

SHERPA: NORWAY – THE FIORDLAND

8-days/ 7-nights self-guided inn-to-inn walking holiday

(Ref: JNO - Revised: October 10)



This trip is the ideal introduction into the magic of Norwegian walking; it is undertaken from several centers using easy transportation on trains and boats in between. From Oslo, you travel by rail to some of the wildest, most spectacular, classic "picture postcard" settings within the realms of Norwegian mountain and fjord land. Many people enjoy taking a leisurely cruise up the coast to see the beauty of the country from below, but on this tour you can be looking down and walking amongst the highlands, a much more engaging experience.

The route embraces the famous Hardangervidda area of western Norway where there is the potential for a heady mix of highland walking through the manifestations of the last Ice Age. The retreating glaciers once overwhelmed and molded this landscape; gouging out the great coastal grooves which, with postglacial rising sea levels, have become the fjords. Of these the beautiful Sognefjord is the longest and deepest in the country.

There are a wide range of walks to take in the highlands, which lead you right up onto the glaciers edge; it is even possible to go out onto the ice to take an excursion. There are also the more lush walks down into the pastoral settings of the Flam and Aurland Valleys. These are furnished with forests, farmsteads, cascades and churches.

All in all an unforgettable experience, especially if the Nordic Gods favor you with good weather and that you read your Sherpa Runes wisely!

Departs: Daily from mid-July – September 2011

Cost: AUD\$1890 per person twin share. Single supplement AUD\$385

Starts: Geilo

Included: The price is based on two people sharing a twin or double room and includes half board (dinner, bed & breakfast accommodation on 6 evenings and B&B 1 evening). Lunches are also provided in Finse, but these are packed lunches, that you need to make up at breakfast time.

There is only one baggage transfer included on this tour. The baggage transfer included is from Flam to Aurland, because most of your transfers are by train and you will need to travel with your own bags, we recommend that you keep your travel weight down and for convenience use an easily portable method of carrying your things such as a rucksack and then bring with you a much smaller day sack as well. On the plus side is the fact that the accommodations are pretty near to the train stations.

Cost of the train transfers are not included, nor are the other local transports such as cable car (a possibility in Geilo) taxi or ferry services whilst you are in Norway.

Contact Outdoor Travel on (03) 57501441 for details and reservations

Travel Information

The first Hotel: At Geilo, which is easily reached by train from Oslo. Train services from Oslo are normally 4 times a day. The journey time is approx. 3.5-4 hours. Clients should aim to arrive in Geilo by 8pm on the first evening. Our hotel is 1.7 km from the small town of Geilo and the hotel will collect you from the station.

Nearest airport: Although Bergen is slightly nearer the start of the most people will fly to Oslo Gardermoen, where there are more flight departures everyday.

End of Tour: The tour ends on Day 8 at Aurland. Take a taxi taking approx 10-minutes to Flam, then an hour on the scenic train from Flam on Sognefjord to Myrdal and onwards arriving mid afternoon in Oslo.

Level of Difficulty: Fitness: We grade this tour as moderate, with some challenging options; anyone used to hill walking with a daily height gain/loss of up to 1000 metres should find the tour within their capability. Most days are a lot easier than this. There are usually walking options and experienced walkers can of course extend their range if they want to. There may be a chance to do an optional glacier walk from the hotel in Finse, which will require a local payment of about 300 NOK. Although items like crampons are supplied, if you want to do this guided trip, you should at least make sure that your walking boots are stiff enough to be compatible with articulated walking crampons. This option is subject to availability and weather conditions.

Day Stages: The duration of walk-ing per day varies. You will have to attend to a morning train (or a ferry transfer) on some days to get you to the next hotel; these are normally under an hour's journey. So you have to fit in the walking with this. However you will normally be able to spend up to 6 hours happily walking per day in most cases. In Geilo one walking route can be shortened by taking the Geilohogda chairlift (not included) this runs up to mid August.

Waymarking: As one would expect in Norway, the trails are pretty well waymarked, well mapped and often signposted. However poor visibility at times will mean that it is advisable to carry and be able to use a compass in case of mist or fog.

There can be snow patches and fields on higher trails, especially on our two most challenging walks while new snowfalls are possible during the summer period when we operate this tour. We would recommend that later departures in September would be more suitable for the more experienced walker.

General Information

Hotels: The hotels described are our usual choice of accommodation, however if these are not available then alternatives are used and if these are of a different standard you will be informed at the time of booking.

Baths/showers: Many rooms with ensuite/private facilities have a shower rather than a bath, usually because of limited space. Some hotels/guesthouses may however have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests.

Breakfast: in countries such as Norway is usually buffet style, please don't offend your hosts by making up a picnic lunch from the breakfast buffet unless it has been specifically organised for you ie Finse in Norway.

Special Dietary Requirements: It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Single Supplements: are payable on most of our tours. The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms.

Route Notes: Please note that 1 set of route notes per room booked is included in the cost of the holiday. If you require more sets of notes then there is a charge of £25 per set ordered.

Language: When travelling in less frequented areas you will not necessarily come across people speaking English although most hotel staff do in Norway. Remember you are experiencing a different culture, buy a phrase book and try to learn a little of the local language!

Insurance: All clients must have appropriate cover for the activities included for the duration of our trip.

Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation is on a half board basis for 6 nights (6 evening meals included) and 1 night B&B in characterful, traditional style hotels. We always try to book ensuite rooms, if this is not possible for the dates that you want to travel then we will let you know. Lunches are not included in the tour cost, however in Finse packed lunches are included, which you normally make up from the breakfast buffet.

Nights 1 & 2: Geilo. Our hotel is the perfect place to relax, let alone start walks from and is within walking distance from the center of Geilo. Rooms are newly renovated and there is a cozy informal atmosphere. Facilities include restaurant, indoor swimming pool, sauna and tennis court, lounge -bar and pub.

Nights 3 & 4: Finse. Here we stay at a cosy chalet styled hotel with spectacular views. The hotel is a short walk from the train station. In fact Finse was built around the railway. At 1222m, the hotel started as a shelter for the occupants of snow bound trains (an increasingly rare event in these days of global warming). Over the years this cabin has been through many upgrades. Converting it into an extraordinary hotel with the emphasis on outdoor activities within a superb landscape. Rooms are basic but comfortable (don't expect a TV) often with great views. There is a little pub in the basement that has become a bit of a museum with railway memorabilia. There is a relaxation center with a sauna and ice bath...if you think you are hard enough!

Night 5: Flam. We stay in a cosy basic pension, run by the owners, which is located next to the Aurlandsfjord, only 400 m from the famous Flåm railway. The pension is not too 'flamboyant' but has an informal atmosphere. There is a room with an open fireplace, TV-lounge and a large garden. The rooms are the most basic of the tour, but are warm and simple ensuite. Bed & breakfast only. There are several cafe restaurants open until 22:00.

Night 6 & 7: Aurland. Our resplendent hotel here overlooks the fjord. The hotel is spacious with fine rooms and there is a café bar and the restaurant produces great local meals.

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Morning Flight to Oslo, transfer to railway station for the railway journey up to Geilo, a scenic railway journey in itself, whilst not traversing the fjords, the route winds up into the high eagle swept forests, lakes and moorlands of Norway.

Day 2: Geilo is superbly located beside the Hardanger Vidda Mountain Plateau, at 800m above sea level. You can until mid August take the chairlift to access the Hallingskarvet Mountains to reduce the height gain and complete a great introduction walk with great views in reasonable weather. We offer a challenging walk to climb Prestholtskarvet 1859m in the Hallingskarvet, or there is a nice moderate moorland walk, or an easy Lakeside ramble.

Day 3: Morning train to Finse; a place first populated by British aristocrats before the railways arrived. Then you can undertake a walk across the moorland towards the ice of the Hardanger glacier for a picnic. Or you can do a return walk along the old railway workers track that connects Finse with Myrdal, where captain Scott did his winter training for the Antarctic. In good weather, strong walkers may like to attempt the ascent of St. Paul (1700m)

Day 4: On the second day in Finse, either do another walk or if the weather is reasonable there is the option of doing a guided walk up on to the glacier, donning crampons as you go. You need to phone a number given in the route notes, or from the hotel at least a day in advance to see what the status of the walk is, as it does not necessarily run everyday and not in poor weather. The walk begins from the hotel / station area and the cost paid locally is: 490 NOK.

Equipment is provided, but note that your boots will need to be reasonably stiff to take a crampon. Itineraries will depend on conditions, and we cannot guarantee that you will be able to get on the excursion, but it is something that is a possibility.

Day 5: Train transfer to Myrdal and walk down to Flam (21 km). This is an easy to moderate classic walk! You have to first submit your baggage at Myrdal for local transfer down to Flam station (50 NOK per bag approx, which you have to pay locally). The walk down to Flam is beautiful, following the lush valley route, through woods and pastures, always with the sounds of rushing waters. Eventually drop down to the Aurlandsfjord, a branch off Sognefjord.

Days 6 & 7: A short ferry journey takes you to Aurland for two nights, giving you plenty of time to walk round this beautiful area. There are some little circular walks you can do here, or walk up the breathtaking Aurland Valley, using a local bus at the start and end of the walk. In some ways this place is lost in time, from Ovstebo, you can only follow a mule track into the higher pastures, enjoying the sights and sounds of this landscape. We would also recommend a 4 hour fjord cruise (about 255 NOK) into the Sognefjord described as the most beautiful destination in the world by a panel on "The National Geographical Magazine."

Day 8: Tour ends after breakfast.

As time allows travel from Aurland to Oslo, bus or taxi to Flam and then catch the scenic Myrdal - Flam train, a private line claimed to be the steepest "normal gauge" railway in the world. You should get beautiful views back to Sognefjord and around. At Myrdal, join mainline trains back to Oslo. We recommend you to have an extra night in Oslo so that you can make the most of what this city has to offer including the Viking Museum.

Train Travel

Rail travel is not included in the tour price and you need to use the trains a lot on this tour, and with the stop offs involved, it is probably advisable to buy your tickets in advance especially considering that you should have a seat reservation between Oslo and Geilo at the start of the tour and between Flam and Oslo at the end of the tour. You may or may not be able to reserve seats on the trains from Geilo to Finse and from Finse to Myrdal because these are short sections of under an hour. Depending on how busy the train is, you may or may not get a seat for these short sections.

Although in theory you could just turn up at Oslo S and buy all your tickets (one for each leg of the journey) when you arrive in our experience the best deals on trains in Norway are made OUTSIDE of the country. You can look for timetables and book the tickets on <http://www.nsb.no>, which is the Norwegian state railway site (NSB) or ask Outdoor Travel in Australia.

Trains, buses and ferries can amount to around \$500. Although it can be substantially less with 'Mini-pris' tickets on certain trains.

The routings that you need are (note there may be new timings for Summer 2011):

Day 1: Oslo - Geilo (reservation recommended). Depending on when you arrive in Oslo, there is usually a train around 16.07 that gets you into Geilo at 19.39.

Day 3: Geilo - Finse, (10.15 train is ideal).

Day 5: Finse - Flam via Myrdal (11.10 train is ideal). Hopefully you will walk from Myrdal and you need to pay locally to get you baggage taken through to Flam.

Day 8: Flam to Oslo via Myrdal. A reservation is recommended ie depart Flam at 08:35 to arrive Myrdal. Depart Myrdal: 0951 to arrive Oslo 14:32, or depart Flam on the next train at 11.00 - arriving at Oslo 17.32

Norwegian rail tends to be very reliable. Trains run every 30-minutes approx from the airport to Central Station, (Oslo S), taking 30-minutes and vice versa (200 NOK approx).

Other walking holidays – guided in small groups or self-guided with inn-to-inn luggage transfers & meals are available in many parts of the UK & Europe through **Outdoor Travel** including the spectacular **Coast to Coast** trail across England, **St Cuthbert's Way** from Scotland into England, the pilgrims **Way of St James** or **Camino de Santiago** from Le Puy in France to Santiago in Spain or the **Via Francigena** the pilgrims 'road to Rome' in Italy.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

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