

Norway Travel Journal – Volume 1

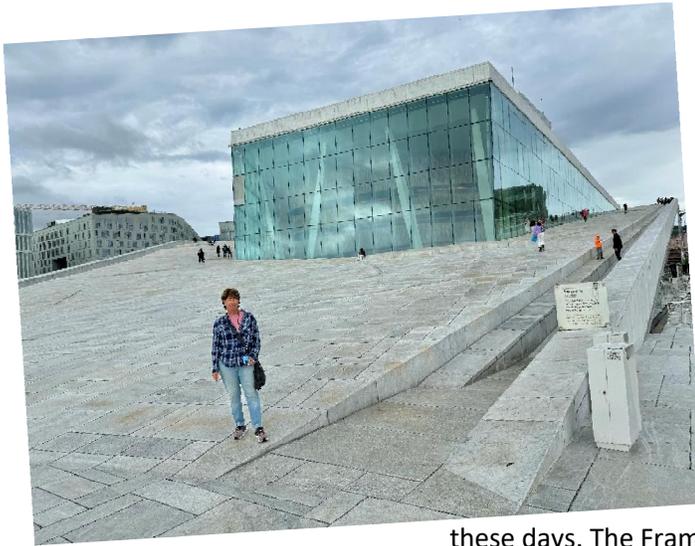
Monday, May 27, 2024 – Oslo, Norway

Lori and I are now in Norway. We arrived in Oslo, the capital, this morning after an overnight flight on which I didn't sleep for one minute. Nicknamed the "Land of the Midnight Sun," one-third of Norway is in the Arctic Circle, to where we'll be travelling later in the trip. It's also home to the original Vikings. They crossed raging seas in elaborate ships and conquered territories far and wide. They left a strong mark on Northern Europe and Minnesota that will last forever. Fran Tarkenton is considered one of the greatest Vikings of all time.

The name "Norway" means "path to the North". Get it? Nor/north; way/path. Norway is the birthplace of modern skiing. The word "ski" is Norwegian for "piece of wood". Norway is also the world's largest exporter of salmon, and we expect to be eating a lot of fish this trip.



Oslo sits on the country's southern coast at the head of the Oslofjord. After checking into our hotel, sleeping very soundly, and buying umbrellas for the torrential rain that we found ourselves in, we did a walking tour of the city. We visited the modern Opera House, which you can actually walk upon (we didn't due to the rain), Oslo's Bjørvika district, the city's main cultural hub, and many other places of which we couldn't understand the name. Oslo is very clean, full of historical and cultural sites, and everyone speaks English, unlike South Florida.



Tuesday, May 28, 2024 – Oslo, Norway

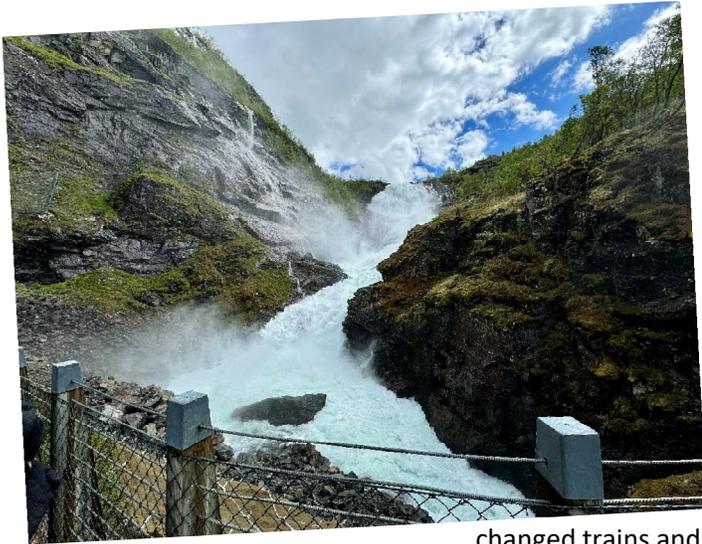
Today we visited the Fram Museum, a museum of polar exploration containing the world's strongest wooden ship, the Fram. Yes, there are museums for everything

these days. The Fram was used in expeditions of the Arctic and Antarctic regions by the Norwegian explorers Fridtjof Nansen, Otto Sverdrup, Oscar Wisting, and Roald Amundsen between 1893 and 1912. It was originally designed and built for Nansen's 1893 Arctic expedition. The plan was to freeze Fram into the Arctic ice sheet and float with it over the North Pole. It worked, and somehow the ship is now encased in a building in Oslo hosting thousands of tourists every day.

In the afternoon we did a food tour to sample some of the foods unique to Oslo. We tried Norwegian reindeer, moose and whale sausages and brown cheese and lingonberries at our first stop. For our second stop we were all



worked up for a Norwegian hot dog at the last remaining traditional hot dog stand in Oslo, but the place was closed when we arrived. The owner had had enough that day, and apparently is working on making Oslo hot dog stands completely extinct. At other stops we tasted Norwegian pastries, waffles and a special cola soda made of essential botanical oils. Not bad, but we didn't buy a six-pack.



Wednesday, May 29, 2024 – Norway interior

This morning we boarded a train in Oslo to start our “Norway in a Nutshell” journey. This tour travels through Norway’s UNESCO-protected fjords and mountain landscapes between Oslo and Bergen, all while experiencing Europe’s top scenic rail journey. We’re taking two days to do the journey, which includes trains, a boat and a bus.

The first train runs from Oslo to Myrdal where we

changed trains and boarded the historic Flåmsbana (Flåm Railway) from Myrdal to Flåm. The Flåmsbana is one of the most beautiful train rides in the world, traveling past mountains and waterfalls. We arrived in the village of Flåm in the afternoon and walked around the village before spending the night in Flåm.



Thursday, May 30, 2024 - Norway interior

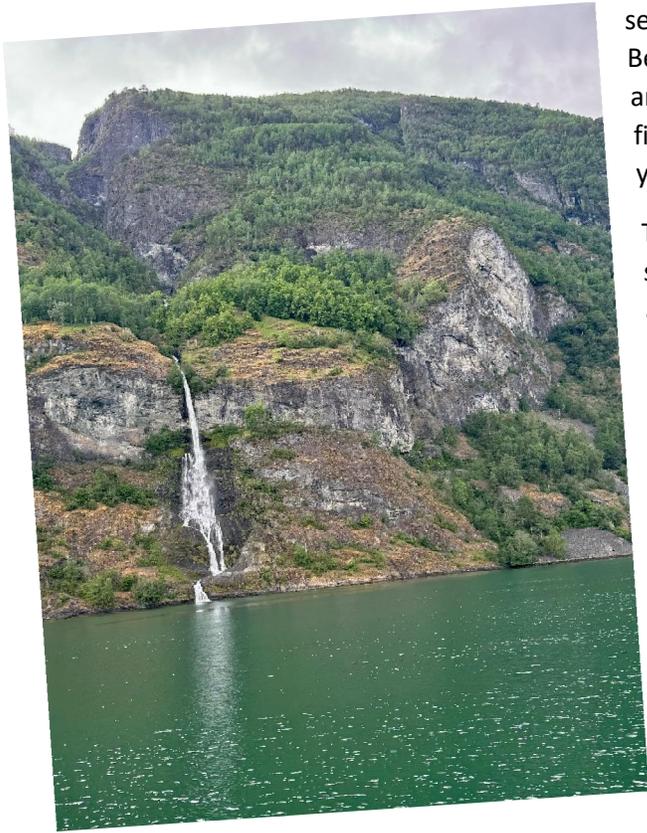
Today we continued on the Norway in a Nutshell tour with a boat from Flåm to Gudvangen through the UNESCO-listed Nærøfjord, surrounded by 1,700-meter mountain peaks. We then took a bus to Voss, where we had a three-hour layover to enjoy the town. We opted instead to take an uphill hike to the hospital emergency room to try and see a doctor for an ear infection that's been plaguing me since before we left Florida. Since it's only gotten



worse as the trip's gone on, I figured it wasn't getting better on its own. After waiting in the ER for a while, only to see more serious cases than an ear ache being taken in and realizing that if we wait any longer we'll miss our train, I convinced myself I was feeling a little better and we left. Maybe tomorrow I'll have more time to find a faster solution.

We then grabbed a quick lunch from a pizzeria that, based on the appearance, taste and texture of the pizza, I would swear heats up frozen pizzas from a box and





serves them as freshly made. We caught our train to Bergen on the Bergen Railway, another one of the world's most scenic railway routes, and arrived in Bergen in time for dinner. We ate at a restaurant at the fish market, where trading fish has been taking place for over 500 years.

The scenery everywhere we passed was beautiful, that is if you like steep mountain cliffs with waterfalls towering above you on all sides and raging rivers beside you.

We'll spend a couple days in Bergen and pick up in the next journal. Thanks for reading if you made it this far.

Love, Lori and Stephen



Norway Travel Journal – Volume 2

Friday, May 31, 2024 - Bergen, Norway

Hvis du brukte tid på å oversette dette, kastet du bort tiden din. Sorry, I've picked up some Norwegian since we arrived, and now I'm confusing it with English. As you can see, they're very similar languages.

Before I begin this journal, I need to address some items from the previous journal. Some of you have responded to me that Randy Moss was also a great Viking. As you know I am not a sports fan. While Randy Moss may be a great Viking, I've barely heard of him. I have heard of Fran Tarkenton, so he's my choice of most-famous Viking. When you visit Norway and write your own journal, you can name your own most-famous Viking. Regarding my ear, aside from the blood and puss oozing from it occasionally, all manageable with gauze, the pain is gone, so I think it's getting better on its own. Nevertheless, I defer to the doctors on my distribution list, of which there are several.



Now back to Norway. We're in Bergen, Norway's second-largest city, located on the southwestern coast and surrounded by mountains and fjords. Its strategic location made it a maritime center dating back to the Viking Age. The city was founded in 1070 AD and has a long history of international trade. Hanseatic merchants from Northern Germany sailed into Bergen in the 13th century to exchange grain for stockfish from Northern Norway. Their trading activities made Bergen one of Northern Europe's most important trading hubs for centuries.

On our first morning in Bergen, we started with a group walking tour at the Bergen Palace and Fortress. We covered 1,000 years of Norwegian history in the first 16 minutes, making it a very fast-paced tour. We made our way through the city's historic and picturesque streets including Bryggen with its colorful and UNESCO-listed warehouses and well-preserved old houses. After the tour we wandered over to the Bergen International Festival, happening this weekend. They needed someone from the US to perform, so I volunteered with a song and dance number. The past four years of dance lessons came in handy.

For lunch we returned to the fish market for the world-renowned Bergen Fish Soup and a fresh salmon burger. I don't like fish that tastes like fish, but both were delicious. We returned to the wharf for dinner, then took the Fløibanen Funicular to Mount Floyen where we had a panoramic



view of the city from above. We wanted to watch the sunset from the top of the mountain, but by 10pm it didn't look like the sun was setting anytime soon, so we hiked down. The sun was still so bright at 10:30pm we needed our sunglasses! While the sun does "set" sometime after 11:00pm, it doesn't really get that dark before the sun "rises" around 4:00am. The days will get even longer as we go farther north.



June 1, 2024 - Bergen, Norway

Today we started with a private guided hike through the Bergen Mountains. We again took the funicular to Mount Floyen, then walked to the Skomarkerdiken lake through the woods and did a hike on the mountain. It was a serious and slow-going hike for us, but we were passed a few times by Norwegians *running* the trail.

Of course, there's a Hanseatic Museum, which contains the last Hanseatic assembly rooms in the world. We joined a guided tour there, which was able to nearly put us (and half the group) to sleep despite the coffee we had just before the visit. Some people actually did fall asleep during the presentation, which was hilarious to watch. In the afternoon we made our way to the cruise port and boarded the Havila Capella to begin a voyage up the west coast of Norway from Bergen to Kirkenes.



Since the late 1800s, various cargo and passenger vessels have operated along the Norwegian coastline. Ships still carry cargo and local passengers, but now they

also host tourists, including the Margolis's.

On our northbound voyage we'll visit 34 (not a typo) ports in seven days and some of the world's most beautiful fjords, cross the Arctic Circle and sail around the North Cape plateau at the very top of Europe.

We'll stop at many of the smaller ports for just 15-30 minutes, just long enough to unload and load cargo and local passengers, but each day we'll stop at one port for at least a few hours to do an excursion. Food onboard has an emphasis on fish and seafood, with local ingredients obtained from the various ports along the route. It's not a typical cruise ship. The ship runs on electric motors powered by huge batteries and is very quiet. There are less than 300 passengers onboard with a majority seeming to be Norwegian or European, through there is the typical obnoxious New Yorker and nice Mid-Westerners. We've already met all the Jews onboard. People get on and off at every port and stay onboard for any number of days. There's no entertainment, but there are presentations and lectures along the way. The scenery outside is what we came for.



Sunday, June 2, 2024 - Western Norway coast

We're traveling through fjord country first. The geography will change as we travel north. The first stop for the ship was Florø, Norway at 2:45am this morning for 15 minutes. I happened to be up going to the bathroom at that time, so I did go out onto our balcony (in full daylight) to check out the port. Not much to see.



scenic bus tour beginning in Geiranger, traversing two fjords by ferry, and visiting Trolls Wall, the highest sheer mountain wall in Europe, before taking the Romsdalsgondola to the elevated Eggen Restaurant for dinner. The scenery here is spectacular. We then met back up with the ship in Molde.

I apologize for the length of this journal. I'm just happy to be here. Thanks for sticking with us.

Love, Lori and Stephen



We spent the first part of the normal hours of the day cruising by glaciers, waterfalls and steep mountain landscapes of the Geirangerfjord, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the afternoon we did a



Norway Travel Journal – Volume 3

WARNING: This journal contains some stereotypes. If you are easily triggered by this type of stuff, please close this document immediately and let me know so I can stop sending you my journals and delete you from my Contacts.



Monday, June 3, 2024 – Trondheim, Norway

This morning we docked in the medieval and historic city of Trondheim, which was founded over a thousand years ago. Today Trondheim is Norway's third largest city and contains Norway's main cathedral, one of the largest cathedrals in Northern Europe; a major university; a fort which is currently closed for renovations; and lots of other old stuff which we walked past on a tour of the city center. Our tour guide was a Chilean woman married to a lawyer from Norway, and it was interesting to hear her outsider's perspective on Norwegians. Consistent with what we've sensed since being here, she said Norwegians are all introverted. They don't make eye contact with you when you pass them on the street. They're quiet people that value the outdoors and are taught how to live in the

cold climate from the time they were born. Babies aren't bundled up for cold weather, school children spend at least one day a week outside all day regardless of the weather conditions, and people are encouraged to take time off from work if they're doing something outdoors. I would say that gives them a "home field advantage" in cold weather activities.

After our visit to Trondheim, the voyage continued into the Trondheim Fjord, then into an abundant archipelago with beautiful coastal landscapes as we headed for northern Norway. Up until now the food on the ship reflected the cuisine of the fjords, with its flavors from the icy depths of the sea and the sunny slopes of the fjord landscape. As we leave the



fjords, the food will also change to reflect the cuisine from the surrounding arctic areas.



Tuesday, June 4, 2024 – Bodø, Norway

This morning we crossed the Arctic Circle and continued into the Arctic region. Above the Arctic Circle the sun never goes below the horizon in the summer, while winter days are merely a shade less dark than night-time.



Our excursion today from Bodø, the second-largest town in northern Norway, was a RIB-boat trip to Saltstraumen, location of the world's strongest tidal currents. where we were able to get right beside whirlpools and vortexes in powerful boats.

After dinner the ship sailed into some nooks and crannies (not the geographic name) in the



shoreline to reveal Trollfjord, a beautiful fjord with sheer cliffs and waterfalls. We finally went inside around 1:00am, and the sun was still shining brightly, as it did all night.



June 5, 2024 - Tromsø, Norway

We are now well into the Arctic. This is the land of the Sami, Norway's indigenous people best known for their semi-nomadic reindeer herding. Before lunch we stopped in Finnsnes, population 4,658, for 30 minutes, where we walked to the town center and back in 20 minutes, long enough to take in the entire "downtown." The weather today was a balmy 67 degrees and sunny, and I was too hot just wearing a long sleeve t-shirt. Because Northwest Europe is on the Gulf Stream, the weather is much warmer than other areas of similar latitude.

The main port stop today is Tromsø. For some reason the city of Tromsø is known as the “Paris of the North”. Having spent some time there today, I assure you it resembles nothing of Paris. There is no Eiffel Tower, and we didn’t see rude French people anywhere. It’s also known as “The Gateway to the Arctic”, which is a much better description.

We took a guided bus tour around town, first taking a gondola to the top of Fjellheisen 421 meters above sea level, where we had a spectacular view overlooking the fjords, the city, and its surrounding islands and



mountains. There was still snow on the mountain. Then we made a couple other stops before talking around town and returning to the ship.

We have two more days on the cruise, which I’ll tell you about in the next and final journal. Thanks for keeping up with us.

Love, Lori and Stephen

Norway Travel Journal – Volume 4

Thursday, June 6, 2024 – Honningsvåg, Norway

We docked this morning after breakfast in Honningsvåg, a fishing village of a couple thousand people on the island of Magerøya in the Arctic Ocean. The people in town make their living gutting fish and skinning tourists.

We took a van ride along fjords and snow-covered plains and mountains, enjoying spectacular scenery on our way to the North Cape, described in literature as the “end of the known world.” We’re so far north that no trees can grow anywhere. Up here in the polar landscape, nature is at its harshest. Last year the summer lasted two



hours and thirty-five



minutes. There’s always snow on the ground, and the dark winters are so long they sell anti-depressants in the bubble-gum dispensers. The geography was dramatic, and we took pictures in front of the globe marking the northernmost point of Europe.

Friday, June 7, 2024 – Kirkenes, Norway

We arrived in Kirkenes this morning on the last day of our voyage. This is as far east as we go. The border with Russia is only a few kilometers away, and the road signs are in Norwegian and Russian.

After disembarking the ship we visited the Kirkenes Snowhotel. There are Ice cubes in the glass, of course, but when the table, the chairs, the walls, the counter, the candlesticks, the decor and even the fireplace are made of ice, then it really is a snow hotel! Everything is made of snow and ice, and the temperature is maintained at about 27 degrees. There are 13 rooms and it costs between \$100 and \$300 to stay one night depending on the season. No one stays more than one night. That tells you how comfortable (or not) it is.



We then hung out in Kirkenes, visiting the Soviet Liberation Monument which commemorates the sacrifices the USSR made when liberating the town from the Nazis in WWII. Not much else doing in Kirkenes besides the shopping mall,

where we wasted some time. We'll catch a flight back to Oslo in a little while, where we'll stay the night before flying home tomorrow.



We're looking forward to catching up with everyone. Thanks for following along with us on our travels to Norway.

Love, Lori and Stephen