

Post



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The ladder of the trolls - July 18, 2024

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SUMMARY

We dock in Ålesund and almost immediately go ashore for today's excursion (Land of the Trolls). It's a long one - eight hours - mostly on a bus. Our first stop is the beautiful Gudbransjuvet Gorge with curved metal walkways out over the waterfalls and deep crevices. It's also the place to buy very good cinnamon rolls and famous, delicious local strawberries. We do both. On to the Trollstigen Viewpoint where, the excursion write-up says, "you can soak in panoramic views of the surroundings peaks, cascading waterfalls, valleys, and the serpentine road with 11 hairpin bends". Sounds lovely but we have to take their word for it because we're in the middle of

a cloud and can't see jack! Buffet lunch along the way and a visit to the 1789 highly painted Rose Church follows. We drive back through gorgeous fjords and lakes followed by a short hike over the famous stone Skodje Bridges. Dinner at the onboard steakhouse. - Karen

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DETAIL

Good morning from Ålesund. We're up early and we watch the ship gently glide into town and to our dock for the day. We again see the Queen Mary 2 (our ride home to the USA from Hamburg in a few weeks hence). Today's big feature is another shore excursion, but this one is eight hours long! Post-breakfast we're quickly off the ship and down the gang-plank. On our bus we meet Jørn, our Norwegian driver and Monica, our German tour guide. We wonder if we'll have any Norwegian, or even Scandinavian, tour guides.

Thankfully Monica's funny and easy to understand. She explains how to pronounce Ålesund, and that Å is last letter of the Norwegian alphabet. There's a city in Norway by the name of Å where the city government has stopped replacing the city sign, as it is so often stolen. Apparently this also happens in France in the city of Condom, we're told.

Ålesund has 60,000 people spread out over seven islands. Bridges and tunnels connect them, including via the Ellingsøy tunnel, the deepest and longest underwater ("sub-sea") tunnel which goes 450 feet deep and extends 3.5 kilometers. We'll be going through that one later.

Monica explains how Ålesund came to look as it does today. It all burnt to the ground towards the end of January 1904. Not a good time to have no home, food or possessions. Nearby cities and countries sent lots of help, quickly, and left the boats to transport these goods and building materials to be usable as living quarters for a while. Anyway, the city was rebuilt over the next two or three years, all in the current "all the rage" style, art nouveau. It does look nice.

We're told the first hour of the tour will be driving with stops. We're going so far to see the Trollstigen, the Troll Ladder, which is a road with many hairpin turns that (apparently) looks like a ladder sized for trolls. In the past we would have seen it AND driven down it, but in the past year there was an rock slide and so it was closed. But... it was reopened (yay!) but then re-closed (boo!) when a big boulder fell and didn't kill anyone, but wound up in the (thankfully empty) passenger seat of a car. Our guess is that the driver's seat (and pants) weren't empty after that experience.

As happens on every excursion bus we're told we absolutely must wear our seat belts, it's the law. We're also told about Norwegian rules regarding drinking and driving. It's 0.05% for regular drivers and they have occasional sobriety check points. Fail and your life (well, your driving life for a long time) is over. For commercial bus drivers? The limit is 0.00%, enforced by the integrated measuring device that won't let you start the bus unless the driver passes the test. Whew!

It's explained to us that license plates starting with an E (of which we see many) are electric vehicles. Teslas are very popular. White plates are private cars and green plates are on company cars. These are, financially, a very good deal but these can only have a front seat. So, you'll see bigger cars with built in contraptions to make the back seats unusable. We have not see this yet, but we want to.

We hear about what animals are in the region and the industries. They make the "Ekornes" (Stressless Relax Chairs), but mostly the industry is, and has been, cod. They catch it, dry it and ship it out. This has been done for a long time. In the old days they would dry the fish by dangling them over the edge of a cliff (a "klipp", here in Norway) until they were dried out. Thus, to this day, cod is known as klippfisk. Dried cod is very popular in Portugal, where it's called bacalou and you can also get bacalou in France and here in Norway and elsewhere.

Driving along we see many houses with gorgeous grass-covered roofs. Before the 1960s Norway was a "not wealthy" country and so they built the houses with the materials they had... wood, rock, and sod. The roofs were a few layers of birch bark, a layer of sod (root side up), and then another layer of sod (root side down). Maintenance is required. If you see a tree growing? Remove it. Otherwise it's just keep the grass to a manageable length (i.e. hoist a goat up there and let it go wild).

Monica lets us know the bus will be making a short stop for us at a George (pronounced like George Washington). We quickly figure out this is a "gorge", and it certainly is "gorge-ous" what with it's very powerful waterfall on display. Also exciting there are the bathrooms (which we use), the famous cinnamon buns and coffee (which we buy), and the girl selling delicious locally grown strawberries (which we also buy).

As for the colors of Norwegian houses, they're essentially red and some white and some yellow. In the beginning they just had red (left over iron oxide from a big metal factory). Later, as there was more travel and trade, the existence of white and yellow paint became known and fashionable. White paint didn't last long (it had to be redone each year), so people with money painted their houses white (to show off their wealth).

As we get close to the Trollstigen (necessarily a pass, from the direction we're coming) we're getting higher and higher until we're actually in the clouds. Monica tells us not to worry, this happens but frequently the weather changes quickly and we'll get to see the troll ladder. We see snowbanks at the side of the road (in July!) and it's raining.

The the viewing platform for the Trollstigen we get out and shield ourselves from the rain, mist, and wind. It's not pleasant. We splash through the puddles and muscle on towards the viewing platform, quite a ways away. All around us there are innumerable cairns (human made rock piles) of varying sizes. What this means to the Norwegians is that foreign tourists have been here as this absolutely is not something anyone from Norway would do.

We get to the viewing platform, confirm it's 100% socked in with fog, shiver, and head back the long path to our warm, dry bus.

On the drive back towards town we learn about speeding in Norway. A friend of Monica's got caught by a traffic camera doing 67 km/hr in a 50 km/hr zone and got a 900 euro fine. Yikes. What to do? You can buy a device that will warn you when you're getting somewhere with a camera that can detect if you're speeding. These are illegal in some countries, like Germany. But in Norway? They love for you to have such a device. It will encourage you to drive the speed limit where it's important, which is what the government wants, so why not? Damn these people are smart!

We stop at a delightful small restaurant for pre-arranged lunch. They had all kinds of food (meaning many types of salmon, cod, herring and other fish, meat balls and gravy, potatoes three ways, a small salad, and lots of desserts. The featured dessert is a cake topped with 'Cloud Berries'. Something new! Everything was delicious (for Norwegian food) and we're soon back on our way, ready for a post-eating nap.

We wake and de-bus long enough to tour the Rose Church, a nondescript building from the outside, but with all walls and ceilings very nicely painted on the inside. The church is from 1789 and the main pillars come from a stave church even a lot older than that. Inside the ladies sit on the left and the men all on the right. We hear about the church and stories about the paintings (such as Jesus and the bad virgins, above where the ladies were sitting. You could tell these virgins were bad because they all had red cheeks (say no more, gov'nor).

Our last big adventure was walking across two old bridges (the longest roman arch bridge in Northern Europe?) and looking at the modern bridge that replaced it. The walk is lovely and it's brilliant, we think, that they decided not to tear down these lovely relics of the past.

We do a quick pass through town and re-mMarvel at the Art Nouveau buildings. We crawl back aboard the good ship Onward. Dinner at the Prime C specialty restaurant and then off to bed. Ooof, we thought vacations were supposed to be relaxing!

Photos



Ålesund. Cute town. We drove through it quickly. Didn't walk through it at all. Maybe next time. Up on the hill is a combo viewing platform/coffee shop.



Our first stop on our bus ride. For a picture and to stretch our legs. Behind us? A fjord! Who could have guessed. :-)



At our next stop, for a bathroom, cinnamon buns, etc. Beautiful flowers and traditionally painted Norwegian homes in the background.



The gorge had an amazing waterfall (not pictured here) and a very wild welded metal railing that went on forever.



You have to add your own sounds effects to get the power and sound of the rushing water.



A nice Polish girl in-country to pick, and sell, strawberries. The strawberries are delicious (we bought). I rate the girl as 'less nice' after I count my change and come up two euros short. Grr.



Snow in July!



Cairns (human built rock piles). Pleasing to Americans, bewildering to the Norwegians who say "Fine, whatevs".



Our view of the Troll Ladder (hat briefly removed for the picture). I'm being pelted by very cold, quickly moving rain drops.



What the Troll Ladder would have looked like for us, from the viewing platform, had mother nature cooperated.



So many beautiful strawberry fields in the sun with migrant, iterant crop pickers picking.



FARNSNIENTE



We could not get enough sod roofed buildings.



Jesus and the bad virgins. You can tell because their cheeks are red. There are such a thing as bad virgins. Who knew??



Travel back in the day was long and hard. "They" put up these "cooking rocks" periodically so you could take a break from your travels and cook (out of the elements) under the rock. Modern conveniences. What will they think of next?



The longest roman arch bridge in [fill in accurate geographical region here]. Used in two directions with motor cars until not that long ago. The replacement is nice and thanks to the city fathers (and mothers, we're sure) who decided NOT to tear the old one down!

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