

Post



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"Mountain climbing" - July 24, 2024

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SUMMARY

One of my favorite days so far! From the dock in Harstad we're driven to Mount Kjeipen (pronounced Chay pin) for a hike up to the top. It's a bit strenuous but oh so worth it! The scenery on the drive there and on the climb is breathtaking. At the top we're treated to campfire coffee and the Norwegian equivalent of a pop tart and given the option to hike around the lake we are looking down on. Yes! On the far side we come to a place where the land drops off 500 meters straight down to a gorgeous valley and lake. SO Instagram ready! On the way back to our ship we drive into that valley and part way around the lake. - Karen

DETAIL

Happy National Tequila Day! Outside it's 52°, cloudy and rainy. Today's highs are not expected to exceed 58°. Now that's more like it!

We're in Harstad and today we'll be hiking to the top of a mountain! Mount Kjeipen (pronounced Chay-Pin). This will be different for us. So many of our excursions are transitions from sitting on the ship to sitting on the bus. This excursion is listed as "strenuous" and is not recommended for passengers in wheelchairs or those otherwise mobility impaired. The ship's excursion rating scale leans conservative. "Strenuous" often means "Some of the stairways may not have handrails." We'll see.

All of our guides so far have been from Italy, Russia, Poland, Germany, etc. so it's nice to have a local guide. Conveniently our tour guide's name is Tour. Well, it's pronounced Tour but spelled Tore. It seems everyone here speaks English very well. The younger generations speak with no accent and grammar better than most Americans. Tore isn't of any younger generation and so is harder to understand. He was born nearby and we'll be driving through his hamlet. Tore's assisted on the tour by Gru, and we'll have two more helpers up on top of the mountain: Ulf and Astrid.

On the bus we hear about the city and the area. Harstad is the third largest city in Northern Norway. It's funny, we don't normally think of Norway, let alone the sub-parts of the country. The city had it's 100th birthday last year. In "The War" (what they call it here - World War II) Harstad was the city the allied troops came through to join the fighting.

The city is very proud to be the collection point of milk for the area. Small dairies tend the cows and bring the milk here where it's processed, packaged and shipped on. Way back in the day, herring were the big business here, then they decided to go elsewhere. That was hard, but the fish are coming back. Tourism is big here now. Lots of beautiful nature and outdoor activities.

Off the bus we begin our hike. It's been sunny and dry here for weeks, that is, until yesterday when it poured like a banshee. We're hopeful the dry earth was able to soak up all that precipitation. The ground does seem to be a lot of peat moss. Very comfortable, luxuriously bouncy. As we hike up we see blue stains on the rocks every few steps. I envision a hiking four year-old, with a bag of blueberries, where only three of every four berries makes it into his mouth. In truth there are blueberries all around and birds eat them and apparently the blue color doesn't get digested, if you know what I mean.

The hike starts fairly flat but gets steep quickly (and stays that way). The trail is a trail only in that people have hiked here many times before. No work has been done to remove any rocks or boulders from the "path". It's quite the challenge for us old farts from the ship. After about a mile of hiking we're (thankfully) at the top. It is pretty. There are low clouds around but you can see lakes and gorgeous peaks peeking out from behind the mist.

At the top we meet our other two guides. They have a fire going in a circle of rocks and have made coffee for us. We're given the Norwegian equivalent of Pop-Tarts and all the coffee we care to drink. Off in the distance, on a ridge through the mist, we see a lone reindeer with a big set of antlers. We snap pictures and accept more coffee and Vestlands Lefsa (Norsk Pop-Tarts). Eventually we have to decide our next move. We're told that across the mountain lake, in front of us, is the cliff above the town. Those of us who still have energy and desire can follow Gru over there and the rest can stay here. All choose to press on smartly.

Around the pond we come upon the previously spotted reindeer, now sitting down. This will never do, thinks Gru, and she charges over to get him/her up for a proper photo. At the cliff we're admonished (repeatedly) not to get too close. Peeking over we do see that it is straight down. More pictures, with the views coming and going through the mist, and we continue on.

On the hike back down we find a couple of cloudberries, a true Nordic delicacy. These aren't ripe and we leave them for some future hiker. Closer to the bus we're relieved to have made it back down as we hear an incessant clanking. It turns out to be a trio of sheep. With each new mouthful of grass the bell announces the sheep's presence. The farmers release their sheep in the spring and the animals find their own food all summer. In the fall they're rounded up, sheered, and some become people food.

Back on the bus we head back down, sharing harrowing tales of our heroic hike. I asked Gru if the Norwegians would also rate this hike as being "Strenuous". "No, this is an easy hike for us", she chuckles. Hm. In a nearby hamlet Tore announces this is where he was born and lives. There's a cute, small mockup of the town, complete with Ikea (which we're sure they're not big enough to have).

On the ship we change, grab a frozen margarita (in honor of National Tequila Day), and ease into the hot tub. For dinner it's our destination immersion meal. Very tasty aquavit cocktail. Lots of truly good Norwegian food and dessert. We're impressed, though no reindeer. For those who still believe, that's probably a good thing (Santa would not approve). Also no Fiskeballer (fish balls). That's likely a good thing, too (wink).

Photos



On the hike up to the top of Mount Kjeipen we quickly realize we're totally surrounded (by blueberries!)



At the top we get a view of the mountain lake. On the ridgeline behind, on the left, we can almost make out a dot that is a reindeer.



Zooming in, we can confirm it's a reindeer sighting. It's not the best, but we're excited.



Back at "base camp" there's beverage and eats as reward for our strenuous one mile hike. I've always said: there's nothing like coffee, freshly brewed over an open fire, on top of a Norwegian mountain, next to a fjord.



Karen happily accepts hers.



The eats? The Norwegian version of Pop-Tarts. Med sukker og kanel (with sugar and cinnamon).



Continuing on, we get to the other side of the mountain lake and Gru negotiates with the now seated reindeer for some good insta shots.



It works and soon we're all taking way too many pictures of a grumpy reindeer.



On the far side of the lake are more views and a very quick return trip to the fjord, straight down, if you're not careful.



As we pose, we're repeatedly asked
"Please step further away from the edge
of the cliff". What? Us worry?



Time to head back down and absorb
more Nordic beauty.

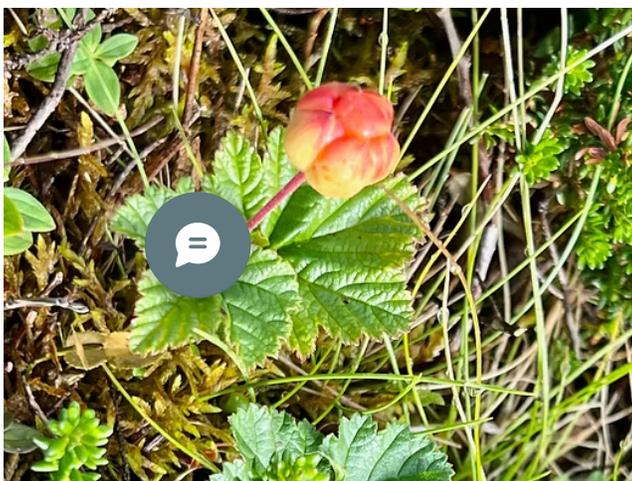


FARNSNIENTE





The mist is gone for our stroll back to sea level.



Among all the blueberries is the occasional cloudberry. Very much beloved by Scandinavians everywhere. The ones we find aren't ripe so we leave them for some future hiker.



The incessant clanking of sheep bells announces our arrival back at the bus.



In tour guide Tore's town we see the cute mockup of the town, complete with Ikea.



Driving on, the crystal clear views put an exclamation point on how beautiful this country is.

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