

Day 03 – The Norway Adventure

Today was a wonderful day. Up at 5 am to capture the bathroom, shower, shave and do all that needs to be done in the morning, at 6am I opened the 14th floor cafeteria to work on my email.

Have I told you how very happy it makes me to have you join us on this adventure.

You are so very dear to me, and your company lifts my heart, and it makes me feel so good that you can enjoy each day with us.

Just another kind reminder to note that our ship's email has not been the best. If for some reason a day's email does not come through, kindly check the day on our website and open the word file narrative. Please remember to take a look at the day's picture files as well. Remember you can find them all here:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/scandinavia.htm>

Today is Norway. A place I have always wanted to visit my whole life.

Land of the Vikings, renowned explorers, incredible skiers, and movie star, beautiful people.

A sea faring nation, it is a peninsula intersected by countless rivers, unending forests, and breathtaking vistas. A vacationer's dream.

Its Fjords (a long, deep, narrow body of water that reaches far inland, set in a maritime based valley with steep walls on either side) are world famous for their unprecedented, awe inspiring, scenic beauty.

But Norway's art and culture are equally known for their inspiration and effect.

Like any wonderful place, however, it is its people, that make the visit.

Norwegians are friendly, hospitable, handsomely beautiful people, who are very proud of their country, its history and its culture. Better yet, they seem to really like Americans.

Norway's history has long been inspired by its geography.

Formally known as the Kingdom of Norway, because of its status as a constitutional monarchy, it is located at the very top (north) of Northern Europe, and comprises the western and northernmost portion of the Scandinavian Peninsula.

Norway shares this magnificent peninsula with Sweden, separated by the Scandinavia Mountains, and also shares a small portion, with the northern part of Finland, to its northeast.

Norway's capital and largest city is Oslo, which is located along the Oslo Fjord, and has a population of 634,000 inhabitants. And that will be home base for our adventure.

Interesting fun fact, Minnesota has the largest number of people of Norwegian heritage in the United States, with over 500,000 calling this beautiful country their ancestral home. As seen above, that is almost the same population as the entire city of Oslo. No wonder their football team is named the Vikings.

To put Norway in a perspective in which we are familiar, with a land area of 148,729 square miles, this nation is about the same geographic size as Montana.

And with a total population of 5,488,984, it has slightly more people than South Carolina.

Maintaining an extensive coastline, facing the North Atlantic Ocean and the Barents Sea, Norway's maritime influence dominates its climate, with mild lowland temperatures on its sea coasts, and with interior temperatures, though colder in winter and warmer in summer, its overall climate is significantly more temperate than areas elsewhere in the world, which share its northerly latitudes.

This means that even during its famous polar, northern light displaying nights, during the winter, temperatures are often actually above freezing along its coastline. While during the summer, it is almost the perfect temperature of around 72 degrees.

The name "Norway", actually comes from the Old English word, meaning "northern way" or "way leading to the north".

Norway has long been known as a source of independent, tough, spirited and driven people.

Although they have their own lovely language (Norwegian), nearly everyone here speaks perfect English, and is delighted to speak it with you. As someone who is far from multilingual, I truly appreciate their kindness and aptitude in this regard.

One of the original home bases for the famous Vikings, it is a place that is clearly dedicated to their heritage.

The Vikings were a war based, sea faring, determined people, who explored, invaded and conquered much of northern Europe, Iceland, Greenland and even parts of North America's Labrador.

Largely brutal by today's standards, they were infamous for their pillage, kidnapping and plunder. But beneath their "Hagar the Horrible" exaggerated persona, they were also innovators in ship building, agriculture, military tactics, navigation and engineering.

The age of the Viking was between the years 793 to 1066. A long time to make their impact on the world.

Originally driven by a pagan religion, with the famously militaristic but friendly Thor as its head god, Norway and its Vikings converted to Christianity around the beginning of the 11th century. Some attribute this conversion to a moderating influence in their tactics, militarism and reduced brutality, that soon led to the end of the Viking Age.

But their sea faring society, determination, spirit of adventure and heartiness, for which the Vikings were famous, can still be seen in the eyes and demeanor, of all the Scandinavian people.

Vikings, of course were not limited to Norway, and included people from Sweden, Denmark and Finland as well. But it was Norway, from which they drove the proverbial boat.

Many sociologists have attributed one of the motivating forces for the Viking missions to pillage and kidnap (particularly beautiful women) to the fact that, Norway, with its pre Christianity polygamous society, and multiple concubines of its warlord chieftains, had an serious under supply of the female gender.

This fact, according to these academics, led to the military age males, seeking the greener, more feminine populated, pastures of other lands.

Bringing home the most beautiful women they saw, has left a legacy on all of Scandinavia, and particularly Norway, populated with some of the most physically attractive people in the world.

Walking down the street, it does appear as if almost everyone here is indeed ready for a super model contract.

I guess genetics does have its benefits.

Today, a peaceful nation, Norway now maintains a high respect for law, and is devoted to its constitution.

After the Age of the Vikings, Norway evolved into an independent series of kingdoms.

Then starting in the 12th century, it became a more united nation, under a kingdom with some republican principles.

Under this new Christian centered culture, Norway really began to flourish, growing its population from 150,000 to 400,000, with concurrent agricultural expansion, resulting in a great deal more land being cleared from its forests for farming and animal husbandry.

Between 1537 to 1814, Norway then united with one of its neighbors, as a part of the Kingdom of Denmark–Norway, and, from 1814 to 1905, it then joined in a personal union with the Kingdom of Sweden.

It is now a completely independent country, and it cherishes its independence on many levels.

In fact, Norway was neutral during the First World War.

It also began the Second World War with the same mindset, until April 1940, when it was invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany.

After it was invaded, however, Norway became famous for its strong and violent resistance to Nazi rule.

Today, Norway maintains its independence, once again, but also enjoys close ties with both the European Union (although not a member) and the United States.

It is also a founding member of the United Nations, NATO, and the European Free Trade Association.

On a per-capita basis, Norway is the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas outside of the Middle East.

Although an extremely strong welfare state, with highly generous social services, healthcare, and public pension benefits, as a result of its full scale, 24/7/365 North Sea Oil production, Norway is now an extremely affluent country, that despite its socialist mentality, has not increased its citizen's tax burden in over 20 years.

Due to its high latitude, Norway enjoys as many as 20 hours of daylight during the summer, with temperatures often in the 70s, and as few as four during the winter, with temperatures similar to that of upstate New York.

Its maritime based peninsula, together with gulf stream influence, help to moderate its climate.

We were all excited, as we made a reverse trip of the Viking ships, sailing from Southampton, England.

As we entered the Oslo fjord from the open ocean, one could see the spectacular beauty of which so many have spoken.

A deep channel cut between high hills and cliffs, this scenic cruise, presented beauty all around us.

Cut into the hillsides were several vacation homes, with countless boats and marinas built along the shoreline.

The beautiful day, with partly cloudy skies, only highlighted the pleasantness, as we stood upon the upper deck and then the balcony of our stateroom, to admire the sights.

To me, it reminded me of an elevated version of New York's 1000 islands.

You can find the day's pictures of these event here:

<http://www.bobfarley.us/0800travels/833scandinavia/Day03/>

I feel so lucky to be on this trip.

It is indeed a wonderful adventure that I have always wanted to take.

To be joined by all of you, AmazingHugh and the Geddi Master, only makes it more delightful.

As we started to approach the Oslo Cruise Ship Terminal, not far from the center of town, one could see that this is truly a maritime culture.

A marina, very close to the terminal lay berth to thousands of personal boats. A veritable forest of masts and power boats, it really was incredible.

As we docked, we went to the ship's theater to receive our shore pass, so that we might take our pre purchased, bus based, shore excursion. Highlights of Oslo it was called.

We checked into the shore excursion desk at the bottom of the theater. Arriving plenty early at 12 noon, our pre paid adventure was scheduled to leave at 12:45 pm, for what is called the Norwegian Explorers Tour.

As we took our seats in the theater, we were give three number 27 stickers to place on our jackets. At about 1 pm, the cruise director team, escorted us off the port side of the ship.

Personal inventory is done in a very interesting way on this cruise. Everyone is awarded what they call a sea pass. A small magnetic key card, like you would be assigned as a hotel room, it works as stateroom key, ship store credit card, and ship entry and exit pass. The

has been no need to bring our passports, as the sea pass electronically contains all that information.

Once discharged the off deck two gang plank, we proceeded to the number 27 bus, and our tour guide Anna. She was a lovely, tall woman, with a sweet Norwegian accent, who spoke perfect English, but in a rather quiet voice that was sometimes hard to hear. About 80, Anna was spry, smart and fun to be around. She reminded me a lot of my beloved, late Aunt Mildred, the wife of my late Uncle John Farley.

Once on board the bus (Dad grabbed the best seats right behind the driver) we proceeded out of the Cruise Terminal toward the city center.

To our left was the enormous marina of which I spoke previously, with a forest of masts of countless personal sailing ships, and thousands of small and some very large power boats.

All the sails reminded me of the fact that originally the massive Viking ships had no sails and were powered by oarsmen. Rowing hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles to their destinations.

Starting between the year 900 and 1000, Viking ship makers began to incorporate both Sails and Oars in their designs. The addition of sails allowed the Vikings to travel much further, and it was with this invention that great explorers like Naddodd (the discoverer of Iceland), Erik (the Red) Thorvaldsson (founder of Greenland) and Leif Erikson (the discoverer and settler of North America) were able to travel so far from their homes.

Over time, the Vikings (and their descendant Norwegians) became master sailors, navigators and mariners, leaving their runestone monuments as far east as Minnesota and as far south as Italy, Greece and Persia.

Not surprising that the most recent incarnation of the Norwegian people would own and have ready for deployment, so many ocean going sailboats and personal motor boats.

As we began to drive through Oslo, Anna pointed out many of the sites of the city. From the Royal Summer palace, to the now closed for renovations, Viking ship museum.

As with the old one, the new Viking ship (which I was really hoping to see) was being reconstructed around the ancient maritime relics, as such are far too fragile to be moved and placed inside a new museum.

Oh well, next time I'm in Norway, I'll have to catch that very heralded exhibition.

On the bus we were able to see first hand traditional and newly constructed Norwegian housing. Both were attractive and quaint.

The Royal summertime palace was especially interesting, proving far more modest, than I had expected. King Harold the Fifth and Queen Sonja must live an exciting and opulent life, but I would imagine that their concern for non subjects (like me) is limited.

After a bit of a tour of the outskirts of Oslo, seeing the royal summer palace, and a number of dairy cows and horses in the field, we came upon what looked to be a little group of houses, and then our first stop. The Kon Tiki museum.

The Kon-Tiki expedition was a 1947 journey by raft across the Pacific Ocean from South America to the Polynesian islands, led by Norwegian explorer and writer Thor Heyerdahl.

As I indicated previously, Norway is the home to sailors, adventurers and explorers.

Heyerdahl very much followed in that tradition.

While studying zoology and geography at the University of Oslo in the 1930s, Heyerdahl began to do a deep intellectual dive into Polynesian culture and history, consulting with a man who was then the world's largest private collector of books and papers on Polynesia, Bjarne Kroepelien, a wealthy Oslo wine merchant.

During these studies, Heyerdahl began to be convinced that ancient Polynesians could have crossed the Pacific Ocean by raft. Inspired by his own native Vikings, he began to conceive of a mission to prove his theory, consulting with his zoology professors and international scholars all over the world.

After the Germans invaded Norway, at the age of 30, in 1944, he joined the Free Norwegian Forces, and served in the far north province of Finnmark.

Two years after the war, and after a failed marriage, Heyerdahl, organized and raised the money for a mission where he would prove his raft crossing thesis, by building a Balsa wood raft, and with a small crew of five, sail across the Pacific, from Peru in South America to the Tuamotu Islands in French Polynesia.

The voyage would take 101 days and cover over 4300 nautical miles.

He would write a best selling book about the expedition. It would sell over 50 million copies and has been translated into over 70 languages.

Heyerdahl would also make a documentary film about the adventure, which would win an academy award in 1951. The Documentary can be viewed here:

https://www.facebook.com/crazysailors/videos/kon-tiki/330534151000840/?locale=eo_EO

The raft built by Heyerdahl was named Kon-Tiki, after the Inca god Viracocha, for whom "Kon-Tiki" was said to be an old name.

After his successful voyage, the Kon-Tiki was brought back to Heyerdahl's Oslo, and a museum was built around it. It was this museum that we visited.

There we saw the original Kon Tiki vessel and all that went into building and sailing it.

In 1969 and 1970, now a multi-millionaire, Heyerdahl decided that he wished to recreate another ancient voyage, based upon an Egyptian reed ship design, from Africa to the Americas.

This he did twice, constructing two reed boats, the Ra and Ra II.

Although the 1969 adventure was a bit of a failure, due to unauthorized modifications to Heyerdahl's design made by the Chad workmen constructing the boat, which caused it to take on water and eventually become unseaworthy, the 1970 expedition, in the Ra II, which was built to the correct specifications, was a notable success.

Again, Heyerdahl would write another best selling book about these voyages, together with making another award winning documentary.

In addition to containing the original Kon-Tiki, another room in the museum also housed the Ra II.

These were both amazing, inspirational missions, filled with hard work, creative engineering and unbelievable determination. Heyerdahl, who was described by our tour guide as an incredibly handsome and charismatic man, who she said was renowned for his like of the ladies, did, indeed, accomplish some remarkable things.

He really did seem to be an strong example of that determined, sea faring, Viking spirit, that is Norway and its people.

Across the street from the Kon Tiki museum is the Fram museum.

This museum is dedicated to expeditions to both the North and the South Poles, and the ship, the Fram (Norwegian for "forward"), that carried those explorers, who dared to make the missions.

More specifically, the Fram is a wooden, three-masted schooner, originally launched in 1892, that was designed for these polar missions, to be both unusually wide (36 feet wide and 128 feet long) and unusually shallow, in order to better withstand the forces of pressing ice.

The Fram museum, like the Kon Tiki Museum, also had its museum building constructed around this massive ship.

State of the art at the time of its construction, Fridtjof Nansen, the leader of the mission to the North Pole, commissioned the Norwegian shipwright Colin Archer to construct the vessel with its special characteristics. Built with an outer layer of greenheart wood to withstand the ice, with almost no keel, the rudder and propeller were designed to be retracted.

Nansen also ordered the ship was also carefully insulated to allow the crew to live on board for up to five years, and included a windmill, which would run an electric generator to provide power for the ship's state of the art electric arc lamps.

Initially, the Fram was designed with a coal fired steam engine, but such was later replaced in 1910, with a diesel fueled engine, a first for polar exploration vessels.

Nansen's mission was to explore the Arctic farther north than anyone else, culminating at the north pole.

With the Fram, Nansen got as far as 86 degrees 14 minutes North, but did not reach the North Pole as intended in 1893-94. The first explorer to actually attain the 90 degree goal was claimed to be US explorer, Frederick Cook in 1908, or US Navy Engineer, Robert Perry in 1909, but neither were able to actually be confirmed, and their remains some degree of controversy of their success to this day. The first consistent, verified, and scientifically convincing attainment of the Pole was on 12 May 1926, by Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen.

Sixteen years earlier, in 1910 to 1912, Amundsen, on board the Fram, made the first successful adventure to the south pole, in Antarctica, reaching the pole by foot on December 14, 1911, five weeks before British Explorer, Robert Scott. During the Amundsen expedition, the Fram served as the home base for Amundsen and his crew in the famous Bay of Whales along the Great Ice Barrier.

This museum was extremely interesting, and once again demonstrated the spirit of adventure and determination of the Norwegian people, as they lived their own Viking adventure.

From the Fram museum it was back on the bus, where we next traveled to the world famous Vigeland Sculpture Park. This park features more than 200 sculptures in bronze, granite and wrought iron, from the sculptor Gustav Vigeland (1869-1943).

Vigeland was into interpretative art, with a strong authoritarian presentation. The park, which was completed during Nazi occupation, had originally had its work ordered by the Germans to be ceased, in an claimed effort to assist the war effort. A Norwegian, who was friends with high ranking Nazi, Heinrich Himler, however, interceded on Vigeland's behalf, and his work was then allowed to continue unmolested, until his death in 1943.

This magnificent park, which took us an hour to walk through, features not only the sculptures, but also a breath taking obelisk, a sculpture bridge, man made waterfalls, multiple, incredible, fountains, and several, immaculate, multi colored, flower gardens.

Although not present in this park, a contemporary Norwegian artist to Vigeland, was also Edvard Munch. A symbolist/expressionist painter, Munch, who has a large museum in Oslo dedicated to his work, became world-famous for his painting, the Scream, which is said to represent the anxiety of modern man. His other notable works include: The Sick Child, Madonna, and Puberty.

Shortly before we entered Vigeland Park, we saw in the distance, the Holmenkollen Ski Museum and Tower, off in the distance. This enormous ski jump facility was constructed for the Winter Olympics, of which Norway has won more medals than any other country. Although last held in Norway in 1956, this Olympic training facility has been rebuilt and expanded 18 times. This jump allows participants to fly through the air, at record distances. Eddies the Eagle would certainly be proud of this facility.

At Vigeland Park we re-entered the bus and took a serious tour of several Oslo City sights. These included their famous new, and gorgeous, Opera House, the Parliament Building, the Royal Palace, the Nobel Peace Center (where the annual Nobel Peace prize is awarded), and Akershus Castle.

With its charming streets, and beautiful, friendly people, this wonderful city brings you in with a magnetism and style that is simply endearing. It is clean, pretty and comfortable. Everywhere, you see people walking, riding their bikes, and talking on the sidewalks. Oslo is simply a great place, and I hope that someday, I can return, and stay longer.

After the tour the bus brought the three jolly boys back to the ship. AmazingHugh, Geddi Master and myself, soon went up and took dinner at the 14th floor cafeteria. A place I have playfully begun to refer to as the trough, as the serve your self buffet almost always has several hungry, large build senior citizens, trying to bump themselves to get to the food in front of anyone else.

Patience needs to be the order of the day at the trough, as the able kitchen staff, will always bring out more of any dish you seek. And Lord only knows that the worst place to be in life is between a hungry senior tourist and her dinner.

After the dinner, all three of us ventured over to the Theater. The show for the night was a combination singing, dancing acrobatic performance. The singers were good, but after about a half hour of young 90 pound women being thrown or suspended 30 feet in the air, Dad and Bob had had enough for the day, claiming they had to leave before someone broke their neck.

It was a long day, with an even bigger one tomorrow, so we all crashed, and were in bed by 9pm. With jet lag still up us all, we each fell asleep rather quickly.

Tomorrow, Copenhagen and the Dutch.

Other artists of note include Harald Sohlberg, a neo-romantic painter remembered for his paintings of Røros, and Odd Nerdrum, a figurative painter who maintains that his work is not art, but kitsch.

Vigeland also designed the park's design and architectural form. An extremely worth seeing work about the cycle of life.