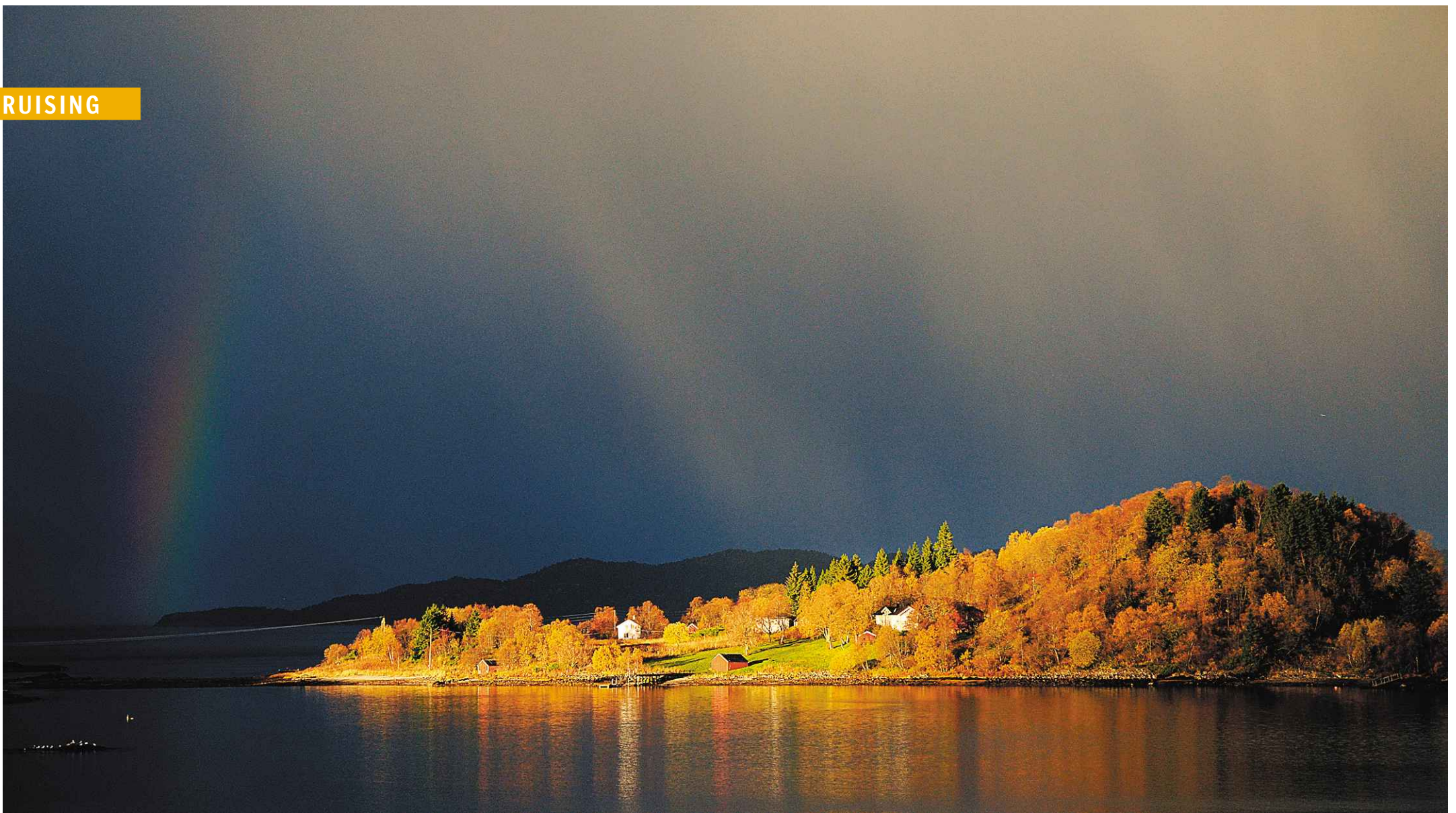


CRUISING



NORWAY

Elbow room

Shipping out in shoulder season leaves little behind in the way of beauty, hospitality, variety, and interesting excursions

BY KARI BODNARCHUK | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BERGEN — By 9:30 a.m., the sun had just inched its way over the snowy mountains behind Ornes, a village of 1,500 people above the Arctic Circle. Golden rays reflected off the morning's dewy air and lighted a nearby island with the accuracy of perfectly choreographed stage lights. As if on cue, several rainbows appeared to the left of the island and completed the idyllic scene.

"This is what I've been waiting for," an Australian passenger said to me, as we stood on the sun deck of a Hurtigruten cruise ship.

The views up to that point hadn't been shabby, but the scenery and weather grew more dramatic the farther north we traveled.

My husband and I had always wanted to see the Norwegian coast, so along with our daughter we joined 91 other intrepid travelers aboard the MS Kong Harald last October for a shoulder-season adventure (the ship fills all 483 beds come summertime). The seven-day cruise would take us from the mild and manicured city of Bergen in the southwest to the rugged outer reaches of the country's Arctic region, where reindeer graze on patchy scrub, and autumn skies filter and diffuse the daylight.

Most of the big cruise lines run trips along Norway's west coast from May to September, stopping at main ports such as Ålesund, Trondheim, and Tromsø. But Hurtigruten's 11 working ships run year-round, as they have since 1893, transporting cargo, residents wanting to avoid long drives or experience the voyage, and sightseers like us.

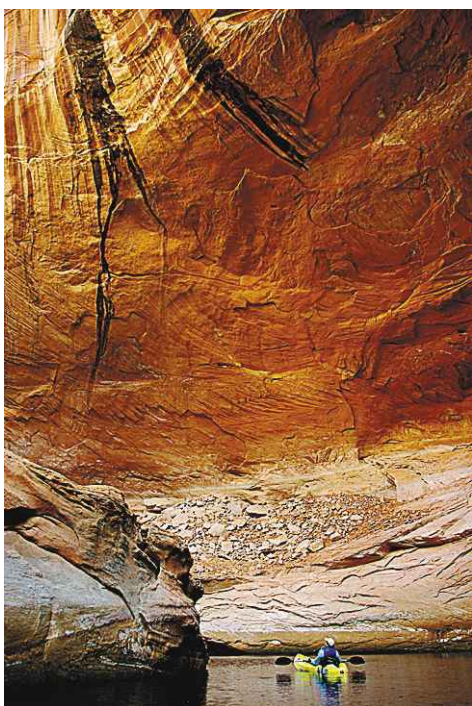
"Everyone in Norway will go on

NORWAY, Page M5



PHOTOS BY KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Morning dawns at a remote island near Ornes; the River Nidelva wharf in Trondheim; a Sami trading post.



CATHRYN M. DELUDE FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

INSIDE

Save on your **Alaska** cruise, but spend on those excursions. **M5**

See **Utah** prehistory from a kayak on Lake Powell, left. **M6**

EXPLORE NEW ENGLAND

Grab a **zip line** and get a rush in Bretton Woods, N.H. **M7**

Savoring one part of the Amazon



AQUA EXPEDITIONS

Plying the Amazon, the Aqua transports 24 guests in its 12 rooms.

By Tracey Ceurvels
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

IQUITOS — I am sipping a pisco sour, a popular Peruvian cocktail made from a native grape brandy, and nibbling on plantain chips and shrimp with sauce made of cocona, a local fruit.

While I have come to see monkeys, blue Morpho butterflies, pink dolphins, and the lush, mysterious rain forest, it was the chance to taste Peruvian food in a luxurious setting that lured me here. I am on an intimate cruise (only 24 guests per trip, maximum) along the Peruvian part of the Amazon. The popular chef Pedro-Miguel Schiaffino is leading

PERU, Page M6



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Minus glitz, glamour, glaciers, sights and stops still dazzle

► NORWAY

Continued from Page M1

this trip once in his or her lifetime," said Anita Heiberg, the ship's tour director.

You won't find the same glitz and glamour onboard these ships — no spas, casinos, or musical productions — and you may dock for only 15 minutes at some ports. But you will get to see remote fiords and sleepy outposts where the ship's arrival often generates a flurry of activity.

Going this time of year had its pros and cons. On the downside, the maintenance crew took advantage of the low passenger numbers to rewire sections of the ship. There were big bundles of electrical cables in the hallway outside our room for days. Many excursions were unavailable, since our trip took place after fair-weather activities had ended — such as sailing to Norway's second-largest glacier and exploring the Lofoten Islands — and before winter activities had begun, such as dog-sledding and visiting a snow hotel (out of 37 total excursions, 12 were available to us). And we met only four other children, all Norwegians traveling for a few stops, at most.

Our 17-month-old daughter ended up being the only person under about 35 to do the entire 1,250-mile route. The small playroom and all the new faces kept her entertained, but slightly older children — too old to ride the mechanical Winnie the Pooh or play with the toy kitchen, and too young to be captivated by the fabulous views — might get bored without extra entertainment.

On the plus side, we had plenty of elbow room and our choice of seats, from the cozy indoor viewing lounge on Deck 7 to the spacious dining room. We rarely had to wait in line for anything, whether getting coffee at an onboard cafe or using one of the ship's two public computers. Townsfolk warmly welcomed us at each stop (some ports, like Bergen, get nine cruise ships a day during the summer), and shops that weren't closed for the



KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A hotel en route to Nordkapp, a northernmost point in Europe, and its 900-foot oceanside cliffs.

season offered deep discounts. We also saw the aurora borealis, which put on a spectacular show one night, as the haunting green and white northern lights danced across the polar sky. You're more likely to see the lights between October and May.

We flew to Norway a day early, in case of delays, to get over our jet lag, and to explore Bergen, a charming city of 252,000 situated between mountains and a bay that's sheltered by dozens of islands. Downtown is relatively flat and easy to navigate, but bring comfy shoes for the cobblestone walkways and surrounding hilly streets. And an umbrella and rain jacket, too, since Bergen gets twice the rain in Seattle, its sister city: 100 inches annually.

In a day, at a relatively relaxing pace, we visited the Bergen Maritime Museum, went for a two-hour guided tour with The Travel Designer, and explored quiet residential streets near downtown. We also strolled through the city's main squares, the famous fish market (where we sampled a traditional Norwegian food: whale meat), and the Hanseatic wharf, where the colorful and visibly crooked warehouses now house souvenir shops, restaurants, and artists' studios. The wharf and its 62 historic buildings were declared a



NORTHERN EXPOSURE

See more of the Norwegian coast at www.boston.com/travel.

World Heritage Site in 1979.

A highlight was our ride on the funicular, Scandinavia's only cable railway, which whisked us 1,000 feet up a hillside along steep tracks to the summit of Mount Floyen. From here, we had expansive views over the city's black-slate and red-tiled roofs, the area's six other mountains, and the North Sea in the distance. Five miles of hiking trails lead walkers through forested routes along the hillsides, or back down into town.

Like Bergen, the cities we visited (most feel like large towns) can easily be explored on foot, but the ship's guided excursions let you see many of the highlights in short order. On a chilly, rain-splattered day, we jumped on Hurtigruten's bus tour of Trondheim, which swept us through downtown with its wide streets and cobblestone alleyways, up to a city overlook, and around residential neighborhoods where the fall colors were ablaze and the houses were painted in bright blue, deep red, and mustard tones. Then we drove through the beautifully landscaped university before stopping for a

guided tour of the imposing Nidaros Cathedral. We still had time to wander back to the ship on our own — our choice — and see some of the sites afoot, like the colorful warehouses on stilts over the Nidelva River and a funky bicycle lift that pulls bikes up a steep hill along a track.

We wandered aimlessly through back streets in Ålesund, letting our curiosity guide our way, and did another bus excursion in snowy Tromsø, which gave us entry to an Arctic aquarium and offered a whirlwind tour to the city outskirts and over Norway's first cantilevered bridge to the Arctic Cathedral.

One of the cruise highlights and Hurtigruten's most popular excursion was the RIB ("rigid inflatable boat") Safari, when you slip on survival gear — one-piece immersion suits, fleece hats, and ski goggles — and motor up a fiord to the narrow channel of Saltstraumen. Here, you can witness what are said to be the strongest currents in the world, when 13 billion cubic feet of water is forced through a passage 450 feet wide and 95 feet deep.

"It creates powerful whirlpools and eddies so strong that small boats have been sucked down," said Henry Johansen, our guide. "Last year, we had to rescue three Russians."

If you go . . .

Getting around

Flybussen offers a one-way shuttle between Bergen airport and downtown (\$15); Hurtigruten runs a shuttle from the airport to downtown (\$25.25) or to the ship terminal (\$11.80) on cruise departure days.

Hurtigruten

800-323-7436

www.hurtigruten.us

Rates for the Norwegian Coastal Voyage start at \$1,019 (6-day); \$1,297 (7-day); and \$1,502 (12-day) cruises.

Where to stay

Thon Hotel Bristol

011-47-55-55-1001

www.thonhotels.no

In Bergen's city center. Rooms are small (European style) but super clean and comfortable. Great restaurant with extensive breakfast buffet (included); free Internet and coffee in lobby. Rates start at approximately

\$235 per room, per night.

Radisson Blu Airport Hotel, Oslo Gardermoen

800-333-3333

www.radissonblu.com/hotel-osloairport

Steps from the airport. Singles start at \$169, including buffet breakfast.

Resources

Bergen Tourist Information

011-47-55-55-2010

www.visitbergen.com

Oslo Visitors and Convention Bureau

011-47-23-10-6200

www.visitoslo.com

The Travel Designer

011-47-55-01-2322

www.thetraveldesigner.com
Arranges full-day customized tours with funicular ride, walk along the wharf and through residential areas, museum visit, and lunch at a private home. Contact for rates.

The water looked calm and nonthreatening when we arrived, however, since we showed up three hours before the shift in tides. That's what happens when everything runs on the ship's versus nature's schedule. The 19-mile ride up the Sundstraumen fiord was still worth the trip: We saw two white-tailed sea eagles with 7-foot wing spans and rock formations that looked like hundreds of thin, stacked pancakes that, in some spots, have frozen in curved ocean wave shapes.

The crowning glory during the cruise was our journey to Nordkapp, or North Cape, where rugged cliffs rise 1,000 feet above the ocean and mark the northernmost point in Europe that's accessible by road (the actual northernmost piece of land is a finger-shaped peninsula that's visible from Nordkapp and juts nearly a mile farther north).

The narrated 45-minute drive

took us across a barren, snow-dusted plateau with alpine lakes and volcanic rock that is 300 million years old. We stopped to meet semi-nomadic reindeer herders, who belong to Northern Europe's indigenous Sami group and who run a one-room trading post. They introduced us to a reindeer and let us look around their lavvu, a portable shelter that resembles a tepee.

Nordkapp conjured an end-of-the-world feel, reminding me of the windswept wildness of Ireland's west coast. We were captivated by the landscape: the intensity of the North Sea pounding against the cliffs, the soft midday light reflecting like moonlight on the lakes, and the reindeer dotting the Arctic tundra. The scene had all the makings of an award-winning set.

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