



Hiking Fjord Norway

July 28- August 5, 2012

Plan your arrival in Bergen, Norway for July 27, 2012

Plan your departure from Bergen, Norway for August 6, 2012

Enjoy a close encounter with western Norway's convoluted coastline, a landscape that has been called the most beautiful on Earth. Here towering granite cliffs plunge into deep, twisting fjords that wind their way for as much as a hundred miles into Norway's rocky core. Picturesque villages and farms huddle where the topography permits. Stroll to ancient stave churches, and hike to the blue face of glaciers to see how the hand of ice is still at work shaping the Scandinavian landscape. Enjoy thrilling walks and hikes to glorious vantage points and isolated summer farms perched high above the fjords. Gain a better appreciation for the resiliency of the Norwegians who have over the centuries come to terms with and thrived in this rugged, harsh, and magnificent environment.

Day 1

Overnight in Lofthus

Dinner included

Velkommen til Norge! Depart Bergen and visit Trolldhaugen, home of Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg. Travel to Lofthus, a fjord village in the Hardanger region known for its fruit orchards. Enjoy the ambiance of one of Fjord Norway's most renowned hotels, your base for two nights. Stretch your legs on an afternoon walk to the waterfalls that plunge over the edge of the great Hardangervidda plateau into the Opo Valley. The waterfall named *Skrikjo* ("shriek") plunges down the face of the escarpment at the head of the valley in a thin stream while the Bjørnabyksefoss tumbles down the valley's north wall in a series of powerful, roaring cascades. A cabin that Edvard Grieg used while staying in the Hardanger region can be found on the hotel grounds.

Day 2

Overnight in Lofthus

Breakfast, lunch & dinner included

Follow the route of the *Munketrappene* ("Monk's Steps") which leads to the fabulous vantage point called *Nosi* ("the nose") at the edge of the windswept Hardangervidda. Marvel at the cataracts that plunge in a foaming spectacle through narrow canyons on their way to the fjords below. For a longer hike, continue into the austere, tundra environment of the Hardangervidda where rushing streams link a myriad of high country lakes. Be on the lookout for cloudberries (*Rubus chamaeorus*)—highly prized by Scandinavians. They can sometimes be found in the Hardangervidda's high windswept meadows. Return to your hotel nestled in the luxuriant green landscapes of fjord country.

Day 3

Overnight in Flåm

Breakfast included

Travel to Voss and catch a train to the mountain settlement of Myrdal. Myrdal is the mountain terminus of the Flåm rail line (or *Flåmsbana*) which makes its way down the lovely Flåm Valley (*Flåmsdalen*) to its sea-level terminus at Flåm. You can hop aboard the train for the spectacular 55 minute journey to Flåm. Or, if you desire, you can walk down the peaceful yet dramatic valley filled with waterfalls and tumbling streams all the way to Flåm completing a journey from fra fjell til fjord ("from mountain to sea"). Alternatively, you can shorten the walk by riding the train down the valley, disembarking at one of the intermediate stations and starting your hike from there! The walking route down the Flåm Valley is along the Rallarveg, a narrow, well-graded gravel road that was built originally between 1885 and 1898 to serve as a construction road for the Flåm railway. Shortly after departing Myrdal, the route descends quickly via a series of short switchbacks alongside a rushing stream. The trail levels out

as it approaches the hamlet of Kårdal. Here, rocky buttresses constrict the flow of the *Flåmselvi* (Flåm River) resulting in a powerful, foaming cataract. The route continues to descend at a gentle grade to the station at Berekvam, approximately midway between Myrdal and Flåm. Continuing on, pass the *Høge Bro* (bridge) where you can watch the Flåm River emerging from a man-made tunnel into which the river was diverted during the railroad's construction. Before reaching Flåm and its wooden church, pass the lovely waterfall called Rjoande, streaming gracefully down the Flåmsdal's western wall.

Day 4

Overnight in Flåm

Breakfast included

Enjoy hikes in the Aurlandsdalen ("Aurland Valley"). The hike through the lower portion of the Aurlandsdalen is a Norwegian mountain hiking classic! From the mountain hamlet of Østerbø a path leads down an untrammled section of the Aurlandsdalen to Vassbygdi. This route was used for centuries to drive cattle from western Norway across the mountains to be sold in markets in the east. Portions of the path have been recently restored and improved for hikers. The route leads over bridges, and past abandoned mountain farms such as the now-restored farm at *Sinjarheim* (abandoned in the early 1920s) and the small but dramatically-situated *Almen* farm tucked beneath a rock overhang.

Day 5

Overnight in Flåm

Breakfast & dinner included

After breakfast, a twenty minute drive along the Snøveg ("Snow Road") brings you to the Bjørge mountain farm. Ascend the open ridge leading to the summit of Prestevarden ("Priest's Cairn") high above the town of Aurland. Enjoy bird's eye views over the majestic sweep of the Aurlandsfjord and the tundra of the high *vidda* which stretches away to the east. In the late afternoon, consider an optional hike from Flåm to the Otternes *bygdetun* or "cluster farm." Twenty-seven farm houses and associated buildings dating from the 1600s are protected here.

Day 6

Overnight in Balestrand

Breakfast included

After breakfast, travel by vehicle to the Lærdal, a valley well-known for its salmon fishery. Walk the historic route known as the *Vindhellaveg* ("way of the winding incline") to the beautiful 12th-century Borgund Stave Church, one of Norway's best preserved stave churches, richly ornamented with carvings. There were at one time about 1,000 stave churches in Norway; about 28 are left today. The *Vindhellaveg* was first built in 1793 and rebuilt in the mid-19th century. Today, the old road is closed to traffic, its grassy tread maintained for the delight of walkers. You can return to the trailhead via the *Sverrestig* ("sword path"), a lovely trail meandering through quiet woodlands. The *Sverrestig* is part of the old main road between eastern and western Norway, and it's at least 1,000 years old. Continue by vehicle to the fjord-side town of Balestrand, a mecca for fjord visitors since the mid-nineteenth century.

Day 7

Overnight in Fjærland

Breakfast & dinner included

Travel by vehicle to Fjærland where you'll spend the next two nights. For a moderate hiking option, follow the trail leading into the green and quiet Mundalsdalen. At the head of the valley, a large glacial cirque whose walls wear a waterfall filigree awaits you! Wild huckleberries and raspberries grow in profusion along the trail to Mundalsdalen and the open floor of the cirque invites wandering. Alternatively, experienced mountain walkers can undertake a challenging hike following the trace of an old route across the mountains to Fjærland. The route starts at Anestølen, an operating goat farm in a high mountain valley. The term *støl* refers to a summer farm where herds graze and milking and cheese-making is done. From Anestølen, hike across the surrounding stream-laced meadows and begin a gentle ascent along the Langedal stream bordered by grassy meadows punctuated with twisted birches, willow thickets, and huckleberry patches. After a brisk climb alongside a rushing cascade, the trail enters the Haugbotn, a large glacially-carved cirque carpeted with ferns, boulders and meadows where tufts of cotton grass sway in the mountain breezes. Waterfalls cascade down the walls of the Haugbotn from snowfields high above. The route

ascends to the high pass at Sogndalseggi and skirts an ice-filled lake before descending through wild, lonely mountain basins into the Fjærland Valley. After dinner in Fjærland, you might choose to take an evening walk on your own to enjoy a serene fjordscape of glacier-clad mountains rising from the sea.

Day 8

Overnight in Fjærland

Breakfast & dinner included

Continue your exploration of the countryside and mountains surrounding Fjærland. Fjærland's wealth of trails leads you through an "open air laboratory" of glacially-sculpted landforms. If you desire, pay a visit to the Norwegian Glacier Museum (*Norsk Bremuseum*) which interprets the glaciers of western Norway (cost of admission not included in trip price). The museum's exhibits are a great way to gain a deeper appreciation for the power of moving ice. A moderately challenging walk leads to the astounding viewpoint atop Nesehaugen where fjord panoramas await! Or you could choose a vigorous hike to the Flatbre hut in the Jostedal National Park (*Jostedalstredet Nasjonalpark*)—3,000 feet above Fjærland—from where you'll enjoy bird's eye views over the Fjærlandsfjord. Enjoy "front row" vistas of the deeply crevassed *Flatbre* (glacier) as it descends from the main Jostedal ice cap and plunges over a cliff edge in the magnificent Supphellebre ice fall.

Day 9

Overnight in Bergen

Breakfast included

Depart Fjærland to return to Bergen. Upon arrival in Bergen check into your hotel before enjoying a funicular ride to the top of Fløyen mountain for magnificent views over the city. A network of forest paths descend the slopes of Fløyen to bring you back to your hotel via the old quarter of Bergen. Your lodging tonight and breakfast tomorrow morning are included.

Other Details about this Trip

Trip Dates: July 28 - August 5, 2012

Price: \$4,895 (group of 4-5); \$4,195 (group of 6 or more)

Single Room for entire trip: \$600. Single accommodations are subject to availability and may be limited.

Meeting Point: Bergen, Norway

Departure Point: Bergen, Norway

Accommodations: Nine nights in hotels/inns with private bath. Nine breakfasts, one lunch and five dinners are included. **Note:** Your accommodations on the evening of July 27, 2012 are not included but we are happy to assist you with booking your lodging for that evening.

Notes: The mountains of the western Norwegian Fjords are "sea-level" mountains rising sharply from the waters of the fjords. "Alpine tundra" environments are encountered at an elevation of about 3,000 feet above sea level. No hike on this trip exceeds an elevation of 4,500 above sea level. The trail system in Norway is, in general, less developed than in other parts of Europe (such as the Alps), and many mountain trails are wild and rugged.