

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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# The King and I (er, we) - July 21, 2024

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## ***SUMMARY***

Today's port of call is the island town of Tromsø, the largest European town within the Polar Circle and the launching point for most Arctic expeditions. It is also famous as a viewing place for the northern lights but, of course, with currently 24 hours of daylight, we'll have to take their word for it. Our excursion is to the Polaris Centre and the Arctic Cathedral. At the Centre we're shown a short film about all the birds and animals found in these parts. There are a surprising number of them. We have yet to see any (except those in the aquarium). Again, we might have to take their word for it. An undersea tunnel takes us off the island to the Arctic Cathedral and back. -

Karen

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### ***DETAIL***

Today's starting out well. We're in port today (Tromsø) and docked and blue sky. Looking promising. It is projected to get up to 78 degrees today, more than twenty degrees above today's average. The locals say we're lucky. They're certainly enjoying it. Norwegian men, especially the older ones with big stomachs, love to take off their shirts any time the sun is out.

Our excursion today starts at 2:30, so we have time to enjoy the sun on the boat. Our excursion guide is Adrian. We missed his nationality, but he sounds Italian. We learn we're on an island, with 40,000 others. The island is the size of Manhattan, which has over 1.5 million people, so Tromsø-ites can spread out. It's known for a number of things. In the year 1,240 the King of Norway requested that his chapel be built here (and of course, so it was). There's a statue of King Hakoon VII (grandfather to the current king, King Harald V). The current king, by the way, is in town today, though we didn't hear why.

Tromsø is also famous for being the “Gateway to the North”. If you want to go to the North Pole this is where you’d start (according to Italians living in Norway). There’s a museum for such Arctic expositions, and a statue of Roald Amundsen, of course, but we’re not going to see either of those things. We’re headed to Polaria, an aquarium in town which focuses on all creatures (in and on the sea) that inhabit the polar regions.

Polaria’s building is very unique. It looks like several huge dominos, one falling on the next. Whether that’s a comment on the outlook for the polar ecosystems, I’ll leave to the reader.

We look at some informational displays, and tanks with anemones and yummy looking snow crabs. But the most popular attraction is the seals. They’re in their tank, zooming around in big circles. You can certainly watch them from the top but downstairs you’re looking at a wall of glass with the seals gliding by, probably touching the smooth glass on their side. And around the corner is a hallway where the ceiling and walls are a huge glass tube that you walk through. It’s not a complete circle, but you’d swear you were in the water with the seals. They seem to love to zoom over the hall-of-glass upside down, just missing the ceiling. It’s pretty cool.

We watch them get fed, which is to say, get trained. How much or little they learn on any given session is based on how into it they seem. There are two big (280 kg / 620 pound) bearded seals. They'll fetch balls and short length of rope. The smaller seals, the harbor seals, vary in how much they've learned. One is fairly new and is just learning "open your mouth", certainly not in English, and likely not in Norwegian either, but this skill is really loved by the facility veterinarian. One of the harbor seals didn't seem to care to be in class today, so that trainer just gave her all of her fish to eat.

Once we're done with the exhibits and gift shop we're on the bus, driving, and hearing about the northern-most this and northern-most that. We pass the northern-most Hard Rock Café and Mackol, the northern-most brewery. We hear about the heated streets and sidewalks, and see some heated benches. We drive by the university and a very impressive ski jump. We hear how it's very well situated, being right next-door to the city hospital.

The subject of "the midnight sun" comes up, of course. It doesn't occur to me I don't know what the opposite of that is. It's "Polar Night" (when the sun never rises for part of the winter). Sunset here is in about five days. We're told that parents here don't pester their teenage sons, bound for a keg party, to "be sure to be home before dark!" (since there is no such thing now).

Our next big stop is a church. It's 'on the mainland', we can see it right across the water from our ship. And there's a convenient bridge pretty much connecting the two. Alas, given that all public works projects can only be done in the summer, the bridge is closed for resurfacing. We make a rather long detour to take the tunnel under the water. We're told it's about 3 km (~2 miles) long. Our ears pop as we go from the island to the mainland.

The church is either beautiful or an eyesore, depending on your point of view. It's a series of tall, huge upside-down Vs, in decreasing size and then increasing size. It is made of cement, which didn't weather well, so they added corrugated metal screwed on to the outside. When the original architect saw this he exclaimed "You ruined it!" Good of him to be so understanding.

The whole place is bright white, so it's referred to as the Ice Cathedral, or Arctic Cathedral (even though it's just a parish church). Whatever, so long as it attracts tourists (it does). At the end of the church, facing the water, are tall, clear windows (with a huge pipe organ suspended way up high). And at the other end is stained glass, similarly modern in design. If you don't like how modern the church is, you likely won't love the stained glass either. Just sayin'.

For dinner we're again at the Prime C speciality restaurant. Not sure what we were thinking. Our table for two is against a window with an awesome view of the (river? fjord? Norwegian Sea?) body of water that the bridge crosses, with the mainland/Ice Cathedral on the far side. At one point a very long, white boat appears, gliding straight out of the harbor, with a long line of sailors standing at attention on the bow. Holy carp, we think, that's the King's yacht! Sure enough (we tell ourselves) that's his ship! We'd heard he was in town. What luck! (Karen: check "King of Norway" off our trip bingo card.)

Tomorrow we're at our furthest point north: Honningsvåg on Magerøya Island. Will we see any Kings up there?

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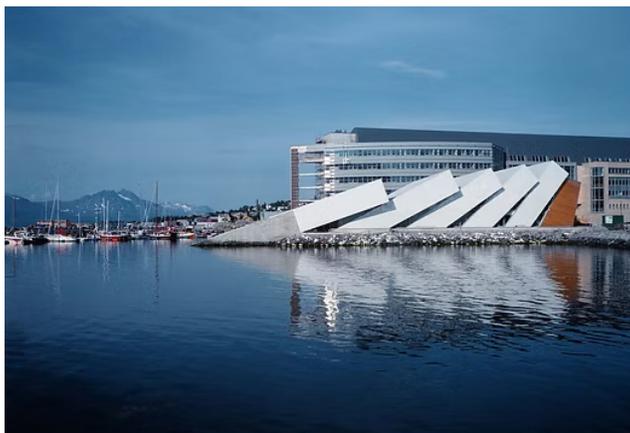
## Photos



The view from our balcony of the waterway in Tromsø. The Tromsøbrua (bridge) and Arctic Cathedral in the background, on the mainland. We always love blue sky.



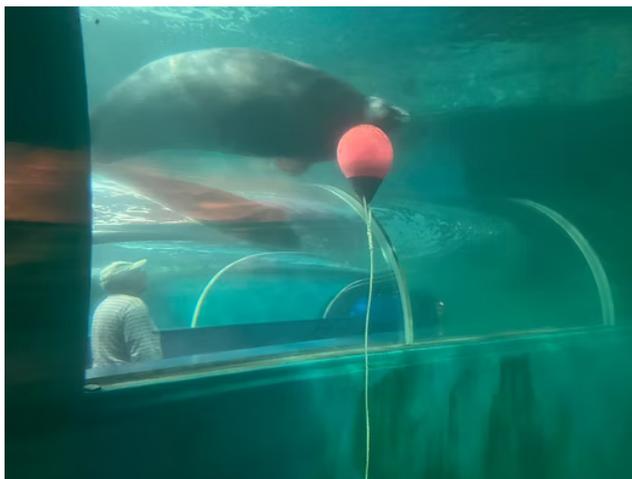
Since our excursion du jour isn't until the afternoon Miss Karen runs to/at the gym.



First stop on our tour is the Polaria, an aquarium and exhibits dealing with sea (and other) life in the arctic. Tell me that doesn't look like falling dominos.



Bella, the 600 pound bearded seal in the background, and a harbor seal (whose name I didn't catch) in the foreground. They're being fed/learning.



When not being fed, there's a big, fun tank for the seals to swim around in. It's includes toys, lots of windows, and a long tunnel that humans are constantly walking through. It's pretty amazing.



The city's three ski jumps. It's conveniently located right next to the region's biggest hospital.



The inside of the very modern Arctic Cathedral (i.e. Parish Church). It's a definitely a tourist draw.



The outside of the Arctic Cathedral didn't handle the elements well, so they screwed on long panels of metal. That architect was not amused, but you gotta do what you gotta do.



Dinner at Prime C, with a great view of the waterway, Arctic Cathedral, and bridge.



At long last Karen spots the famous Hurtigruten. It runs up and down the Norwegian coast every day of the year, servicing 34 different cities. It's a ferry, hotel, restaurant, cargo ship, etc. It's a



Wait! What's this? A regal-looking ship with lots of sailors standing (mostly) at attention? Could it be??



Yes! It's the yacht of the King of Norway! We don't think he could hear us shouting "Hi, Mister King of Norway!" through the glass. (Probably just as well).

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