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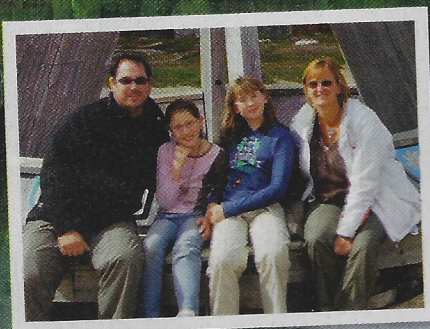
haymarket



GREAT Escapes

GETAWAY

NORWAY IN AT THE DEEP END



New caravanners **Jane Sullivan** and her family embark on an eight-month tour of Europe, starting in the stunning landscapes of Norway

Last year my husband Andrew, children Elena and Madi, and I bought a caravan to tour around Europe for eight months. This was our first time as caravanners and Andrew was quite nervous about towing but he needn't have worried. He drove as though he had been towing for years.

The first stop on our grand tour was Norway: we wanted to go whale watching. We took the overnight ferry from Newcastle via Stavanger and Haugesund to **Bergen**, where we arrived at 10.30pm. On arrival, all vehicles had to leave the ship and go through customs but because we were arriving so late we opted to park the outfit on the quayside and spend one more night on board the ferry. It was still light so, before turning in, we took a walk through the town to stretch our legs.

Early the next morning we drove to **Bruvoll** campsite on **Lindås island**, north of Bergen. At £16 for the four of us, including hook-up, the site was a bargain. This was our first experience of setting up the caravan, which we did while the children caught up on sleep in the car. We settled in and spent the rest of the day horse riding and walking in the woods around the site before experiencing our first night as caravanners.

Our first task the following day was to get some gas. We had already bought a regulator for Campingaz, which is what we thought all Europeans used. However, in Norway, it turns out, they use propane bottles, which need a different regulator. We found gas at the petrol station. It cost a small fortune – £110 – to buy the bottle, gas and regulator.

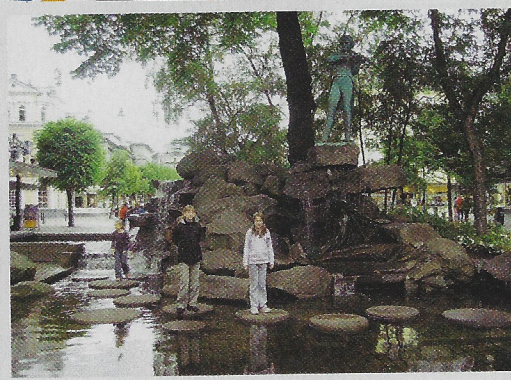
Food prices were also a bit steep and we shopped sparingly. For example, a litre of milk cost £1.60; a large bag of crisps, £2.30; a bottle of cola, £1.80; and four chicken breasts, £8. As for beer, Andrew is too upset to talk about it. He had to make the six cans he bought last.

After a late lunch the following day we drove to **Bergen**. At £4 per hour parking was pricey but it was worth it, Bergen is a lovely town. We



Gloppen site is beside the Sognefjorden

LEFT Lake Stryn borders the Jostedalsgreen National Park BELOW The overnight ferry from Newcastle to Bergen was packed BOTTOM A memorial to the composer Edvard Grieg stands by the Lille Lungegårdsvann in Bergen



walked up to the lake, **Lille Lungegårdsvann**, and saw the statue of the composer Edvard Grieg. We then headed down to the old wharf area known as **Bryggen**. The wharf is a World Heritage Site. Fire has destroyed many of the original wooden buildings but rebuilding programmes have followed old construction methods and the main structures are largely preserved. Behind the lovely waterfront buildings we found narrow streets housing small, interesting shops.

A stroll through the fish market revealed more examples of high prices: take-away fish and chips cost £10, restaurant fish and chips, £27. We opted for a cake to share instead, which still cost nearly £7.

In the summer this is the land of the midnight sun so everything is geared up for

late-evening activity. Supermarkets are open until 10pm and bars serve drinks until 3am. Even the tourist information centre is open until 10pm. There is a lot to do here, with concerts and folk nights, a cable car and funicular railway, and plenty of museums. We stayed only one day. We had to press northwards in search of elk and whales.

When we planned our trip, the idea of driving beyond the Arctic Circle seemed daunting, mainly because we didn't know what the roads would be like or how often we would find fuel. Our plan was to stick to the bigger roads where possible and, with this in mind, we headed for the E39 highway.

This route was fabulous, taking us through amazing landscapes and tunnels. After a few hours we arrived at **Oppedal**, which is on the Sognefjorden, Norway's longest fjord. We caught a ferry to the other side, and went on to **Gloppen** campsite, near Sandane.

Gloppen is a lovely site, right on the edge of the fjord. In the evening we strolled on the beach. We still hadn't got used to the daylight hours, and as the temperature doesn't change much day or night (15°C-17°C), it was easy to lose track of time. We were up past midnight. ➡

Need2know

Destination

Andoya, Norway

The caravanners

Jane and Andrew Sullivan and their children Elena (11) and Madeleine (9)

The car

2007 Nissan Terrano 2.7 TD

The caravan

2005 Lunar Chateau 500

Where to stay

Stave Camping, Stave, Andoya, Norway

Tel 00 47 926 01257

Web www.stavecamping.no

Open 30 May-6 September

Located on the island of Andoya, the campsite is 15 minutes' drive from Andenes and the whale safari. Washroom and laundry facilities are spotless. The site has internet access, trampolines for the kids, kayak rental, hot water pools and can help with safari bookings. Rates are 200 krone per night (includes 2 people and hook-up).

Essential information

■ The Norwegian Automobile Federation (NAF) camping guide has the prices and details of 282 campsites all over Norway.

Web www.nafcampa.com.

■ **Whale watching** The whale safari staff all speak perfect English and are very helpful. You can book in advance via the website, or by telephone or turn up on the day and hope for cancellations.

Departures Daily at 11.15.

Price Adults 795 krone.

Child 5-13yrs 500 krone.

Under-5s free. Family and student discounts

Tel 00 47 76 11 56 00

Web www.whale-safari.no





ABOVE Road signs warn of the presence of elk RIGHT Hell: better than it sounds BELOW Wooden houses in Mosjøen BOTTOM Stunning views around every corner heading north



Jostedalbreen National Park is home to the largest glacier in Continental Europe. At the park's Breheimsenteret visitor centre you can learn more about the Jostedalbreen glacier

From Gloppen we could either continue north on the E39 or head east to pick up the larger E6. We opted for the latter route as the E39 involved four expensive car ferries. The E6 route north is free but involves steep, winding, narrow roads but with the bonus of spectacular scenery. The road from Byrkjelo to Stryn took us over mountains and along the edge of the inmost fingers of the Nordfjord. We picked up the R15 along the edge of Lake Stryn, with the Jostedalbreen National Park opposite.

The Jostedalbreen is Europe's largest glacier, so we just had to stop and take a photo of it before we continued on our way. The last part of the drive that day took us alongside the River Otta, a torrent of green glacial water, and through elk country. We saw many road signs

warning us they were there, but we saw none. We arrived at Otta Camping at about 4pm with the sun still shining.

We had been in Norway for a week by this point, heading north the whole time. The next day we went to Hell (it's a village). After a day of milking the 'Hell' puns ('driving to Hell and back', 'shopping in Hell'), we continued north on the E6 towards the Arctic Circle, travelling through the Namdalen valley. The further north we went, the fewer people we saw.

That evening we reached Mosjøen Camping. The skies were clear but the temperature had dropped considerably. We were 80km from the Arctic Circle.

The following day we drove into Mosjøen to see the street called Sjøgata, which is home

to northern Norway's largest area of wooden buildings from the 19th century. The city grew through the establishment of a sawmill in 1866 by the English timber barons. It's not what we think of as a city though. It's much smaller and feels more like an outpost. The town is a mix of modern shopping and history. While wandering among the quayside buildings, we came across a giant's chair, a large troll and a huge chicken – all made of wood, of course.

While in the city we stocked up on groceries. The prices here were less steep and Andrew thought he had got a bargain on beer: six large cans for about £11. But it turned out they were small cans and again he had to make them last.

We continued along the E6, north through the rest of Helgeland towards the Arctic



Pine forests, mountains and glaciers line the E6 as you head north towards the Arctic Circle

Circle. We got to the **Polarsirkelsenteret** (Arctic Circle Centre) in time for lunch and sat on the 'line' to eat at northern latitude 66° 33'. The line is marked by cairns, rough mounds of stone built by hundreds of visitors. We added the Sullivan cairn to the collection before posing for photos, buying the sticker and celebrating with ice creams.

We spent the night at **Fauske** and the next day drove on to Bognes to catch a ferry to Lødingen on Hinnøya island. The weather was closing in as we made the hour-long crossing. Our destination was **Stave Camping** on Andøya island. We arrived at 7pm just as the sun came out, so Madi and Andrew decided we would have a barbecue. Just across the road from the site was the beach: after dinner we strolled on the white sand in the evening sunshine.

The next day we drove the 20 minutes to Andenes to join a whale-watching safari. This is what we had travelled so far to see. The weather was perfect – a blue sky and a light wind. We were all issued with seasickness tablets and boarded the boat. Just a few days before, the tour had seen sperm whales, orcas, dolphins and a humpback whale. We didn't know what we would see, but we were excited.

It took an hour to get to the whales' feeding ground, which is just off the continental shelf where the water's depth drops steeply from 100m to 1000m. Madi was feeling nauseous, despite the pills. The boat slowed so we could look for the tell-tale 'blows' from the sperm whales. Madi was feeling really ill when someone shouted that they'd seen a blow and

the boat started moving to get nearer. We saw our first sperm whale, which perked Madi up and took her mind off her tummy.

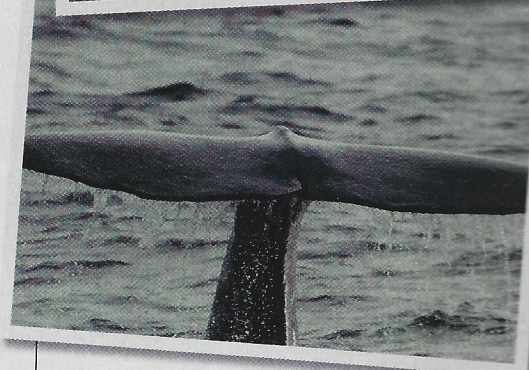
We had three more 'observations', chasing blows to get close to the whale. When the blows are sighted there is only a brief time to see the whales before they dive. We had been out for about an hour and a half when the weather began to close in and the captain decided to head back to shore. But we were thrilled that we had seen four sperm whales.

We spent our last few days in Norway on Andøy. The opportunities for seeing wildlife around here are amazing. We drove along the shore at Bleik, from where you can see the small island of Bleiksøy. It is home to tens of thousands of auks and puffins, with many white-tailed eagles sharing its space.

There are organised boat trips to get close to the birds but we decided not to put Madi through the whole seasickness thing again. We settled for watching the island from the shore. We spotted a few eagles high in the sky, and as a tour boat approached the island, many more eagles appeared. We counted at least 12. It would be a great trip to get photos of them in action.

After two weeks in Norway it was time to head east to Sweden in search of reindeer and moose. We loved Norway's amazing scenery and friendly people.

■ Follow the Sullivans on their journey though Europe in upcoming issues.



TOP Passing into the area known as North Norway you enter the land of the midnight sun MIDDLE It doesn't matter how cold it is, holiday means ice cream ABOVE You need to be fast with the camera if you want to record your sighting of a sperm whale