



INDULGE

Land of the Midnight Sun

By Dr Ryan Tan



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My wife and I toured Norway for three weeks in April 2012. One of the nicest things about self-drive holidays is that you can pull over when you see something vaguely beautiful. The toughest thing is surely having the discipline not to do that – and stick to the schedule.

Due to some last minute work leave issues, we ended up visiting in the shoulder season of spring. While it was spring proper, snow-covered landscapes were still much plenteous! During our trip, we delighted ourselves to the fullest, and captured both on photos and in our hearts, beautiful memories of Norway.

We flew into Oslo, the capital of Norway, and stayed for a day before driving northwards. While in Oslo, we stayed a short throw from the beautiful Aker Brygge, a very popular shopping and dining area by the harbour.

Oslo is expensive compared to many cities in other countries. The cost of a visit to a public lavatory is to the tune of ten kroner! If you meet a kind McDonalds staff, they can provide you with the four-digit code to unlock their toilets – secret toilet codes are otherwise printed on customers' receipts.

As a Peking duck connoisseur, I highly recommend trying the Peking duck at the unassumingly-named Dinner Bar & Restaurant (<http://www.dinner.no>), which necessitates one to book a day in advance.

The splendid Heddal Stave Church was a brief drive west of Oslo, and from there we made a pause at Gaustatoppen (the highest mountain in the county of Telemark) and stayed over at the nearby town of Rjukan for the night. The following day, we set off for a quick photo stop by a semi-thawed Langfoss waterfall, before proceeding northwards to Bergen.

Bergen is not dubbed the City of Rain for nothing. Our first day in Bergen was shrouded in rain for most part of the day. We had a window of better luck the next morning – amazing sunshine came for but just a few hours. We visited the postcard-perfect Bryggen wharf, and took a funicular up the Floyen mountain to take in the amazing night view of Bergen city from the top. On any fine weather, Gamle Bergen, an open-air museum featuring Norwegian houses from the 18th and 19th centuries, would be a lovely visit as well.

After an extended drive covering more than 400 kilometres (including fjord crossings via car ferries), we managed to reach the UNESCO-protected Geirangerfjord before complete darkness ensued. The Geiranger area experienced freak precipitation, transforming spring greens into white over a span of two days, which dashed our plans of hiking around the charming fjord. However we did manage to pull off a day trip to Alesund from Geiranger, and enjoyed a glimpse of the sunset from the Aksla viewpoint there.

We did a costal detour to traverse the scenic Atlantic Road. With its prominent Storseisundet Bridge, the road is touted as the world's best road trip, by UK newspaper the *Guardian*. Some time later, we finally arrived at Trondheim in the evening, taking a well-deserved dinner at the well-received Sushi Bar (<http://www.sushibar.no>).

Further north from Trondheim, we chose to drive the longer but more picturesque coastal route, Kystriksveien over a span of three days.

Photos

1. The traditional fishing village of Henningsvaer, Lofoten
2. Heddal Stave Church
3. Oslo lights
4. Storseisundet Bridge, part of the Atlantic Road



Photos

5. Traditional *rorbuer* in red in the traditional fishing village of A, Lofoten
6. Sunset at Lofotakvariet, Lofoten
7. An aurora over Svolvær, Lofoten

The beautiful seaside drive is punctuated by multiple fjord crossings, bridged via car ferries on a rather irregular nonsummer schedule. If you are pressed for time, the inland E6 route is a faster way. Bodo is a quiet but welcoming small city, just north of the Arctic Circle. From Bodo, we took a 1 am ferry ride into Lofoten.

Pretty much exhausted from the poor sleep we had during the ferry ride from Bodo, we were nonetheless exhilarated when we reached Lofoten the next morning – the view of the archipelago that greeted us was beyond amazing. Reine, or the Pearl of the Lofoten Islands, was so beautiful I actually had goosebumps! Its great splendour pervaded the atmosphere, leaving me speechless.

We stayed three nights in a *rorbuer* (converted fisherman's cabin) in Reine, and two nights in a hotel in Svolvær, the capital of Lofoten, located on the island of Austvagoya. The harmonisation of human society and the economy with nature is almost palpable on Austvagoya. Within Lofoten, we drove and visited various fishing villages: A, Reine, Moskenes, Hamnøy, Sakrisøy, Henningsvåg, Leknes, Svolvær, Gimsoy, Nusfjord, Unstad and Eggum. On our last night in Svolvær, we were fortunate to witness an aurora, a rather uncommon occurrence considering it was already midspring. The dance of northern lights was our best parting gift from Lofoten, and we were immediately reminded that our Norwegian journey was coming to a close.

On our return leg, we boarded a ferry to cross back to Bodo and returned the rental car to the local Avis. From Bodo, we took a lengthy day plus sleeper coach rail ride back to Oslo, before finally heading back to Singapore.

If you are a city dweller who wants a time out for something different, Norway should definitely be part of your travel list! **SMA**



Ryan is a family doctor who dreams of travelling a little more each year. Apart from using an old Canon DSLR for travel photography, he gives a fair shake with even older film cameras. He maintains a photo gallery at <http://www.kaleidoscopy.com>.

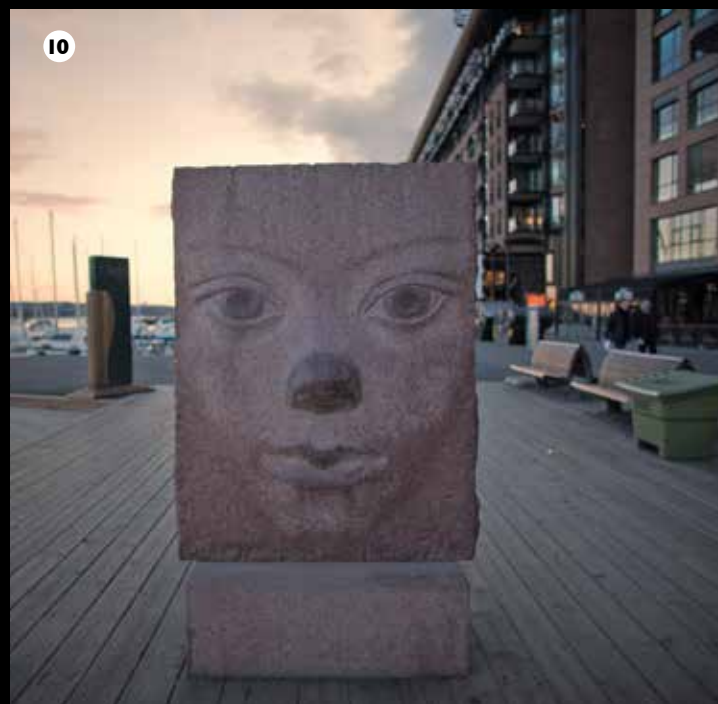




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Photos

8. Rjukan, a town and administrative centre of Tinn municipality, Telemark
9. A half-frozen Langfoss waterfall
10. An evening stroll in Aker Brygge, Oslo
11. Bryggen, the Hanseatic wharf of Bergen
12. The left arm of Latefossen waterfall, which comprises two streams from its source that later meet in its middle
13. Stockfish drying on traditional wooden racks (otherwise known as "hjell") in Lofoten

