

The Unforgettable Fjord Norway Experience

Follow Lyssiemay Annoh as she survives an encounter with the Viking Kings, journeys across the Fjords and the amazing waterfalls. Her brush with ghosts, the quest to find a seal, a walk through the land where goats rule and the incredible train journey from Flåm to Bergen up until when she discovers what the incurable Norwegian habit really is...

S, like so many, have heard so much about the Fjords of Norway but did not quite know what it actually was until I set myself off to discover Norway. The whole experience started with an SAS flight from London Heathrow to Oslo and then a domestic flight from Oslo to Haugesund. I cannot say that I saw much of Oslo apart from its airport but I was excited about my next destination - Haugesund & Haugalandet. I was told that Haugesund & Haugalandet is where it all began for Norway. It is the homeland of the Viking Kings and the birthplace of Norway as one Kingdom. As much as I was keen on discovering what a Fjord was really like, I was also very curious to hear some Viking stories as well as visit their homeland to see how they lived.

Haugesund & Haugalandet – *Where Vikings Kings tell their own stories*

Haugesund & Haugalandet did not disappoint me; right from arrival, I knew I was among Vikings. I listened attentively as Harald Hårfagre, Harald the Fairheaded, who united Norway as one kingdom, narrated his life and told me about his kingdom and all about the historic diversity of St. Olav's Church, the Viking settlement at the Nordvegen History Centre, at Avaldsnes.



It all feels so real as history is reproduced with mannequins and stories retold by actors of cunning resemblances that makes you feel as if you have been transported into the past and are living among the Vikings. The experience is amazing and when you leave the Centre to enjoy a real life experience in the Viking village, the views that greet you over Karmsundet Sound, once called Nordvegen, as you walk along the path to dine with the Vikings, are so beautiful that a rush of Vikings fighting along your path to dinner appears to be bearable.

It is interesting to see how the Vikings lived and ate.



A Viking meal feast of vegetable soup, goat meat and garlic wrap and roast wild boar

Cosy is one word I would use to describe the living accommodation and filling would probably be the best word to describe the meal. Whichever way you look at it, the whole experience has been thoughtfully planned to create a believable image in the visitor's mind so much so that when I was whisked away from the Viking village to my hotel in Haugesund on a Rib boat, I felt as if my Prince had come to carry me to his kingdom. To enjoy the whole Eat like a Viking experience please visit <http://en.vikingkings.com/> or telephone +47 52838400

Where to stay in Haugesund.

I stayed at the Rica Hotel Maritime (www.hotelmaritim.no), which looked beautiful as we approached it from the water. The journey to the hotel on a Rib boat was operated by Ravnafloke (www.ravnafloke.com). Hotel room rates start from NOK 1450 for a double room.

Apart from the Viking experience, Haugesund itself is a charming city with costs and a standard of living comparable to its charm. Haugesund & Haugalandet are easily accessible by air, boat, bus or car. There are flight connections from London, Oslo, Bergen and Sandefjord as well as many other routes. Once you have arrived, it is only a short journey to any of the experiences the region has to offer.



Skudeneshaven

Skudeneshavn – a real fairy tale town with everything white and wooden.

With Haugesund and the Viking experience behind me, I realised that I still did not know what to make of a Fjord but I was scheduled for a stopover in Skudeneshavn. (www.visit-skudeneshavn.no)



A Viking Chef at work

([skudeneshavn.no](http://www.skudeneshavn.no)). This town is like a one out of a storybook. It is small – white and beautiful. The old part of town consists of 130 homes and maritime storehouses from the early 1800s and is so well taken care of. The town's museum has a collection of everything quaint from tools, through to sewing machines and paintings. Guided tours of Skudeneshavn are organized by Ørjan B. Iversen www.visithaugesund.no From my Haugesund to Skudeneshavn experience, I could be forgiven to think that all the ghosts of the Norway had come to welcome me and are making me relive their lives. Nevertheless, I still did not know what a Fjord was, nor could I say that I had seen one. After all, I was in Norway and I could not go back without seeing any so I decided to continue my journey to Åkrafjord (www.visithaugesund.no/akrafjorden).

Åkrafjorden - Fjords, naked mountains and a playground for extreme sports enthusiasts

It was upon arrival at Akrafjord that I realized how kind nature can be to those who appreciate it. The fjords emerge like estuaries, drowned glacier valleys, naked mountains with steep ridges and sometimes with spectacular waterfalls streaming out of them.



The Akrafjorden

Looking at the naked mountains, it is inconceivable to imagine that sometime ago, all these were a flat land that have transformed to become these omnipresent features which command a presence. While I was lost in my thoughts, my guide seizes the opportunity to explain to me and the other travel enthusiasts I was travelling with, that the bridge on which we were standing is a favourite playground for extreme sports enthusiasts. My question, why would they want to tempt fate so cruelly?

In Åkrafjord I was beginning to understand the Fjords and enjoying my first encounter. The contrasts in Åkrafjorden are huge: naked mountain sides, luscious pastures, still-reflecting fjords and cascading glacial waters emphasizing the fact that the stone age and small power stations still remains. I had nothing but an all inspiring admiration for the people who live and have lived here. Visitors can enjoy this experience by boat with a unique opportunity of appreciating some of the waterfalls along the way, which according to local sources, has medicinal qualities. A trip to Åkrafjorden will be incomplete without a ride in the local truck by one of the farmers and especially incomplete without the dining experience of Eljerk Gard at Åkrafjordtunet, where an encounter with Western Norwegian culinary and handicraft traditions are surrounded by magnificent scenery (www.aakrafjorden.no).

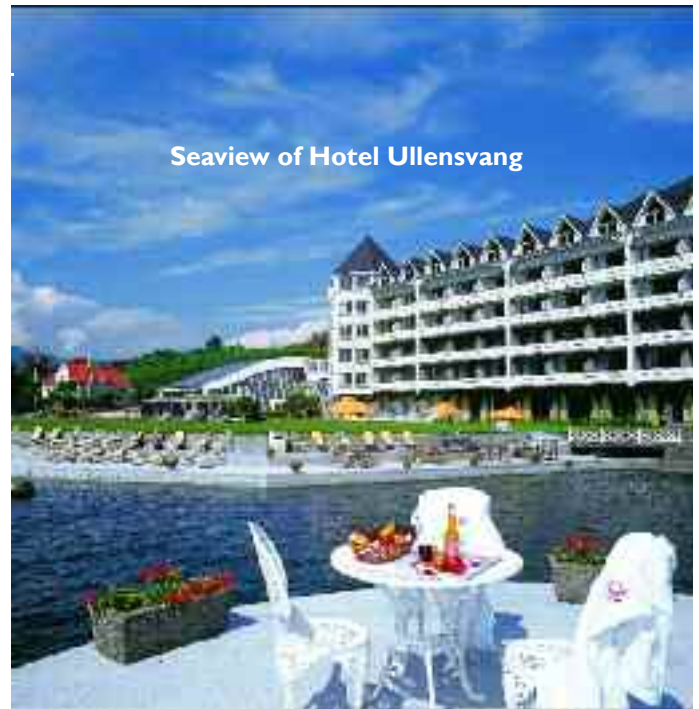
Hardanger – Ullensvang – The source of inspiration and the King of Waterfalls

While en route to Hardanger, I had wrongly assumed that by seeing Åkrafjorden, I had seen everything that I needed to know about Fjord Norway. After all, I had been exposed to the bridge which offers the leap of faith to enthusiasts, travelled by boat across Åkrafjorden; now, I was continuing my journey by coach to Hardangerfjord. My excitement and surprise as we reached the Låtefossen Waterfall. I had seen one waterfall but it looks like the waterfalls get better as you continue to explore the fjords. This one is a famous twin-waterfall close to route 13. Låtefossen is the king among all waterfalls and an internationally famous attraction. www.hardangerfjord.com.



The picturesque Eljerk Gard at Åkrafjordtunet

After a photo stop, I could not allow myself to be distracted, I had a rendez-vous with the big wigs of the Tysedal and the Norwegian Museum of Hydro Power and Industry. I soon discovered that this was a destination for anyone interested in electricity, events managers and extreme sports enthusiasts. To arrange for a guided tour of The Norwegian Museum of Hydro Power and Industry please visit www.nvim.no/www.opplevodda.com.



Seaview of Hotel Ullensvang

Hardangerfjord itself had more to it than the Tysedal and the Norwegian Museum of Hydro Power and Industry. It is considered to be a natural source of Inspiration. Hardanger is like a playpen with scenery comprising of a variety of treasures; fjords, mountains, waterfalls, glaciers and orchards. There is a contrast created by green hillsides, orchards in blossom and snow-clad mountains which have inspired many, and among them the composer Edvard Grieg.

It is intriguing though that upon arrival at our hotel I noticed that the inspiration continued and each room has been designed with each individual guest in mind. Hotel Ullensvang is an event organiser's dream because it has been built with splendid views and is very well positioned for events.



Låtefossen Waterfalls.



The Hardanger juice and cider collection

Hotel Ullensvang, 5787 Lofthus, Tel.: +47 53 67 00 01
 www.hotel-ullensvang.no. Prices from NOK 2200 for double room with fjord view.

Other attractions in the region include:

Agatunet

A pleasant boat ride from Hotel Ullensvang will lead you to the Aga Village, one of the very few farm villages left in Norway. The oldest house here is Lagmannsstova (the Judge's House). It was built some years before 1300, and home of Sir Sigurd Brynjolfsson, counsellor to King Eirik Magnusson and magistrate of Western Norway.

The Hardanger Folkemuseum

The Hardanger Folkemuseum has a collection of old historical houses, furniture, clothes, tools and a variety of other objects (www.hardanger.museum.no).

Ulvik - The marriage between good food, cider and folk dance

After a car ferry ride from Utne to Kvanndal (www.tide.no) and then a coach from Kvanndal to Ulvik, we arrived just in time for lunch at the very spacious Brakanes Hotel (www.brakanes-hotel.no), a beautiful seafront hotel in Ulvik with cuisine to wet the appetite of even the fussiest eater.

After lunch, we visited the Hardanger Juice and Cider House and Hakestad Farm (http://www.visitnorway.com/uk/Product/?pid=49672) to appreciate the culture and learn about the production of cider as well as listen to some good stories. We were delightfully entertained by very well-spoken youth who had learned to speak impeccable English from watching television! The Hardanger Cider House folk dance and music experience makes you appreciate cider and the Hardanger culture.

Stalheim – Ghosts, guest bonding, a remarkable personal collection, more ancient houses and stunning views.

From Hardanger to Gudvangen, we stopped over at the Stalheim hotel in Stalheim for a tour of the Folkmuseum.



Hardanger Folk dancers



An ancient Norwegian dwelling at the Stalheim Folkmuseum

Stalheim hotel is a family run hotel which had its fair share of mishaps and had been burnt down more than once. Most properties in Norway are built with wood and it soon became apparent that almost every historic property had been burnt down once or twice. Once again, we were face to face with another Norwegian collector's passion. Anything and everything can be found here.

The view from the Stalheim hotel is absolutely stunning. The hotel however, does not provide any television nor techs and gadgets (except telephones) in any of its rooms in a bid to get guests to mingle and bond together in its large lounge areas; but for me, this meant an 'eerie night' in a still and quiet room among the mountains. Stalheim hotel is also open for only certain times in the year but it is a good spot to start your journey down to Gudvangen and then onto the Sognefjord; the longest and deepest fjord in the world as well as to the Nærøfjord, the narrowest and most dramatic fjord in Europe. Stalheim Hotel, 5715 Staheim, Tel.: +47 56 52 01 22, www.visitvoss.no Prices from NOK 1500 for a double room.

Gudvangen

Elusive seals and hideaway villages

Soon we were on our way to Gudvangen, a beautiful small village of about 120 inhabitants, situated in the innermost of the wild and the beautiful Nærøfjord. I was assured that I could find a seal en-route to Undredal so I was on the look out for one. The drive down the Stalheimskleiva Road to Gudvangen is by a narrow road in hairpin bends down to the Nærøy valley; and passing several waterfalls on the way alone is a unique experience. www.alr.no/ www.sognefjord.no

On the boat trip between Gudvangen and Flåm and we sailed between steep mountains, passing cascading waterfalls and small farms that cling to the mountainsides. For the boat journey from Gudvangen, we cruised through the Nærøfjord (UNESCO), an arm of the Sognefjord. The Sognefjord is the longest and deepest fjord in the world.

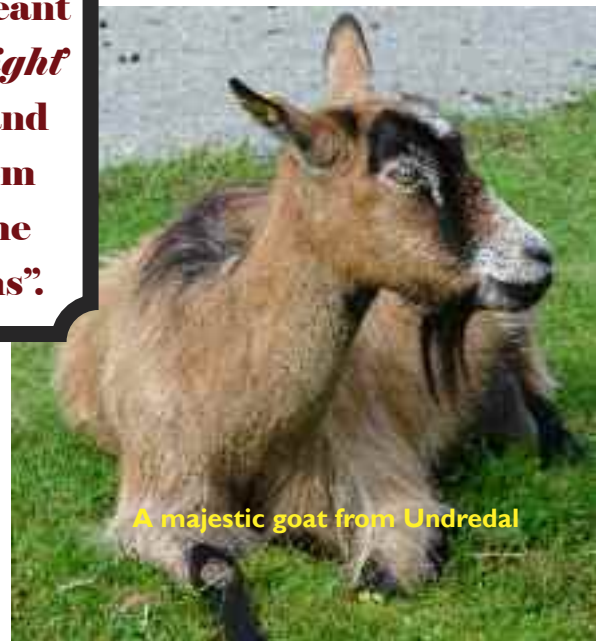


View from Stalheim of the drive down the Stalheimskleiva Road to Gudvangen

Undredal – The town where the goats rule

Undredal is a charming little village with only 80 inhabitants, about 350 goats. Here you can visit the "House of Cheese", enjoy some waffles and pancakes and learn about the making of goat cheese as well as hear some folk stories and songs. Undredal is also home to Scandinavia's smallest church. Allow yourself sometime to visit the church and spend some timewith the goats if you can. www.alr.no /www.sognefjord.no

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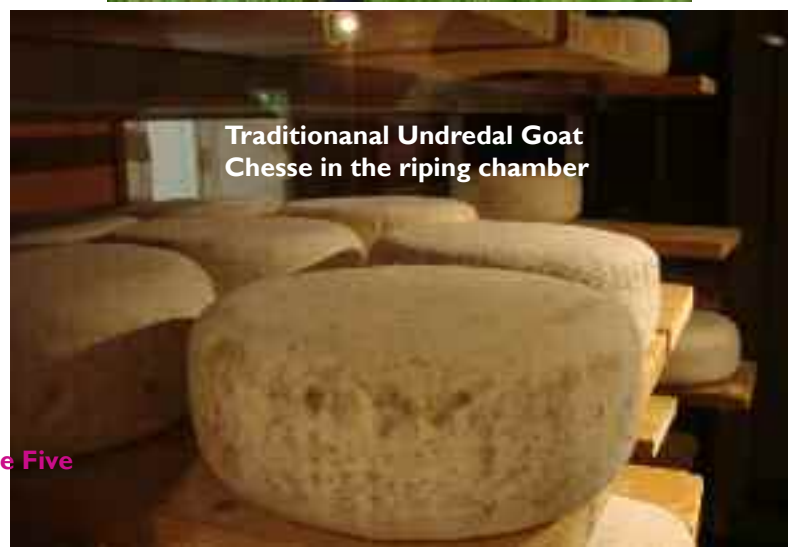


A majestic goat from Undredal



Kayaking enthusiasts ready for some sporting fun on the Nærøfjord

Here, the mountains reach altitudes of up to 1,800 metres. The Nærøfjord is the world's narrowest fjord. In early summer, waterfalls cascade down the mountainsides. At its narrowest, the fjord is only 250 metres wide. The journey passes through several places, many of which can only be reached by boat and the impressive mountain mass along the Nærøfjord makes you understand why it has been listed as UNESCO world heritage site. www.fjord1.no. A soothing experience before our arrival at Undredal.



Traditionana Undredal Goat Chesse in the riping chamber

Flåm – a cruise port with the best train journey experience you can dream of...

Beautiful Flåm is situated in the innermost part of the Aurlandsfjord, a tributary of the 204 kilometres long and up to 1308 metres deep Sognefjord. Surrounded by steep mountainsides, roaring waterfalls and deep valleys, Flåm is a paradise for everyone looking for a one-of-a-kind experience with nature. www.visitflam.no /www.alr.no /www.sognefjord.no

Destination Flåm to Bergen by rail – a bewitching experience aboard the World's steepest normal-track adhesion railway

As I reach the final legs of my Norwegian experience I am all excited because I was continuing my tour on the legendary Flåm Railway which is a 20 km branch line of the Bergen Railway and later to the Bergen Railway. As a railwayman's daughter, I have grown to love trains and I simply could not hold back my excitement. If only I had known what was in store for me on the journey! I was aboard the Flåm Railway and was about to experience something incredible from the Flåm station to the mountain station at Myrdal en-route to board the Bergen Railway to Bergen.

Every year, close to 585,000 passengers travel on the Flåm Railway, making it one of Norway's major and most spectacular attractions. The Railway begun in 1923 and commenced electrical operations in 1944. There is something special about the Flåm Railway, it has survived many threats of "closing downs" and "going its own way" so if in 2009, I am enjoying a ride on it through its silent mountains, I am surely going to meet a gnome or fairy on the journey! The trip takes about an hour, goes through 20 tunnels (of which 18 were dug by hand), climbs 866 metres to Myrdal and the junction main line. It is the world's steepest normal-track adhesion railway, 80% of the line with a gradient in excess of 1:18.



The Kjosfossen Waterfall

where fairies drop by to greet travellers

From one spectacular scene to another we travelled through the mountains to Myrdal and then suddenly the train stops and passengers are invited to witness the Kjosfossen waterfall – one of the most spectacular fjords in Norway. Amidst the towering mountains of 1000m high waterfalls, I get to meet my fairy. The scene is mesmerizing and bewitching at the same time. The faces of the passengers as they re-board the train to continue the journey say it all and just when you think that you have seen it all, there is just another bend and the spectacle continues.



The Legendary Flåm Railway



Tourists overwhelmed by the sight of the Kjosfossen waterfall

An ordinary adult ticket on the Flåm Railway costs 240 Norwegian Kroners one way and 340 return. You can book your journey on the Flåm train from www.flambooking.com

Bergen

The city with its feet in the sea, its head in the skies and its heart in the right place.

I was at the final leg of my fairytale experience and now aboard the Bergen Railway to Bergen. Bergen is traditionally known as the Gateway to the Fjords of Norway but I had already seen the Fjords so I was not quite sure what to expect. I was secretly hoping that it was not going to be an anti-climax. One thing for sure is that the Norwegians take their trains quite seriously and the Bergen Railway which plies many routes including Oslo-Bergen is no exception to the rule. There is no road connection from Myrdal to Bergen and the train journey is very comfortable. For information about the train from Myrdal to Bergen www.nsb.no. A Single trip costs NOK 230.

Bergen itself is a world heritage city, cosmopolitan but still rich in tradition and history. It is easily accessible by air, boat, coach and train. Bergen is worth exploring. Strolling around the old streets and alleyways itself, is an experience. Small wooden houses lie higgledy-piggledy among the cobbled streets and merchant heritage. You can walk the length and breadth of Bryggen to the old fortress of Bergenhus. The city has a lot of credit to its name culturally; home to the oldest symphony orchestra, birthplace of comics, painters, but it is especially famous for its composer, Edvard Grieg. Do not miss a visit to his museum and house, Troidhaugen

Mount Floyen -

Where you can wine and dine as you admire the City of Bergen from above

A visit to Bergen is not complete until you have taken a trip on the Floibanen funicular, the only one of its kind in Scandinavia and one of Norway's most popular tourist attractions. <http://www.floibanen.com/> The trip from the city centre to Mount Floyen is 320 metres and takes seven minutes. This is a very popular attraction so allow plenty of time for queuing. I must add though that the queuing is worth it because upon arrival at the top, the view is spectacular and breathtaking and worth the ride. While on Mount Floyen do not miss the unique opportunity to dine or enjoy a snack at the Floien Folkrestaurant.

By the time I was leaving Bergen, I had agreed that it was really a city with its feet in the sea, its head in the skies and its heart in the right place. www.visitBergen.com

My Fjord Norway experience is unforgettable, in fact so enchanting that I only realized that I did not actually see a seal during my crossing of the Sognefjord and the Nærøfjord until I arrived at London Gatwick airport! Can readers please let



me know if they see one when they visit? All the same, I can now proudly say that I know and have seen the Norwegian Fjords and they are certainly one of nature's best creations. Best of all, I discovered one of Norway's incurable habits - they collect anything and everything!

Where to stay in Bergen

The Clarion Collection Hotel Havnekontoret is one very modern hotel with everything a guest can expect to enjoy in a beautiful hotel right in the middle of Bergen.

Clarion Collection Hotel Havnekontoret
 Slottsgaten 1, 5003 Bergen, Tel.: +47 55 60 11 00, www.choice-hotels.no Prices from NOK 1395 for a double room

Where to dine in Bergen

Bergen has many restaurants but the Holbergstuen Restaurant in the city centre is a good place to eat. The restaurant has lived in its location since 1927 and provide Bergensere and visitors with exactly what they want, good food and good drink with a nostalgic and popular atmosphere. <http://www.holbergstuen.no/>

How to enjoy Bergen

While in Bergen, arm yourself with the Bergen Card which you can either buy online at www.visitBergen.com/Bergen-Card, tourist information centres, railway stations, the Bergen Express Boat Terminal, camping sites and hotels or at the Montana Youth Hostel. The 24 hour card costs 190 NOK for adults and the 48 hours card costs 250 NOK for adults.

Places to visit in Bergen

Hanseatic museum og Bryggen Wharf
 UNESCO World Heritage Site In Bergen.
 Fantoft Stave Church

The Edvard Grieg Museum - Troidhaugen

This is where you would find his museum, villa, the hut where he composed music and his grave site. Music lovers would be pleased to know that there is also a concert hall which sits 200 spectators.

www.visitbergen.com

