It can be part of a tour arranged on the ship, but as with all ports of call I preferred to explore independently and had no difficulty in taking a return train journey, subsequently exploring Flam before rejoining the ship.

Next day I chose a leisurely stroll in the peaceful village of Olden. Sitting by the river beneath soaring mountains I looked at the mirror like reflection on the still water of the fjord. A memory I shall hold for a long time to come. Tours are available through forest and mountains to view a glacier. From Flam to Bergen was again through Sognefjord with yet more superb panoramic views.

Bergen's many museums, including Edward Greig's house, offer a wealth of artistic culture. Dating from the 11th century the district of Bryggen, now a world heritage

site, is well preserved by its proud inhabitants, despite fires and rebuilding over the centuries. It is not a museum but very much living history. As I strolled along the rows of elongated colourful timbered houses and through the alleyways with overhanging balconies I felt I had stepped back in time. Surrounded by seven mountains a cable car ride is exhilarating, giving great views over the city. From the harbour a fun way to see much of the city is the one hour journey on the open colourful "train", Bergens-Expressen. Good value for comprehensive sightseeing of the town. The commentary is in a number of languages and a photo-stop is made at the highest point overlooking the city.

In a week, without unpacking, I had been well dined and entertained, with four full days sightseeing different towns and comfortable best possible views of great scenery.

If you take full advantage of everything on offer and choose a minimal inside cabin it is great value. However, prices rise rapidly for superior accommodation. ■

CONTACTS

Norwegian Tourist Office www.visitnorway.com



Flamsbana railway

قطار فلانمبانا



Stavanger-Old town

المدينة القديمة في ستافنجر



Bergen

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