

This trip was from August 20th - August 29th 2016.

The Sime family (Norwegian spelling Seim) is originally from Årdal in Sogn og Fjordane county, and more specifically, the farming and fishing village of Seim. My great, great grandparents and their children left Norway on a boat from Bergen called the Valkyrien in 1873 (read the horrific story of that journey at the Norwegian Heritage site here: <https://is.gd/5xYobg>). My dad, and many members of my family, have wanted to make this pilgrimage all of their lives. And after a short 3-day visit in 2015, I was determined to get my dad there before the next year was up.

And thanks to the organizational brilliance and daredevil driving of Kirsten Baldock, we did just that. Myself, my dad, Rose Sime and Kirsten successfully visited Seim (!), the very dock in Bergen where the Valkyrien was launched (!), and we explored much of the fjord country & part of the Jotunheimen Mountains of Norway in the process. As a bonus I also included just a few photos from my previous trip (October 2015) too. Sadly, Facebook decided to move all my videos to the end of the set so those aren't really in order but (shrugs) whatta ya gonna do?

This photoset, the research, and the writing behind it all took me 2 1/2 years to get finished. There's so many odd tidbits of information about Norway, Norwegian folklore, local writers / artists / musicians / bands, links to even more items of interest, and also my memories of our various adventures packed into this set that I had to stop working on it several times just to recharge my creative batteries. My hope is at least some of this will be helpful for other Sime family members who will want to travel to this part of the world and visit where the Simes are originally from too. And maybe for the rest of you I can introduce you to some cool bands, great aquavits, Norse Mythology, and just give you a small peek at what I'm up to when I'm not running the register at my comic book store.

Truly the trip of a lifetime. Enjoy.



Seim, Seimsdalen valley, Norway.

On the waterfront at Seim, right where my ancestors put their boats in the water. This is where my great, great grandparents, Ole T. Seim (age 32) and Sonnevi Seim (age 33), and their children first embarked on their voyage to America in 1873 .



Our trip to the Sime Homeland in Norway begins here...

12.5 thousand feet over the East Greenland Orogen mountain range. Norwegian Air's 787 Boeing Dreamliner is powered by twin Rolls-Royce turbines.

I hope to visit Greenland someday too!



Oslo Norway at Jernbanetorget square.

My parents pose with the famous bronze tiger at Oslo Central Station by artist Elena Engelsen in Jernbanetorget square.

With death-defying tiger-tooth stunts performed by local Norwegian circus performer. Or future circus performer. Whatever the case, we were excited to get in this photo!

Fun Fact: The Norwegian word for "circus" is "sirkus" (laugh)!



Oslo Opera House.

The famous Oslo Opera House. Sitting at the end of the Oslofjord, the Opera House is open to the public and the slanted roof is a very a popular place to catch the gorgeous Norwegian sunset. This iceberg-inspired building was designed by the Snøhetta firm and constructed in 2007.

Pro Tip: You can find videos of the very famous men's room on YouTube.



Oslo Opera House.

Inside the Oslo Opera House. The outside of the building is covered in granite and La Facciata, a white Italian marble. The interior features this "wave wall" in oak and also 49 foot tall windows to give a panoramic view of Oslo and the Oslofjord.



Oslo Opera House. My dad likes these oak walls and the sound dampening properties of the design.



Oslo Opera House.

The roof of the Oslo Opera House. This sign says no bicycles or skateboarding but we definitely saw a couple locals riding their bikes on there. An outdoor concert on the roof had happened earlier and was being broken down as we arrived.



Norwegian Black Metal in Oslo! This is one of the first signs that greeted us on our way to our hotel, It reads:

"Your New Style.  
Your Old Car."

And bizarrely even has a Scottish Fold cat down in the corner. This ad is everything! What a great, weird, awesome black metal welcome to Norway!

Our hotel was across the street from Spektrum concert hall in a cool working class neighborhood. The late-night Norwegian kebabs we had at nearby Dronningen's Kebab were beyond excellent! Owner Haim Meir served us. Highly recommended!



The Oslo Harbor.

I accidentally deleted the photo with the name of this vintage Italian sailboat, so I can't tell you much

aside from that we walked by and my dad made a joke about sneaking on board while the guards were looking the other way.



Watching the sun go down over Oslofjord at Akershus Fortress, Oslo. My dad is in total bliss.

Akershus Fortress is in just about every photo of Oslo and the harbor ever taken. This medieval castle overlooking all of Oslo Harbor was built sometime in the 1299 by King Haakon V. Despite many attempts, the fortress has never successfully been besieged by a foreign enemy (although it was surrendered during the Nazi occupation of Oslo). It is still used as a military base to this day as well as housing Norway's Resistance Museum.

Seen here are [Kirsten Baldock](#)'s hair, [Rose Sime](#) taking a picture of Akershus Castle Church, and my dad just soaking it all up. Not pictured: Me leaning over the high precipice to get the shot.



Akershus Fortress, Oslo Norway.

This picture I took on my \*previous\* trip to Norway in October 2015 of the Akershus Fortress. This one is also at sundown but from out on the docks the fortress overlooks in Oslo Harbor. Here you can see Akershus Church from this other angle... and also that very high precipice I was leaning out over to take the previous photo.



Akershus Fortress Church, Oslo.

I should have taken more pictures of this immense fortress, this is just one building, and does not convey the epic scope. It was very easy to get lost in the massive, walled grounds. Take a tour here:[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= Ng4pyFqZyl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng4pyFqZyl)



Akershus Fortress, Oslo.

Not knowing Norwegian, my trick for signs like this that I couldn't read was to snap a picture and then try to run it through Google Translate once I got back to my hotel and internet access. It didn't always work, but it usually did. Fun to try anyway. This sign designates the canon tower here at Håkon fortress.



Akershus Fortress, Oslo.

After finding it nearly impossible to find our way \*out\* of the Akershus Fortress, this open door to nowhere in the distance looked promising. We ended up not using it until when we returned the next day. I was convinced it was an exit from those endless stone fortress walls, but it, too, was not really the way out either.



Akershus Fortress, Oslo.

One of the disturbing "Silent Howlers" statues that lurked all over Akershus Castle by artist Laura Ford. This haunting outdoor exhibition of statues of crying kids ran from June 11th to September 30th 2016. I'm really glad we saw them.

I considered getting a picture with this one (Weeping Girl 2), but couldn't bring myself to disturb her. See more of these statues here: <http://www.visitoslo.com/en/product/?TLp=1130255>



Oslo Harbor.

Gorgeous sunset over the Oslo harbor at Aker Brygge, there's an open air market here and also lots of restaurants. When the weather is nice Norwegians are definitely outside and these Aker Brygge restaurants have upwards of 2,500 chairs outdoors for them to sit and watch these gorgeous Oslofjord sunsets.

This is right out the front door of [SOLSIDEN Restaurant](#) where we ate amazing seafood. We asked our friendly waiter if he could help us pronounce the names of some of the small towns we would soon be visiting... but our waiter was Swedish and he couldn't really help us with Norwegian pronunciations either.



Oslo Harbor.

The Mela Festivalen (an annual festival celebrating mela activities and religious gathering with dance, theatre, fashion, food) was in full swing right out in front of the Oslo City Hall (aka Oslo Rådhus, seen in the background of this photo) and the Nobel Peace Center, where the Peace Prize is given out each year. These glowing light up elephants were everywhere.



Myth (Sphinx) Statue at Folketeateret, Oslo, Norway.

This 10 foot tall statue of Kate Moss by artist Marc Quinn greets all who visit the Folketeateret Mall in Oslo.

This photo is from my late October 2015 trip. I've included it in this set here because a 10-foot Contortionist Kate Moss statue is really weird and also really hilarious.

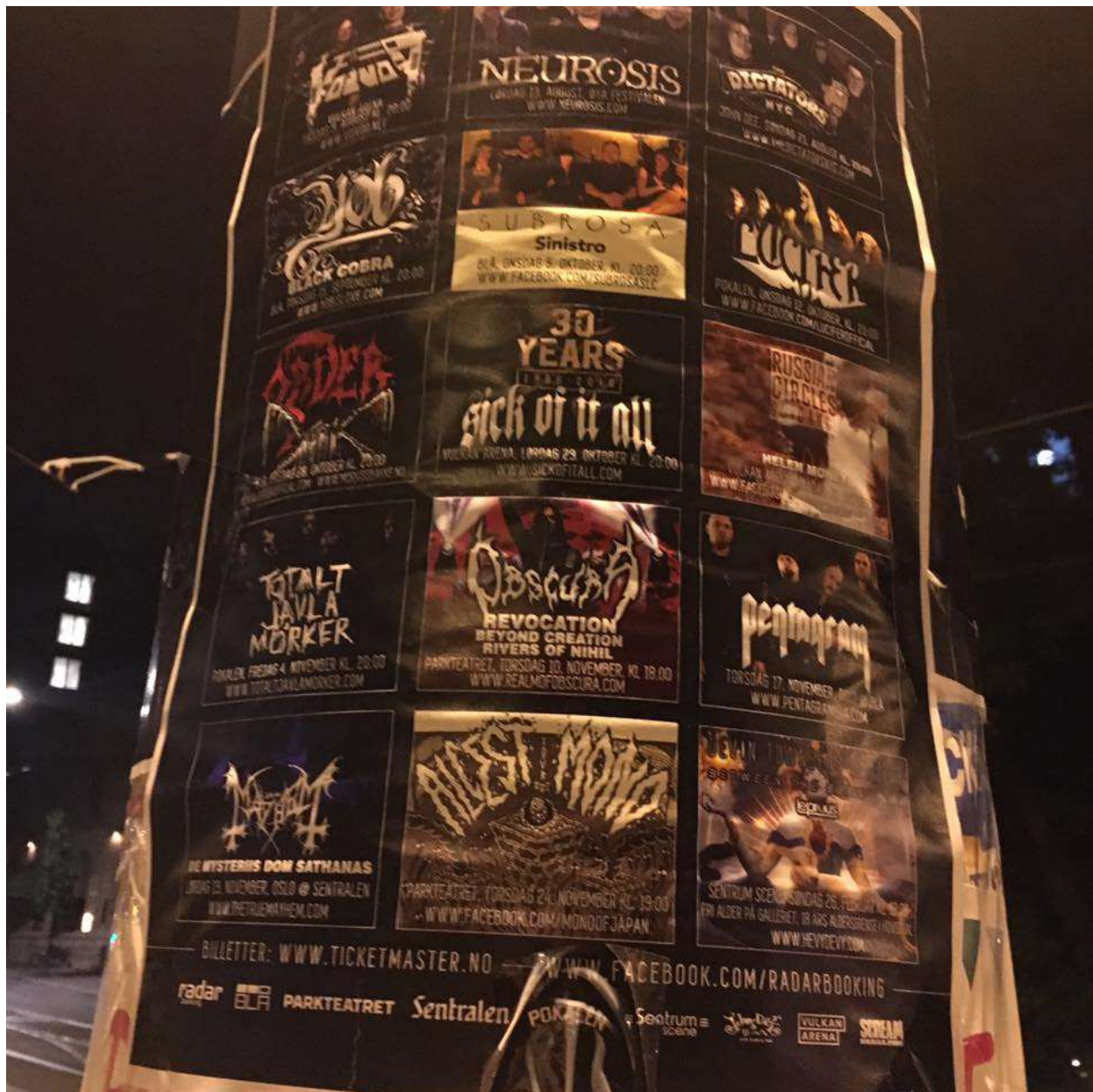


Oslo, Norway... the bad side of the river.

And here you go metal fans, a flyer for the truest of the true Norwegian black metal bands, playing in their home town of Oslo! Of course three of the famous founding members will not be playing this show. Euronymous and Dead who are both dead, and Count Grishnackh is in prison for killing his bandmate Euronymous and also the arson of three Norwegian Stave Churches (those churches are really cool so I definitely can't condone that).

After my parents went to bed we headed off to the \*amazing\* Aku-Aku Tiki Bar in the Grünerløkka district. This is definitely one of my most favorite tiki bars on Earth (second only to Smuggler's Cove), serving up a variety of fantastic Norsk aquavit cocktails and great portraits of Thor Heyerdahl on the wall. True tiki folks will know why I think all of that matters. Great staff too was more than happy to make us off-menu rounds that we'd fallen in love with when we visited last year. What could be better?!

I had wanted to grab one of these Mayhem posters for my traveller's book, but would have had to risk my life to get it. If I'd seen a flyer for one of my favorite Scandinavian bands like Triptykon or The 3rd And The Mortal or Kjøtt I would have risked it. Still cool to see.



Oslo, Norway... the bad side of the river.

Another Norwegian show poster for upcoming metal shows in Oslo. Alongside the Norwegian bands here are bands from Germany, France, Japan, and even Oakland, California.

In Oslo we only saw posters like this in the Grünerløkka district.



Black Star cocktail. Aku-Aku Tiki Bar, Oslo.

A David Bowie inspired cocktail at my second favorite tiki bar on Earth!

The Aku-Aku is in the Grünerløkka district of Oslo and serves up a fantastic variety of Norwegian aquavit tiki cocktails as well as the traditional tiki bar Polynesian delights. This bar has such a great tiki ambiance with an awesome staff and portraits of the great Thor Heyerdahl on the wall.

I must admit, despite my desire to have a David Bowie cocktail, I was a bit terrified to try this one. One of the big cultural disconnects I have in Norway is salted black liquorice. The Norwegians \*love\* them some salted black liquorice! But... despite my trepidation, I knew I had to try this. And my bravery was well rewarded by the Aku-Aku Tiki Bartenders, because this drink was absolutely delicious!

Another win for Aku-Aku Tiki Bar!

BLACK STAR COCKTAIL

Goslings Black Seal Rum

Lime Juice

Johan Bülow Fine Liquorice Powder

Johan Bülow Salty Licorice Syrup

[www.akuaku.no](http://www.akuaku.no)

[#IFindTikiBarsEverywhere](#)

# MENY

## COCKTAILS

### PISCO PEPPER PARTY kr. 121

Pisco, koriander, grønn paprika, grønn chili, lime

### OSLO TESELSKAP kr. 121

(Bombay Sapphire) infusert med Earl Grey te, vermut, aprikosshrub, sitron, eggehvite

### TORGGATA BOTANISKE kr. 121

(på flaske) Rom (Bacardi) mynte, sitrongress, sitronmelisse, honning, sitron

### MISS BASIL kr. 121

Gin (Bombay Sapphire), basilikum, sitron, eggehvite

### TOM KRUSPERSILLE kr. 121

Vodka (42 Below), kruspersille, grønn chili, sitron, eggehvite

### NATALIE PORTVIN kr. 121

Konjakk, portvin, drue, honning, sitron

### RUGE PÅ NYPA kr. 121

Rug whiskey, nype -og rosépeppersirup, sitron, orange bitters

### CARROTS DO HAVE SOULS (NEGRONI SOUR) kr. 121

Gin (Bombay Sapphire), Antica Formula, Campari, sitron, rosmarin, gulrotskum

Torggata Botaniske menu. Oslo, Norway.

While we were in Oslo, Kirsten really wanted to check out this botanical cocktail lounge and herbarium. They use only herbs that they have grown in-house from seeds. It was a cool theme. We were there for maybe 10 minutes tops. Kirsten had a Miss Basil and I had a Carrots Do Have Souls.

[Torggata Botaniske](#)



Oslo, Norway. First morning breakfast.

Let's talk Norwegian Brown Cheese for a minute, shall we?! The various varieties of this Norwegian goat cheese called Brunost, including Gjetost and Gudbrandsdalsost, are completely jaw-dropping. The caramel-y brown color of the cheese is a result of a process in which the whey, cream and milk are slowly heated, causing an *\*actual\** caramelization of the milk's sugars... and results in a rich, dense, mouth-melting experience exploding in a butterscotch / caramel flavor which is AMAZING.

I ate as many of these Brunost varieties as I could on this trip. Because these cheeses are made with whey, which is a by-product of the cheese making process, brunost is not *\*technically\** cheese. Well I do not care for your technicalities! Brunost is some of the most delicious "cheeses" I have ever had the pleasure to consume. If I didn't have such good manners I would gladly bite your hand to get the last paper-thin slice of this Norwegian gift from the Gods.

The other day I was having a discussion about the wonderfulness that is Norwegian Brown Cheese with [Kyle Shutt](#), lead guitar player of [The Sword](#), who also knows the glory of the Brunost. As his eyes lit up and he began his own rant about the greatness that is this cheese, I had one of those moments where I thought "(sigh) I wish I had more friends that I could talk about Brunost with!" (laugh) That is how great this cheese is!

Look upon this photo and revel in one of the true glories of Norway!



On the Bygdøyfergene. Oslo, Norway.

Day two was a very museum-centric day, and also our first boat ride of the trip. As boats are how our Sime ancestors got around Norway for centuries there's just something special about being in the homeland and on the water. That Viking blood just loves being on a boat.

The Bygdøyfergene is a ferry to the Bygdøy peninsula where many of Oslo's best museums are. Including the Fram Museum, the Norwegian Maritime Museum, Thor Heyerdahl's Kon-Tiki Museum, the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History at Bygdøy and the glorious Viking Ship Museum. We did 'em all! And also the Resistance Museum back at the Akershus Fortress that day too. And this ferry ride is where it all started.

In a very rare occurrence, I actually took a selfie.



The Fram Museum.

My dad gets behind the helm of one of the most famous boats in history, The Fram.

The Fram is a massive 402 ton wooden boat, 128 feet long by 34 feet wide, driven by a huge 220 horsepower steam engine and sails on three masts. The ship also has a windmill that runs a

generator to power Nikola Tesla electric arc lamps.

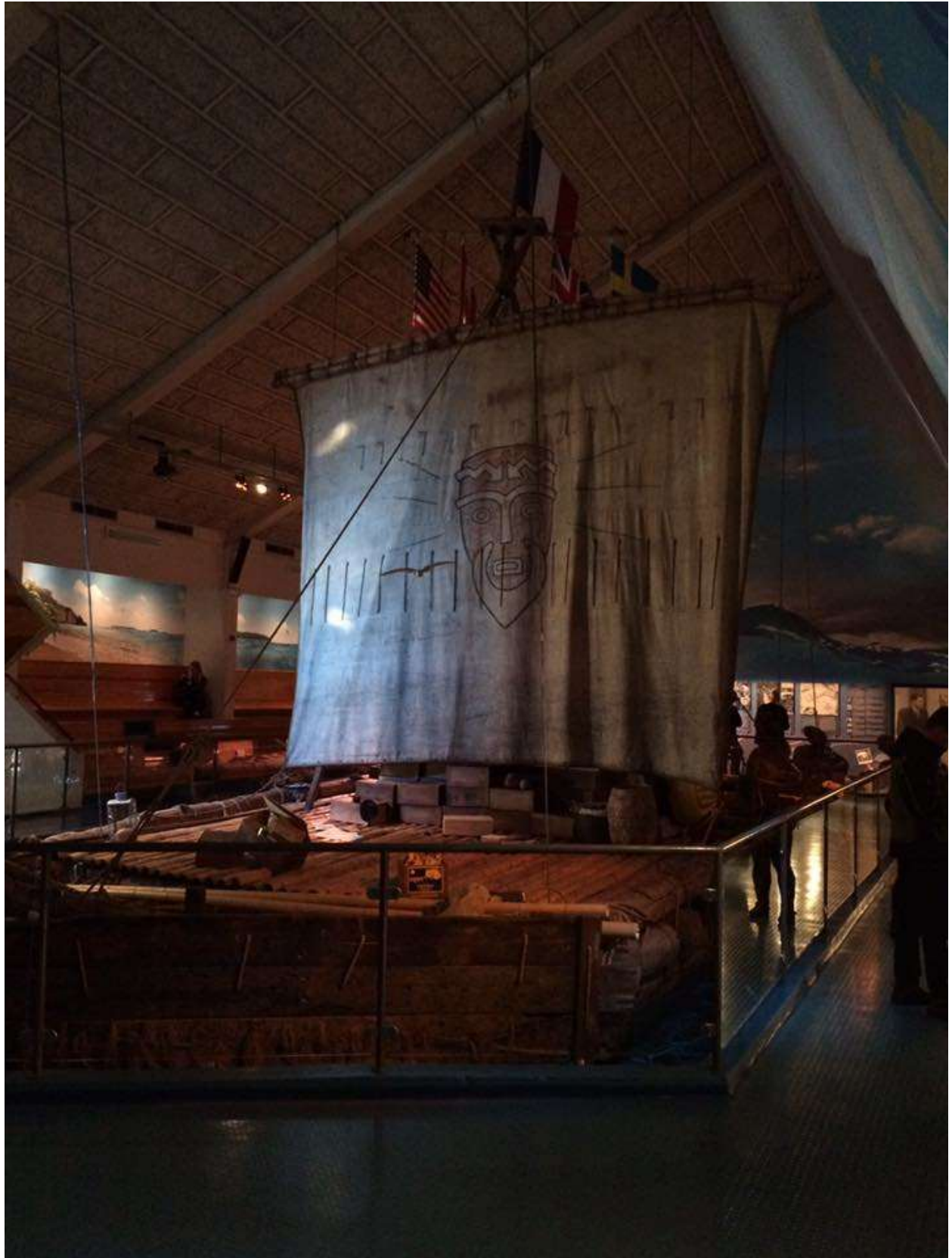
Upon this massive ship the 1893 expedition to the North Pole was launched (85° 57' N) and spent three entire years trapped in the ice. And the Fram was \*also\* the first expedition to reach the South Pole in 1912 (78° 41' S). All this through crushing ice and harsh weathers that decimated everything that came before it. Very powerful to actually stand on the deck of this truly historic Norwegian ship.

This is touted as the "best museum in Norway" and it's hard to argue with that. This giant 402 ton ship greets you at the door and you can actually go on deck and then down into three floors of the ship's lower decks. The only museum I've been to anywhere that rivals this for sheer jaw-droppingness is the Viking Ship Museum nearby.

Watch this BBC documentary on the Fram:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeEm5256pWQ>

And a tour of the Fram museum: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M38y3sukvmU>

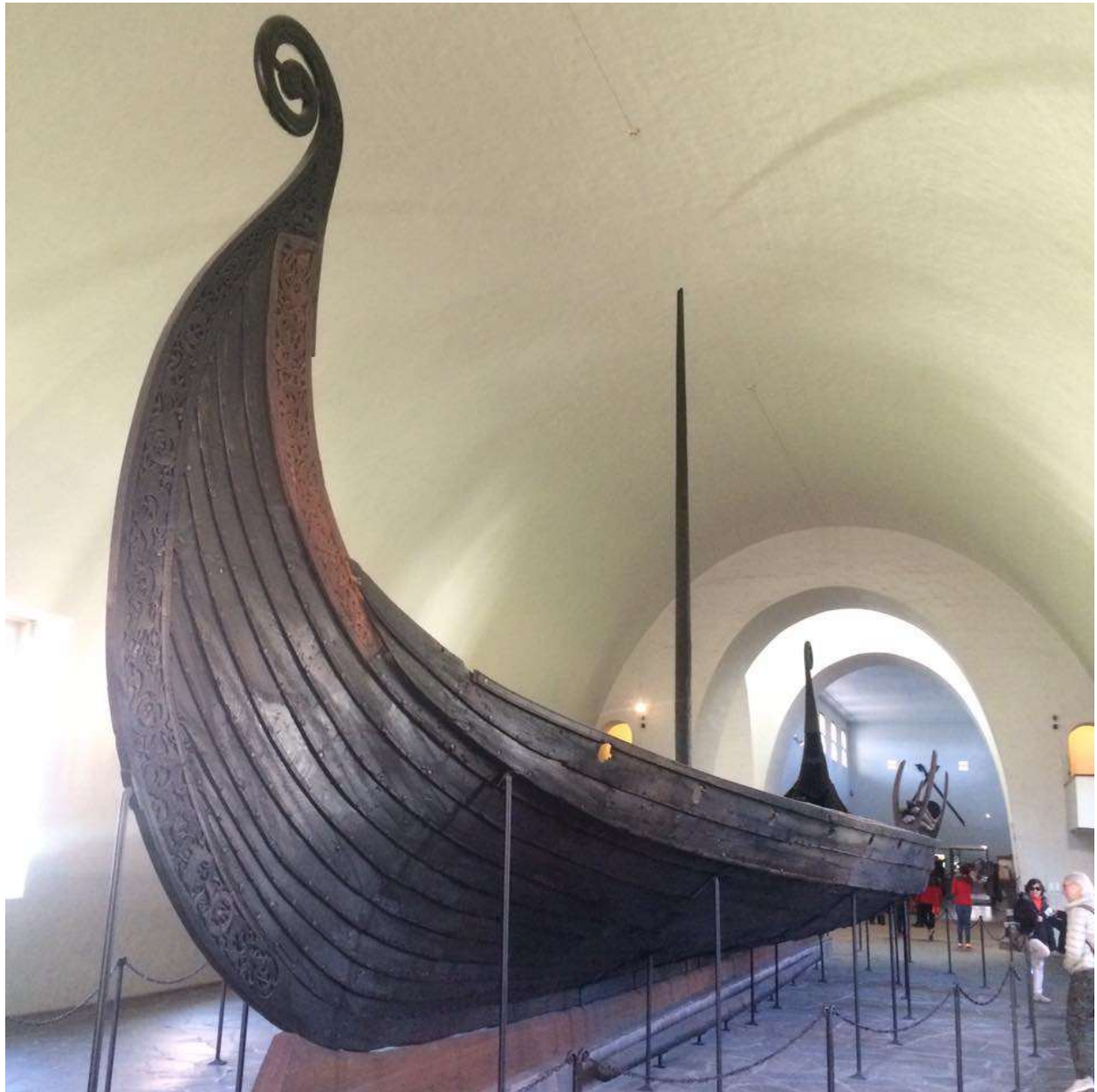


Kon-Tiki Museum. Oslo, Norway.

Thor Heyerdahl's famous balsa wood raft that did the impossible and sailed from South America to the Polynesian islands in 1947. This tiny raft's 101 day voyage, with a crew of six, sailed 4,948 miles. It was this journey that kicked off the worldwide obsession with "tiki culture" in the 1950s.

Fun Fact: Thor Heyerdahl had no sailing experience and couldn't even swim. [#badass](#)

Watch this documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsDNID7pGa4>



Viking Ship Museum @ Bygdøy. Oslo, Norway.

We landed at the incredible Viking Ship Museum just as 10 tour busses arrived (!) so we did not spend much time there. This is a photo from my previous visit here (October 2015) when the museum was almost completely empty.

Upon entering the first thing you see is this, the Oseberg Ship, the greatest preserved Viking artifact ever, thought to be built around 800 AD. It was discovered in 1904 in a now-famous Viking burial site on the Oslofjord.

Just being in the presence of this artifact of Norwegian history is stunning. Despite the crowds on this particular visit, I'm glad my parents got to see it. This museum is absolutely "all killer, no filler" and highly recommended..



Viking Ship Museum @ Bygdøy. Oslo, Norway.

Detail of carvings on Oseberg ship, the single greatest preserved Viking artifact ever, at the Viking Ship Museum. Thought to be built around 800 AD, this ship is actually rapidly deteriorating due to liquification (a result of the best preservation technology available when it was discovered back in 1904) and unless they are able to find some solution is unlikely to even exist in another 100 years. Read more about the latest efforts to save these wooden ships here: <http://sciencenordic.com/shellfish-and-plastic-can-save-viking-ships>

I'm thankful to have seen this monumental artifact of my people's history when it still looked this perfect. This is a photo from my previous visit (October 2015).



Gol Stave Church at Bygdøy.

This is probably the most well-visited Stave Church in all of Norway. Built in 1212 in Gol, Norway and moved here to Oslo in 1884 by King Oscar II. I was blown away that we were able to actually go inside this church, as I was not able to do so the last time I visited in 2015.

Although we didn't plan to visit the others, this is only the first of \*many\* Norwegian Stave Churches we will see on our journey. Watch for several more of these famous churches later in this photoset.

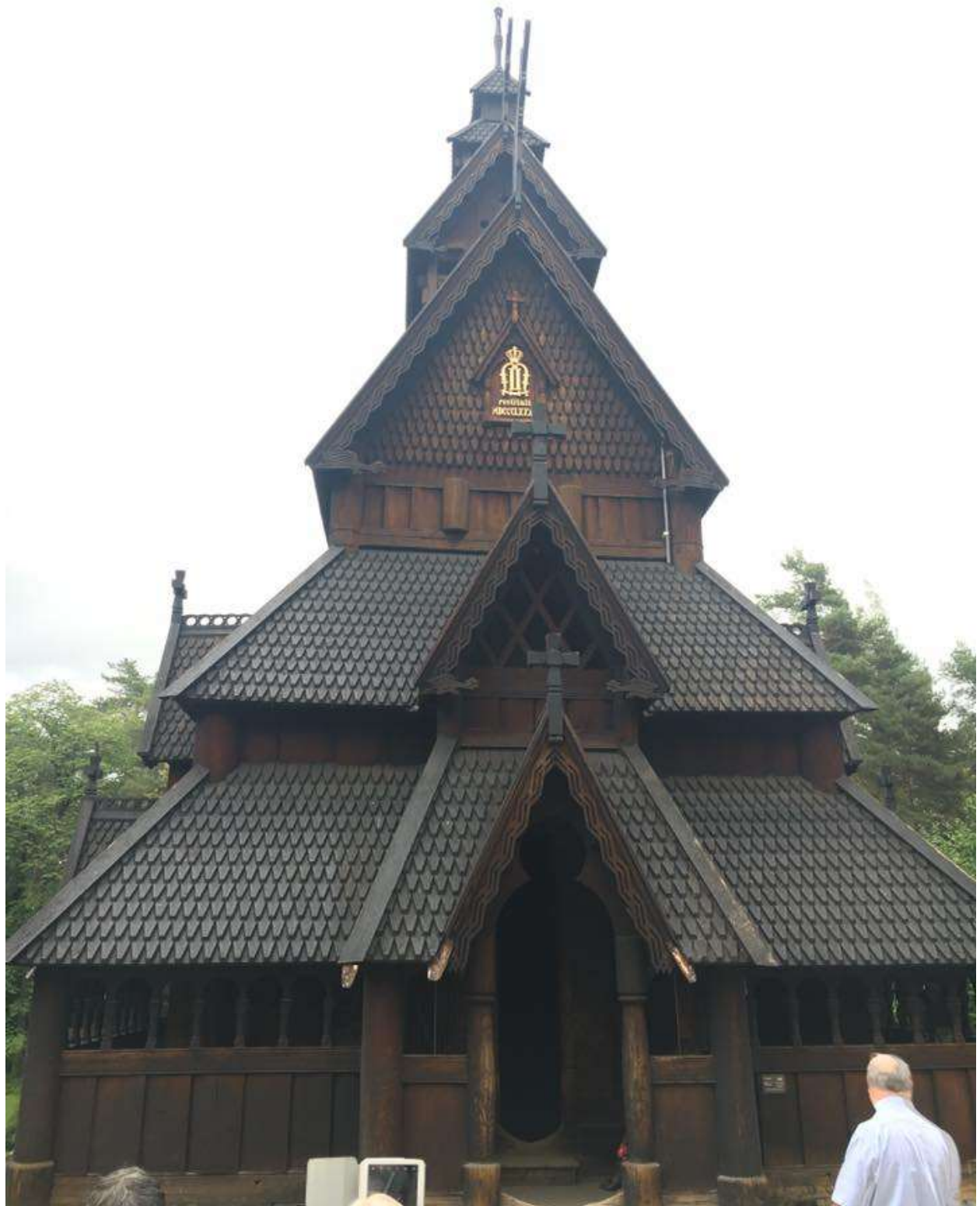
The Gol Stavekirke is part of the open air Norwegian Museum of Cultural History at Bygdøy.



Gol Stave Church at Bygdøy.

Built in 1212 in Gol and moved to Oslo in 1884. This is probably the most visited Stave Church on the entire planet. Although this is the actual original church which had been moved here in 1884, a replica was built in Gol, Norway sometime in the 1980s. And there are also replicas of this exact church at the Scandinavian Heritage Park in Minot, North Dakota and also at Epcot Center in Walt Disney World in Florida.

The Gol Stavekirke is part of the open air Norwegian Museum of Cultural History at Bygdøy.



Gol Stave Church at Bygdøy.

These famous wooden churches were built at the end of the Viking reign, as missionaries were christianizing Norway, This particular church is from 1212.

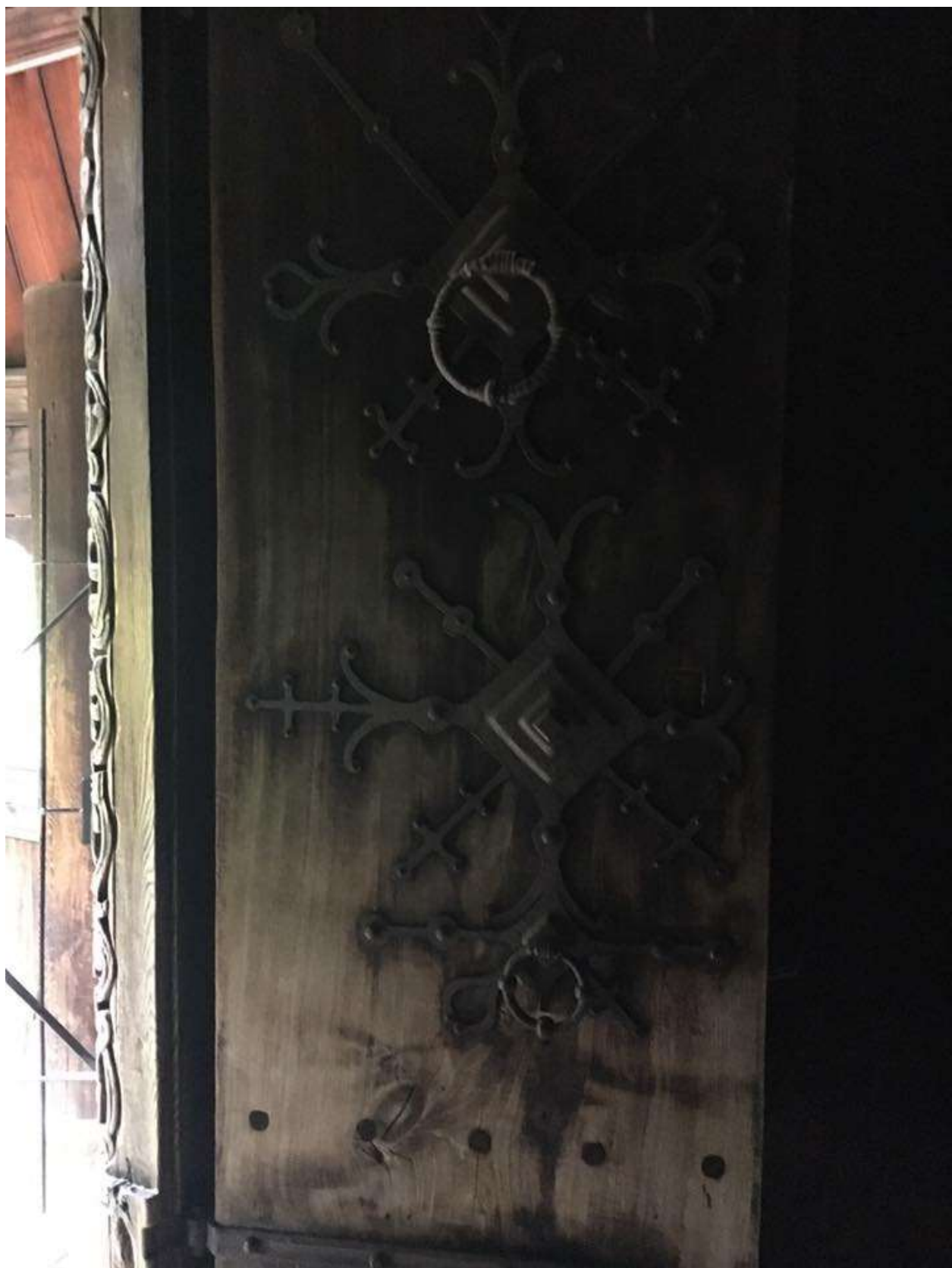
Preserved with a dark red tar these intricate wooden churches tend to look very dark, or even black, against the daytime sky. It's not easy getting photos that show off the details. This over-exposed photo does a nice job showing off the craftsmanship.



Gol Stave Church at Bygdøy.

I snuck a little photo of [Rose Sime](#) taking a photo of [Kirsten Baldock](#) at the doorway to this Stavekirke.

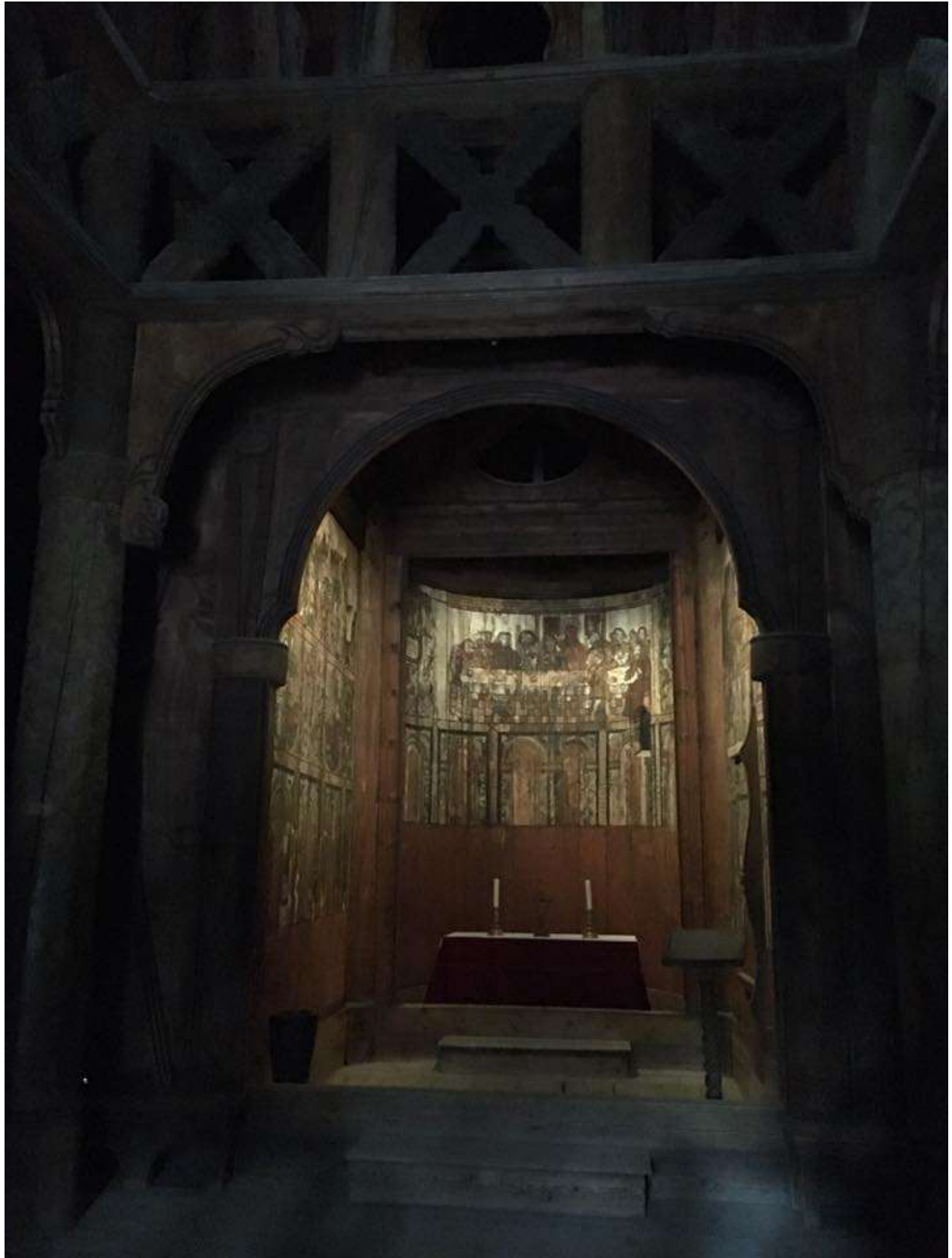
The Gol Stave Church is part of the open air Norwegian Museum of Cultural History at Bygdøy.



Gol Stave Church at Bygdøy.

Great designs on this Stavekirke door.

Gol Stave Church is part of the open air Norwegian Museum of Cultural History at Bygdøy.



Inside the Gol Stave Church at Bygdøy.

The term “stave church” refers to the round pillars, staves, that support the roof. I don't have great interior photos of this one but you can watch a walk-through here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaaiOEvyMzM>

Gol Stave Church is part of the open air Norwegian Museum of Cultural History at Bygdøy.



Gol Stave Church at Bygdøy.

This photo was from my previous trip to Norway in late October 2015, but it's so cool I had to include it in this set. If I ever write a Norwegian Folk Metal album (maybe inspired by "Gullslottet Som Hang i Luften" - an epic Norwegian folk tale that translates to "The Golden Palace That Hung in the Air") this will be the back cover.



Norsk Folkemuseum @ Bygdøy. Oslo, Norway.

The Setesdal Farm at Bygdøy consists of many ancient buildings like these two. On the left is Brottveit Stabbur (storehouse) originally built around 1650 AD and moved here in 1910. On the right is the Åmlid Farmhouse, also built sometime around 1650 AD and moved here in 1898.

There is a whole town of ancient Norwegian houses, barn and storehouses here. We hid out from the rain in one of these barns when the clouds opened up on us. This photo is from my (sunnier) visit here in 2015.

This is part of the open air Norwegian Museum of Cultural History / Norsk Folkemuseum at Bygdøy.



Søndre Stabbur at Norsk Folkemuseum. Bygdøy. Oslo, Norway.

This stabbur (storehouse) from Søndre is where food and grain was stored. After being moved to Bygdøy as part of King Oscar II's Collection, the storehouse was used to exhibit objects from the royal collection. Windows were added in the roof to provide light for the displays.

Pretty gorgeous for a storage bin!

This is part of the open air Norwegian Museum of Cultural History / Norsk Folkemuseum at Bygdøy.



Street Lions. Oslo, Norway.

Kirsten poses with this great lion statue, part of the "Mini Bottle Gallery" at Kikegata 10. One of my favorite things about Oslo is all of the great statues on random streets and on the sides and roofs of buildings. A night many of these statues, and so much of the city's gorgeous architecture, are all amazingly illuminated. The city has a truly incredible gothic look that makes you really understand this is where so much of the world's best metal albums are created.

Kirsten is a Leo, of course!

More about the "Mini Bottle Gallery" at Kikegata

10:[http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMFD5M\\_Mini\\_Bottle\\_Gallery\\_Lions\\_Oslo\\_Norway](http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMFD5M_Mini_Bottle_Gallery_Lions_Oslo_Norway)



Architecture. Oslo, Norway.

Just a random shot of a random building in Oslo. At night it seems like every single one of these statues, gargoyles and architecture are all amazingly illuminated. Imagine how great this guy must look with dramatic under lighting!

Is Oslo the best underlit city in the world? Maybe!



Innsjøkreps Norwegian Disco Socks!

"Choose the right sock for the right disco dance."

Norway is the largest producer of fresh crayfish (feel free to call them crawfish, crawdaddies or mudbugs, if you prefer) in all of Europe. And eating these little guys is a true Scandinavian tradition!

Innsjøkreps (lake crayfish) are the freshwater variety, Sjøkreps (sea crayfish) are also known as Norwegian Lobster (or Langoustine) is a close relative of the common lobster but is significantly smaller and slimmer with long narrow claws. Unlike its larger relative the Sjøkreps live on the soft bottom of clay and sand in the Skagerrak and Kattegat (the ancient names for the Norwegian Sea and Jutland Sea), usually at 30-40 meters depth.

Oh sure - the critters on these socks could also very well be shrimps (reke or reker in Norwegian). And I like those too... but not like I like crawdaddies, so that would be a bit less exciting. And I wouldn't have had such a great excuse to write about Norwegian Crawdaddies, would I?!

Whatever the case, I'll leave you to decide the level of excitement you, personally, should approach these Norwegian Disco Socks with. Me? I'm pretty excited.

Sadly since I started this photoset Moods of Norway has closed. So you won't be able to get a pair of Norwegian Disco Socks of your own. Sorry.



Moods of Norway. Oslo, Norway.

Posing with the world famous [Moods of Norway](https://thornews.com/2012/04/18/moods-of-norway-happy-clothes-for-happy-people) pink tractor that was in all of their early promotions & high fashion photoshoots (<https://thornews.com/2012/04/18/moods-of-norway-happy-clothes-for-happy-people>). Just seeing this tractor in real life was a total geek-out moment!

I am thrilled to be the owner of a couple of amazing suits from this company. The pride of my entire closet! Hopefully someday I will be able to get my hands on one of their iconic pink suits.



Engebret Cafe. Oslo, Norway.

[Engebret Cafe](#) is Oslo's oldest restaurant. It opened in 1857 and still serves excellent traditional Scandinavian cuisine. The Christmas-time lutefisk feasts here are the stuff of legend. We definitely had to go here!

Also... cloudberry and ice-cream for dessert!



Statue at Engebret Cafe. Oslo, Norway.

Kirsten shows off her best mopey teenager slump alongside this statue in the square right outside of Engebret Cafe.

Apparently this statue is entitled En Ung Moderne Jente which translates to "A Young Modern Girl".



Statue at Engebret Cafe. Oslo, Norway.

Rose shows off her best mopey teenager slump alongside this statue in the square right outside of Engebret Cafe.

Apparently this statue is entitled En Ung Moderne Jente which translates to "A Young Modern Girl".

# HIMKOK

## STORGATA DESTILLERI

The idea of HIMKOK Storgata Distillery was born out of the desire to create, to explore and to experiment. We are passionate about spirits and so we decided to produce our own. Our cocktails are focused around our three HIMKOK Spirits, Aquavit, Gin and Vodka, adding our own freshly grown botanicals to create Nordic classic cocktails of the highest quality.

The name HIMKOK translates as moonshine, and is a nod to those pioneer distillers around Norway who shared our sense of adventure, who wanted to create their own signature taste and who wanted to experiment with flavours to create their perfect spirit.

But at HIMKOK Storgata Distillery we want to offer so much more than that. Ask us about our in-house hydroponics project, Norway's first Cider Bar, Munnskjenk, our kitchen, or our barrel aged cocktails, we'll be happy to introduce you to all that HIMKOK Storgata Distillery has to offer.

### Welcome

Himkok Storgata Destilleri. Oslo, Norway.

Ah, the [HIMKOK](#)! I love this bar so much. Fantastic staff and jaw-dropping cocktails. On my first trip to Norway I managed to come here just after they opened to the public and I was excited to go back and have their house-distilled aquavit once again!

Getting to return to Aku-Aku Tiki Bar and Himkok Storgata Destilleri were true highlights of my return to Oslo on this trip.



Himkok Storgata Destilleri. Oslo, Norway.

Cocktails from [HIMKOK](#), the famous Fjellbekk-san and also a Barberer Sørensen in Oslo, Norway. Himkok distills their own aquavit, gin and vodka on site.

Here's two of their great cocktails:

#### FJELLBEKK-SAN

House-made Himkok aquavit

Yuzu Sake

Spruce Syrup

Elderflower Tonic

#### BARBERER SØRENSEN

House-made Himkok Gin

Cocchi Americano

Lemon Juice

Strawberry & Cardamom Shrub

Peychard's Bitters



Himkok Storgata Destilleri. Oslo, Norway.

I lost my notes so don't remember what this one was, and the menu at [HIMKOK](#) is a rarely photographed mystery the world over! And even if you \*had\* the recipe, recreating it would still fall completely flat as Himkok distills all of their own aquavits, gins and vodkas in house.

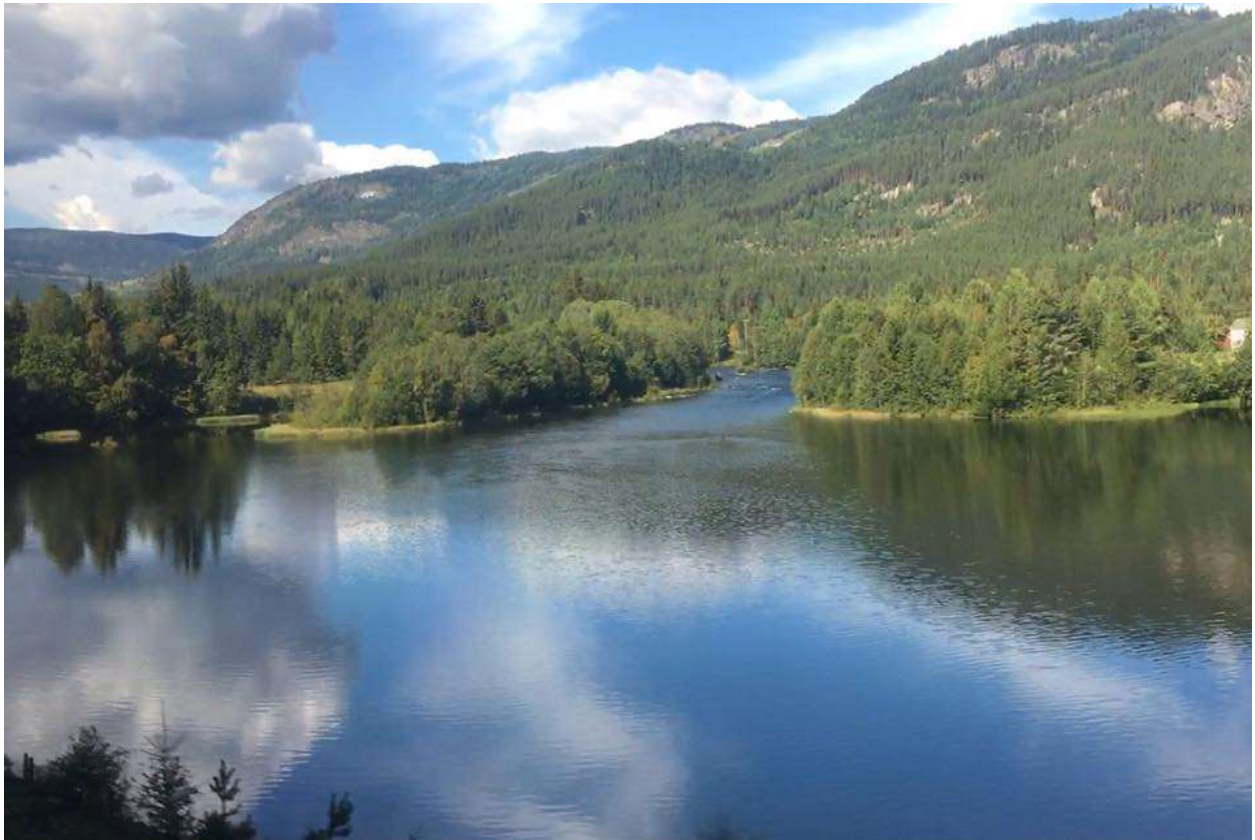
Best bar on Earth? Without question in my top 5!



Himkok Storgata Destilleri. Oslo, Norway.

[HIMKOK](#) Destilleri distills their own aquavit, gin and vodka on site. Our bartender loved us so much he gave us this fantastic aquavit tasting of seasonal creations & new experimentations. They were phenomenal and this quiet little moment was the perfect end to an over-stuffed day of museum-ing. Sadly, I lost my traveller's book with all my tasting notes (sigh), but they are, from left to right:

Himkok Sommeraquavit  
Himkok Sloe Aquavit  
Himkok Bitters Aquavit



Just outside Ål in Hallingdal, Norway.

Looking out the train window. Nearby is Vassfaret, the legendary "Kingdom of Bears." The terrifying 1960s childrens' book about a killer bear, FORTELLINGEN OM SLAGBJØNNEN RUGG by Mikkel Fønhus and Nils Johnson, takes place here.

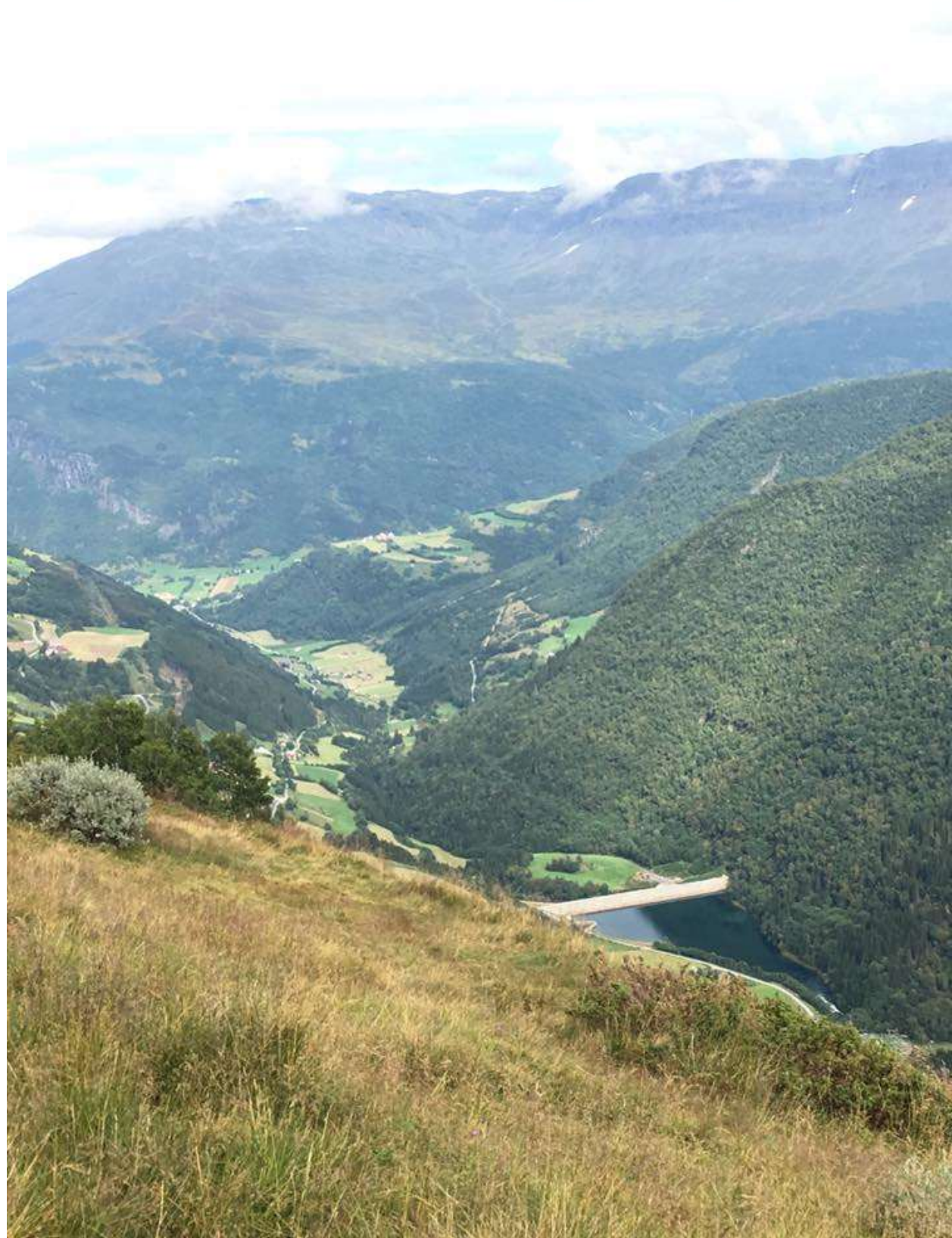


Switchback roads near Myrkdalen Fjellandsby, Norway.

At Voss we picked up our rental car and headed out on a 3 and 1/2 hour drive to Skjolden on the narrow mountainous roads. Driving in Norway consists of lots of hairpin switchbacks up and down the steep slopes. No photos do justice to the magnitude of the sheer grades here. It is equally impossible not to utter a "wow" when you see where you will soon be driving.

As you can probably guess, with extreme grades and no shortage of snow in the winter, this part of the country is one of the most famous places for people who like extreme deep-powder downhill skiing. Nearby is Myrkdalen, The Dark Valley, where the International Ski Instructors Association do their annual speed tests on the slopes, zipping past frozen waterfalls. More snow falls in Myrkdalen than almost anywhere else in Europe.

If you want to check out the nearby winter ski conditions, watch this video: [https://youtu.be/Iq9oPDZ\\_S8c](https://youtu.be/Iq9oPDZ_S8c)



Looking Down near Myrkdalen Fjellandsby, Norway.

Far, far below us is the road from the last photo we've been driving on and the teeny tiny farm houses far, far below. Soon we will be coming up on the town of Vik, Norway which sits at the bottom of one of these huge mountainsides.

Fun Fact: The old Norse language word for Viking is "víkingr" which means a "man from Vík." While there is some historical debate about potential different townships called Vik over the centuries, the Vik we are about to go to is the perfect place to launch Viking warships from.



Hopperstad Stavkyrkje in Vik, Norway.

This historic church stands out in the Vik valley sky with its dark, almost blackened facade. This is the second Stave Church we visited and this one is much older and far less frequently seen by visitors than the Gol Stave Church in Oslo.

Hopperstad was built around 1130 AD and this gorgeous wooden church (together with Urnes, which we will be visiting later in this photoset) is the oldest stave church in existence.

Despite being hard to photograph such a black church in bright daylight, there wasn't a soul at the church when we came to visit, so I was able to get some pretty amazing pictures.



Hopperstad Stavkyrkje in Vik, Norway.

Built around 1130 AD, Hopperstad is the oldest stave church in existence (together with Urnes, which we will be visiting later in this photoset).

The sky looked like a painting, truly phenomenal.



Hopperstad Stavkyrkje in Vik, Norway.

Hopperstad (1130 AD) and Urnes (1132 AD, with parts dating back to date back to 1070 AD) are the two oldest stave churches in existence.

This one is my favorite.



Off the ferry at Hella, Norway.

After Vik, we took the Hella-Vangsnes Ferry (Ferje) to the North side of Sognefjorden on the Sognefjellsvegen road, which was still two entire lanes at this point. But that will soon change!

Near this photo we will pass by the 120 meters tall Kvinnafossen waterfall right after this. "Kvinne" is Norwegian word for "lady" and the Kvinnafossen is said to be named so because the falls is believed to make a unique sound reminiscent of a woman either screaming in distress or screaming in a state of ecstasy. I wish I'd known when we were there, I would have rolled down the window, as it was I just had time to let out a "WHOA!" as we drove by.

Check out this great drone footage of the Kvinnafossen waterfall to see some scale of the stuff we're driving through.

<https://youtu.be/9tfVb2nJCb0>



Skjolden, Norway.

This is where we will spend the next three days! Our hotel is right in the middle of that mesopotamia between the Mørkridselvi river and the Eidselvi river. And the hike we do to Fuglesteg can be seen as a flat light green patch about half way up the right hand mountain. The background is the

Jotunheimen Mountains, the fabled Land of the Giants.

This photo was part of a huge display in the Norwegian Glacier Museum at Jostedalsgreen. Yes the water is actually that amazingly naturally colored! It is the result of glacial meltwater or "glacial milk." These brilliantly blue glacial waters get their color from what's known as "rock flour", sediment from rocks grinding together underneath the glacier. The fine powder is then suspended in the water and absorbs and scatters varying colors of sunlight, giving these glacial rivers and lakes a milky turquoise appearance.

Notice the mixing of the unique colors of the rivers right outside our hotel's front window, as these rivers are from two different regions that have different minerals in bedrock.



The view at Skjolden, Norway.

The idyllic fjord town of Skjolden, at the furthest end of the longest fjord in all of Norway, is where we will spend the next three days. This is the view up the Lusterfjorden (the inner part of Sognefjorden) from the waterfront which we looked directly out at from our hotel window.

The Sognefjellsvegen road we drove to Skjolden (on the right hand shoreline here) narrows down to white-knuckle width before too long and is filled with dozens of blind S-curves. The hotel we stayed at is the amazing Skjolden Hotel Luster.

There wasn't much city stuff to do in Skjolden, which was the whole point of staying there, but the hospitality and food at our incredible hotel was truly amazing.

Without a doubt this is my favorite hotel on Earth. Highest recommendation, obviously!

See more: <https://www.facebook.com/skjoldenhotel>



Skjolden Hotel Luster in Skjolden, Norway.

This is my hotel room view up the Sognefjorden looking out from our hotel window. Skjolden Hotel Luster is waterside at the end of the Sognefjorden, where the Norwegian sea ends and the jaw-dropping mountains begin. The valleys of Mørkridsdal and Fortunsdal meet at Skjolden, just west of the Hurrungane Mountains. There were probably 8 waterfalls that could be seen from this view while we were there.

Man was it hard to leave Skjolden at the end of those three days!



On the hike to Fuglesteg Farm, Fortun, Norway.

My folks and Kirsten checking out the wildflowers at the beginning of our Fuglesteg Farm hike which brought us a full 2,066 feet above sea level at the summit (that's as high as the second tallest building on Earth).

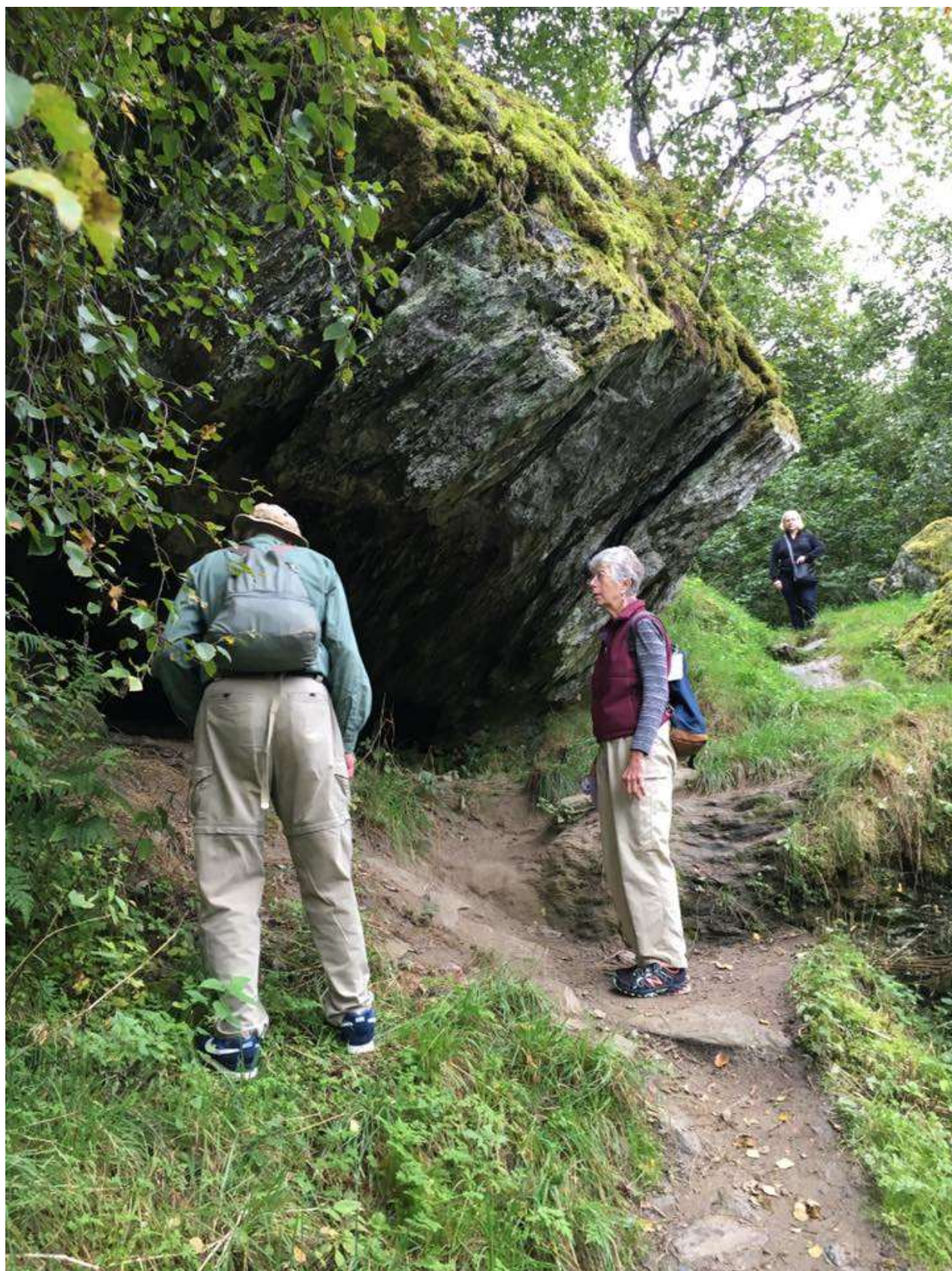
The Fuglesteg Luster farm overlooks the village of Fortun, Norway and the Lustrafjorden, just on the edge of the Jotunheimen Mountains. It was built in 1830 by Norwegian farmer & madman Sylfest Ormeli, who carried stones for 5 years up this steep hill to build his dream farm.



Fuglesteg pass, Jotunheim Mountains.

Far below us is the village of Fortun in the foreground and you can just see a bit of Skjolden in the distance. This is from the opposite direction from that overhead photo from earlier in the set.

The road seen here is the Sognefjellsvegen, which becomes the highest elevation mountain pass road in all of Northern Europe when it gets up into the Jotunheim Mountains.



On the hike to Fuglesteg Farm, Fortun, Norway.

Hiking to Fuglesteg Farm at 2,066 feet above sea level, only part way up the legendary Jotunheim Mountains, where mythology is born and giants dwell.

Here's a fantastic photoset of Norwegian wildflowers, we saw a bunch of these! <http://bentehaarstad.photoshelter.com/gallery/Flora-Wild-flowers-in-Norway/G0000PPXJGI.huWk/C0000umnCRBbQuBI>



Somewhere up Fuglesteg Pass, Jotunheim Mountains.

Below us is Fortun, Norway. There were lots of little white churches of this style all over fjord country. This one, the Fortun Church, was built in 1879 and replaced the village's old stave church that was built sometime around 1160. There will be another picture of this church in a bit so you can see how high into the stratosphere this hike was taking us.

The Hurrungane mountains lie just to the south of the village.



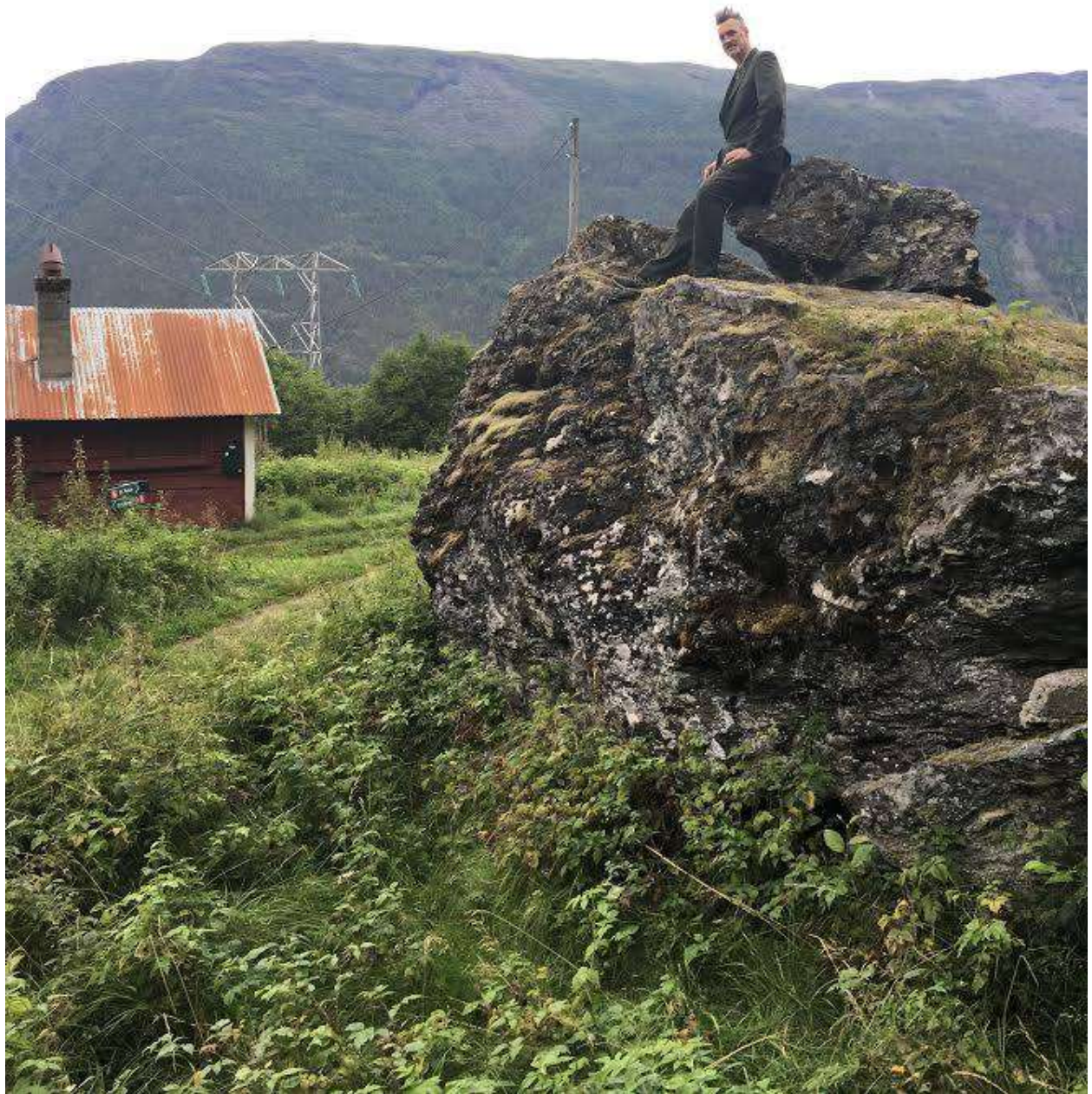
Meeting a herd of sheep on Fuglesteg pass, high above Fortun, Norway.

Do you want to hang out and get to know a bunch of sheep in Norway? Of course you do! Check out the biographies and the [#sheepwithaview](https://www.visitnorway.com/sheepwithaview/) map here:

<https://www.visitnorway.com/sheepwithaview/>

And follow Norwegian sheep on Instagram here:

<https://www.instagram.com/sheepwithaview>



Fuglesteg pass, high above Fortun, Norway.

We took a small breather here and hung out with the sheep. I found a high perch to check out the view. I just can't help it, I climb all over everything.



Fuglesteg pass, on the edge of the Jotunheim Mountains.

My folks take a short break on this little picnic bench (just off the path from the sheep barn in the nearby photo) to consult the book we got my dad for Father's Day this year, **MOUNTAIN FLOWERS OF SCANDINAVIA** by Olav Gjærevoll (1975).

We're about half way up the mountain at this point, somewhere around 1,000 feet above the village of Fortun, Norway.



Fuglesteg pass, on the edge of the Jotunheim Mountains.

Stopping for a rest somewhere along our 2,066 foot hike to the Fuglesteg mountain farm. Far, far below us is the town of Skjolden, which can be seen here in the background.

My dad might be 84 years old but I'm reasonably certain he can still out-hike your dad.



Fuglesteg Farm, Jotunheim Mountains.

This tiny shack greets you at the summit of Fuglesteg pass, 2,066 feet above Fortun, Norway. It's quite the hike to get here, but totally worth it. You'll see this cabin and its glorious reindeer horns over the door in an upcoming photo from the opposite direction.



Fuglesteg mountain farm in the Jotunheimen Mountains ("the land of the giants").

At the top of our 2,066 foot hike was the Fuglesteg Luster farm was built in 1830 by Sylfest Ormeli. The legend is that for five years Sylfest carried these stones up the hill to build his dream secret mountaintop farm... a secret even to his wife!

Less hearty folks than Ormeli (and also \*my\* family!) take a helicopter to get there.

BAH![https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALz2XXTQ\\_il](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALz2XXTQ_il)



Fuglesteg mountain farm, high above the town of Fortun, Norway.

Fuglesteg farm is in the innermost part of the Lustrafjorden, just on the edge of the Jotunheimen Mountains, the fabled "Land of the Giants". This rock table is one of hundreds of rocks carried to this summit by totally badass Norwegian madman Sylfest Ormeli in 1830. (see previous photo for more about Sylfest Ormeli)



Fuglesteg Farm, Jotunheim Mountains.

There are waterfalls *\*everywhere\** in Norway. This one is the Drivandefossen, meaning "driven falls"



Fuglesteg mountain farm, Jotunheimen Mountains.

At the top of our hike from sea level to 2,066 feet on Fuglesteg pass, this summit is as high as the second tallest building on Earth.

Horns above the door are a traditional feature of wilderness cabins the world over, and here in Norway that is no exception. This set of reindeer horns is particularly impressive.

Suit by Falcone, Italy. Yes, I really do hike in a suit.



Fuglesteg farm, Jotunheimen Mountains.

Kirsten and Rose sign us in to the hike logbook at Fuglesteg at the 630 meter sign (2066.93 feet above sea level). If you guys come here you can sign in too.

In the background here is Drivandefossen waterfall coming over the ridge of the mountains. To get an idea of the actual scale of this "trickle" of water, check out this photo of where the spectacular Drivandefossen meets the roadway 2,066 feet below us. <https://www.instagram.com/p/9qwd86KwIM/>



Fuglesteg fjell, Jotunheimen Mountains.

Njörðr, the Norse god of the winds and sea, blew a cloud to envelop Kirsten in the grim cloud created from blithe gods' brains. On Fuglesteg fjell at 2,066 feet.

"From Ymir's flesh the earth was created,  
And from his blood the sea,  
Mountains from bone,  
Trees from hair,  
And from his skull the sky.  
And from his eyebrows the blithe gods made  
Midgard, home of the sons of men  
And from his brains  
They sculpted the grim clouds." - Grímnismál Poetic Edda



Fuglesteg pass, Jotunheimen Mountains.

Escaping the cloud on our 2,066 foot descent from Fuglesteg mountain farm. Far, far below you can see the Lusterfjorden and the fjord town of Skjolden way off in the distance.



Pondus + Kvikk Lunsj + Ringi Rabarbra

For the first time in my entire life MY DAD BOUGHT ME A COMIC BOOK! [#magicalNorway](#)

PONDUS is a famous comic by Norwegian cartoonist Frode Øverli. That slogan on the top, Ikke Bare Bare På Baren, translates roughly on Google Translate to "Not just only on the bar!"

RINGI RABARBRA is the \*best\* Norwegian rhubarb soda, pressed fresh in Slependen, Norway. Despite keeping my eyes peeled everywhere we went on two different trips to Norway, I still know of only a few places to get this delightful beverage. Of course here in Fortun, Norway and also Stockfleths in Oslo: <http://nordiccoffeeculture.com/stockfleths-oslo/>

KVIKK LUNSJ is a famed Norwegian candy bar, similar to an American Kit-Kat bar. Very similar! But any fan will happily extoll the superiority and the virtues of the Kvikk Lunsj!

Here is an incredible, awesomely geek-y review of the Kvikk Lunsj vs the Kit-Kat from Serious Eats: <http://sweets.seriousseats.com/2011/03/snapshots-from-norway-kvikk-lunsj-more-than-a-norwegian-kit-kat-bar-taste-test.html>



YES, THIS REALLY HAPPENED.

Guys, this is a picture of my dad buying me a comic for the first time in my entire life.

I'm still kind of freaking out about it.



Skjolden, Norway. End of Day 4.

When the clouds roll into Lustrafjorden at the end of the day, you know mythological Niflheim (the land of mist) is real.

These jaw-dropping views are right outside my hotel window at Skjolden Hotel Luster. Just gorgeous.

Tomorrow we will drive the southern shore of the Lusterfjord (left hand side here) along the Romantiske Vegen, the "romantic road", to Urnes stave church built around 1132 AD.

Kirsten saw a Viking Ghost Ship (or perhaps some strange anomaly of mist) right off shore beyond this pier one of our nights here. I hope you get to see see Viking Ghost Ships when you come here too.



## Aquavit Tasting and Troll Talking (part one)

What better time to share folk legends of Scandinavian monsters than after a long, hard hike in these giants' homelands... with a glass of Norwegian aquavit in hand?

Hellstrøm Aquavit is made by famed Chef Eyvind Hellstrøm, who will be arriving to stay in Skjolden a couple days after we leave. Our hotel owners are close friends & very excited for us to try his aquavit. Hellstrøm's aquavit lives up to his motto "Enkelt og Perfekt" (simple and perfect).

Now that you have your aquavit in hand, let's talk of Trolls. Children the world over know and fear the human-flesh-hungry Scandinavian trolls.

The Jötnar (singular: Jötunn) of myth are ugly, mean-spirited giants, often with tusks or cyclopic eyes. Cruel and evil by disposition, and also very fond of the taste of human flesh, the Jötnar typically live in hidden mountain caves and hunt after sunset. They are also known to throw giant stones at people and destroy human villages located in the mountains for fun. A female Jötunn is called Gygjar, and are considered just as ill-tempered and deadly as their male counterparts.

According to myth the Jötnar turn to stone when exposed to sunlight.



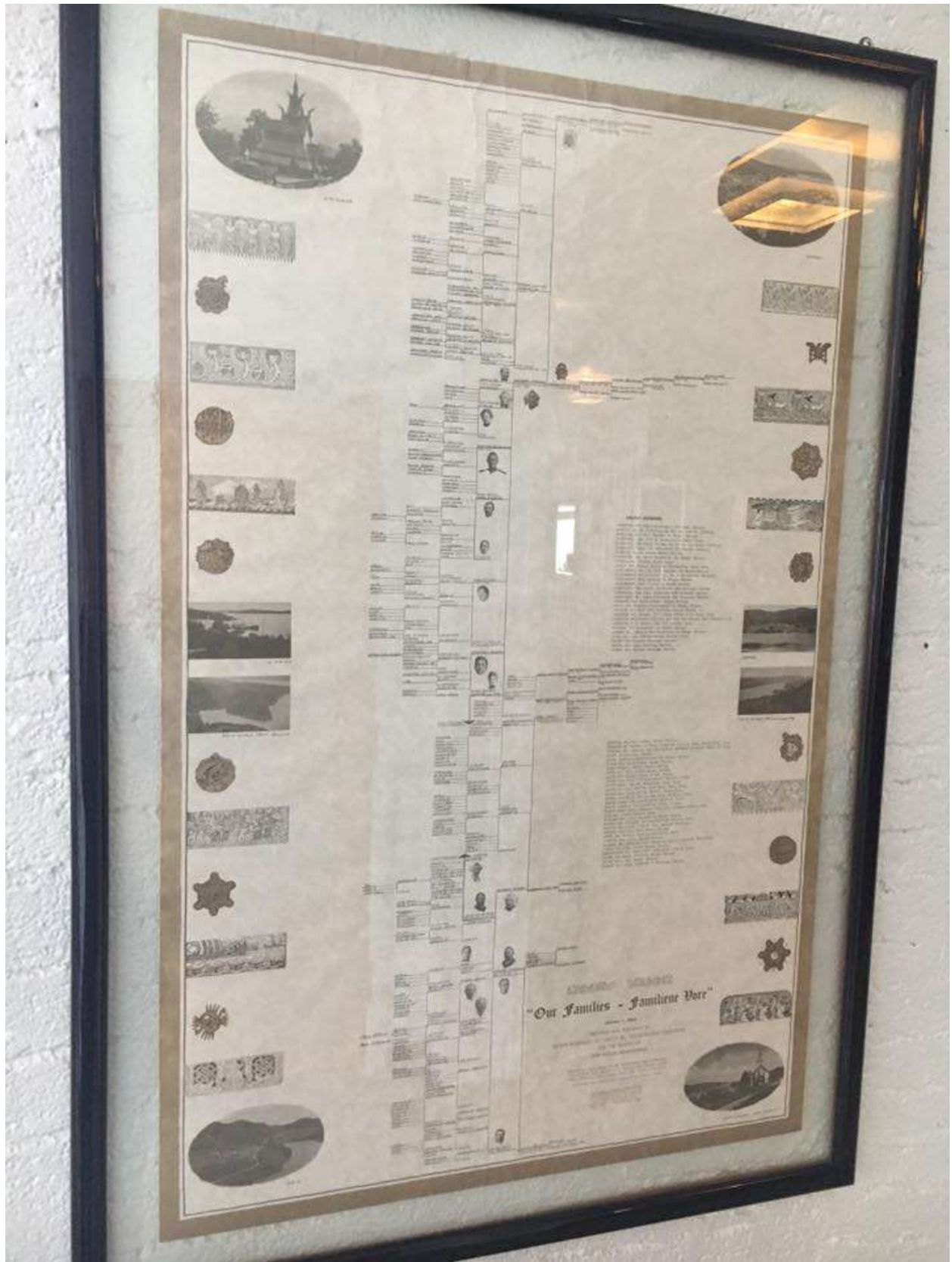
## Aquavit Tasting and Troll Talking (part two)

Much like the Jötnar aren't the only kind of Trolls in Norway, neither is Hellstrøm the only aquavit! Ægir Yggdrasil Akevitt is a small-batch aquavit from Flåm. It is named after the mythic Yggdrasil World Tree that connects the nine worlds of the Norse cosmology (Asgard, Midgard, Jotunheim, Alfheim, Vanaheim, Niflheim, Muspelheim, Svartalfheim and Hel).

Huldfolk are a cave-dwelling human-sized species of Norwegian Troll, known more for their cunning and trickery than their Jötnar counterparts. Females are known as Huldras, blonde and beautiful and often naked, and easily identifiable from the typical gorgeous Norwegian humans you may encounter in the woods by their long tails. Their seductive hypnotic song entrances the minds of those who hear it, and Huldras are known to keep mesmerized humans as their slaves, mates, or pets for many, many years in their caves. These evil creatures are famous for their love of playing with the minds of hapless victims.

And be warned... it is said that some Huldras hide their tails under clothing to trick their prey.

The males of the species, known as Huldrekall, are rarely seen but are said to be just as evil as their female counterparts. Sometimes they are described as beautiful but are just as often said to be hideous, with grotesquely long noses.



## Siri Dalehaug's Family Tree

Over aquavit tastings the \*fantastic\* owner & manager of our \*amazing\* hotel, Siri Dalehaug, asked us if we had family that lived nearby. As soon as I said my last name was Sime (the original Norwegian spelling is Seim), her eyes lit up, "Seim? Did you say Seim?!"

Framed on a nearby wall is her family tree... and it was full of Seims! Imagine our surprise at that!

Siri is truly a wonderful hostess, a font of local information, and she definitely helped to make our time in Skjolden an incredible trip I will never forget. I seriously cannot recommend visiting her and staying at the hotel more. I've said it before but I'll say it again... this is my favorite hotel on the entire planet. [www.skjoldenhotel.no](http://www.skjoldenhotel.no)

While it turns out her family is from a \*different\* town of Seim (near Bergen, Norway - the one my grandparents saw a sign for on their trip to Norway in the 1980s(?)), so it is unlikely our family trees actually intersect much. But it was still amazing to get to connect with another member of the extended Seim Family while we were in Norway. And particularly one who operates my favorite hotel on the entire planet!



Eidselvi River at sunrise in Skjolden, Norway.

Here the milky blue Eide River meets the Lusterfjord. The iPhone just can't capture the amazing color of this river.

Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, considered by many to be the greatest philosopher of the 20th century, stayed in Skjolden in 1913-1914 while writing LOGIK and his philosophical thesis TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS (1921). This building is (I believe) Drægner Hallvard's jam/juice factory that Wittgenstein later worked at in 1921, when he had given away all of his money.

Here's a documentary film on finding the tiny little hut Wittgenstein lived in while in Skjolden: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olLIUUL3Bek&feature=youtu.be>



Eidselvi River in Skjolden, Norway.

No matter how amateurish of a photographer you are, or how lame your equipment might be, it is impossible to take a photo in the quiet, idyllic fjordtown of Skjolden that doesn't make you look like a professional postcard photographer.

However, the water in the Eide River is actually more of a teal--blue milk color than the blue-purple it looks in this photo. As stunning as this shot is, my phone camera just can't capture the real beauty.



Sunrise in Skjolden, Norway.

Another view of the gorgeous sky and clouds of the Lusterfjord from the Skjolden Brygghuset Warf House.

Sognefjord is the largest fjord in Norway and also the third largest in the world. Extending inland for 127 miles from Sygnest to its easternmost point at Skjolden. Here, called the Lusterfjord, it is only 3 miles wide across, over 4,291 feet deep, with steep rock mountains rising dramatically to heights of over 5,500 feet.



Sunrise in Skjolden, Norway.

More views of the fjord town of Skjolden ( $61.4905^{\circ}$  N,  $7.6006^{\circ}$  E) dramatically enveloped in fluffy clouds that really make you believe in Norse Mythology.

See a great drone video filmed from up on this hill, flying down towards us, here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKID9KaXn08>



Obscured by clouds, Skjolden Norway.

As the morning sun disappears behind a veil of white we look to the left hand side (Southern) of the Lusterfjord. We will soon get a light rain to go with these clouds. In this photo you can see the Skjolden Brygghuset Warf where cruise ships dock, a perfect alternative to visiting Skjolden for those who don't want to drive.

Speaking of driving, the shoreline here has a road named the Romantiske Vegen, the "romantic road", named because it is extremely narrow even by Norwegian standards(!). This slim and winding road through small, idyllic hamlets only \*barely\* fits two cars at the widest points and is no more than a single car's width for much of the journey. We will soon be driving the Romantiske Vegen to get to the Urnes stave church.



Krøken

frukt og bær

100% frukt, naturlig

Rabarbrasaft

Kroken Fukt og Bær Rhubarb Soda.

The farm where Kroken Fukt og Bær organic juices and jams are made in on the Romantiske Vegen, the "romantic road". Locally-picked juices and jams and sodas made from Rhubarb, Gooseberries, Raspberries, Blueberries, and Apples. This un-carbonated Rabarbrasafi is the best of all the Rhubarb sodas we tried. Yum, yum, yum.

<http://www.haukadal.no/>



Urnes Stave Church, Norway.

The oldest stave church in existence, dating back to 1132 AD according to dendrochronologists, Urnes is also the most intricately carved and decorated.

Parts of the church are medieval carvings that date back even further, the oldest of which are two door panels (seen on the outside here) from around 1070 AD. These carvings are (perhaps) mythological Viking pagan carvings depicting entwined dragon-snake creatures, foliage and the end of the world.

Of the 1,300 medieval stave churches that are known to have existed in Norway only 28 still remain.

More info on Urnes here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes\\_Stave\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes_Stave_Church)



Urnes Stave Church, Norway.

We arrived at Urnes just as it was being closed to outside visitors due to the presence of a historical research group. Fortunately they were very accommodating and gave us a tour of the church for a few short minutes. The inside is incredibly detailed (as you'll get to see in an upcoming video I took).

Urnes is the oldest stave church on Earth, dating back to 1132 AD according to dendrochronologists (dendrochronology is the scientific study of dating trees, like carbon-dating for wood).

More info on Urnes here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes\\_Stave\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes_Stave_Church)



Urnes Stave Church, Norway.

Here's a view of Urnes overlooking the Lusterfjord, with mystical-looking clouds ghosting along the North bank near Solvorn, Norway across the fjord from us.

Urnes is the oldest stave church on Earth, dating back to 1132 AD according to dendrochronologists. As you can see from this photoset we definitely visited a number of these gorgeous ancient churches. For those who might be interested, no, I did not go to the Fantoft Stave Church in Bergen which appears destroyed on the Burzum album "Aske."

More info on Urnes here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes\\_Stave\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes_Stave_Church)



Urnes Stave Church, Norway.

Whether the carvings on this church represent Níðhöggr eating the roots of Yggdrasil and bringing about the end of the world according to the Norse legend of Ragnarök... or they are of the heroic lion-symbol of Christ fighting the evil snake of Satan... the Urnes Stavkirke is a stunning masterpiece of craftsmanship, a historical icon to spirituality, and a true ancient artifact of Norway. Also it's really, great to have gotten to visit this piece of my people's cultural history.

Also, check out those clouds!

More info on Urnes here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes\\_Stave\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes_Stave_Church)



Urnes Stave Church, Norway.

Smile Rose, you've just visited the oldest stave church in Norway!

More info on Urnes here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes\\_Stave\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes_Stave_Church)



Skjolden Hotel Luster, Norway.

Back at our hotel in Skjolden. With the Jotunheimen Mountains as a backdrop, this is a fjordside view of the awesome Skjolden Hotel Luster. My room is that third window from the right, looking right out on the Lusterfjord.

Their website says it all "Like waking up to a painting when you look out the window in the morning. Mountains reflected in the shiny bay. A perfect experience of silence and tranquility. No wonder many a guest does not want to leave here!"

[www.skjoldenhotel.no](http://www.skjoldenhotel.no)



Eidselvi River in Skjolden, Norway.

Man, Norway is just incredibly, incredibly beautiful.

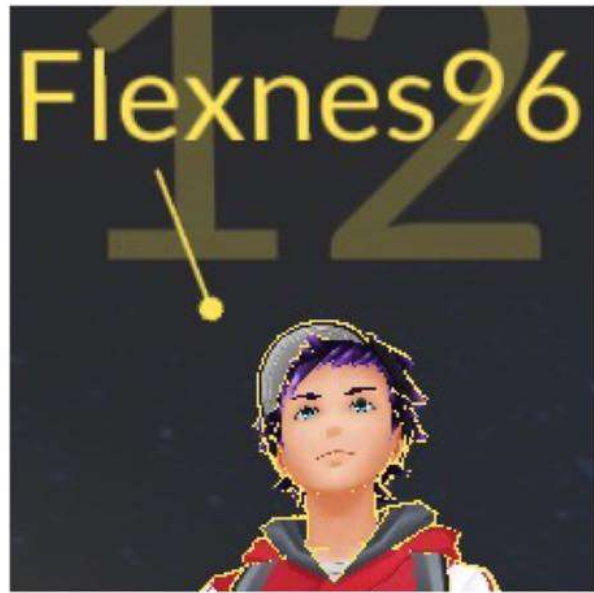
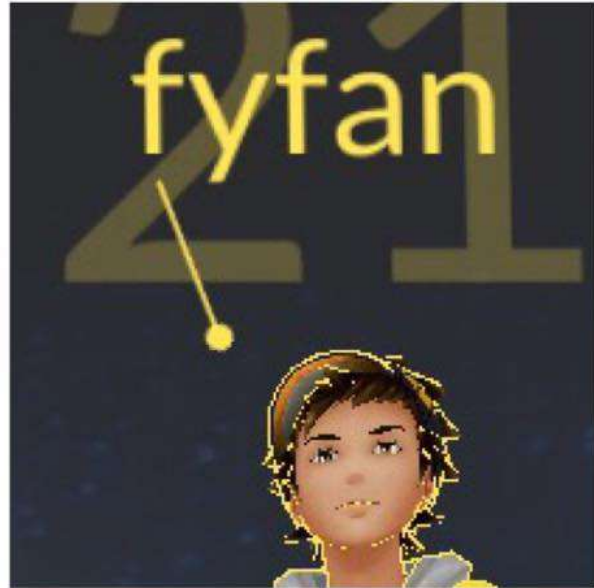


Norskémon Hunting, Skjolden, Norway.

It's time for some PokéHunting! Yes, believe it or not there are even PokéStops In Skjolden. Here Kirsten collects some PokéBalls and hopes to spot an oh-so-rare European-only Mr. Mime (we did not see one). As you can expect there was not much Pokémon Go played by us in this part of the world, as much of our Norway trip had very limited cellular coverage and also we only turned on the International Data Roaming on rare occasions.

PROTIP: Buy a small International Data Roaming package before you go outside of your country and save it mostly for mapping and driving directions. When you do use it - Turn it on, take screenshots of all the directions/maps/etc, and turn it off. Those screenshots on your phone make for great travel souvenirs too.

And if you catch some Pokémon in a far-off land like Norway your Pokémon Go app will tell you where you caught those critters. I'm putting a star next to mine to make sure I keep all the "Norskémon" I caught there.



Norwegian Pokémon Trainers, Skjolden, Norway.

Meet two of Norway's local Poké Trainers! While they are very few and far between in this part of the world, there actually was a Pokégym in Skjolden. Our local gym is held down with two Flareons by Fyfan and Flexnes96. Team Instinct represent! This was the first gym encounter I played in the game and also caught a few Pokémon while there. (I prefer to call these Norwegian varieties "Norskémon")

This solitary Pokégym can be found at the Jonsok, a sculpture by artist Kati Casida, named after the Norwegian Summer Solstice, that stands on the shore at the very end of the Sognefjord in Skjolden.



Day five comes to an end. Tomorrow will be the biggest day of the trip.

Skjolden, Norway is gorgeous.



Starting out day 6 in Skjolden, Norway.

Skjolden is the setting of so many epic Norsk folktales of trolls, giants, goblins and dragons. Famously transcribed here by Asbjørnsen and Moe back in 1841. The ancient folktales of Skjolden have titles like the best D&D games ever played...

THE TROLLS IN HEDALE WOOD.  
THE GOLDEN CASTLE THAT HUNG IN THE AIR.  
THE GIANT WHO HAD NO HEART IN HIS BODY

These Skjolden, Norway folktales have been endlessly adapted, you may not know the stories by their original names but you have probably heard many. THE GIANT WHO HAD NO HEART IN HIS BODY is also story of both PAPER MARIO and BALDUR'S GATE 2.

REYNARD WANTS TO TASTE HORSE-FLESH has to be the greatest title of any Norwegian

folktale ever. Gather 'round the fire, kids!  
Day 6.



Tindevegen, Jotunheimen Mountains, Norway.

Tindevegen, one of the most awe-inspiring roads on Earth. This photo of our rental car's GPS Navigation screen is a pretty hilarious representation of what it's like to drive the snake-like Tindevegen through the Jotunheimen Mountains. This road not also is very steep in places with some parts with a 12.5% grade.

Or... if that drive seems too terrifying... you could always jump off the edge and paraglide down into the valley like this guy did! (great view of our road of switchbacks in this video [here](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=v3QI28c53XM))<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=v3QI28c53XM>



Årdalstangen Church, Norway.

Årdal is two villages, and across the Årdalsvatnet lake from Øvre Årdal lies the second and much smaller half, known as Årdalstangen. Here we find the Årdalstangen Church built in 1867.

Årdalstangen. has a population of just 1,489, just about a third of the size of the town of Boscobel, Wisconsin where my grandparents lived. The nearby valley of Seimsdalen (where Seim is located) has a population of just 467 for the entire valley, which is just about the same size as Gays Mills, Wisconsin where my grandparents lived before moving to Boscobel.

A rather excellent Norwegian crime drama series FRIKJENT ("Acquitted" in English) was filmed here in Årdalstangen, so if you'd like to see a ton of beautiful footage from this town and the nearby area in the context of an awesome TV show, I highly recommend checking it out.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwFwowR0qfo>



Seim headstones at Årdalstangen Church, Norway.

There are a \*bunch\* of Seim (the original Norwegian spelling of the Sime family name) headstones at Årdalstangen Church, just up the road from the tiny village of Seim. And some very, very old ones going back to the early 1800s too.

My dad was a bit disappointed to not find any names from our personal family tree. But soon realized that there likely wouldn't be any gravestones in this tiny cemetery for \*our\* branch of Seims. The people who are privileged enough to be buried here, including these Seim family tree members, are only the most important, most wealthy, and most powerful people in all of the Utladalen valley. Our branch of the Seim Family Tree, likely "just" farmers and the like, were probably buried on their own lands, with wooden grave markers at best.

I have photos of every single Seim headstone in this graveyard, so if any one of my family members would like me to mail them, please just say the word.

And for the record, I am proud to come from "unimportant" branches of that Seim/Sime family tree. And be descended from people who contribute to society in oftentimes un-celebrated ways. Like farmers & fishermen, laborers & miners, ship builders & hunters, teachers & shop-keepers. There is a lot of beauty in that.



Årdalstangen Church, Norway.

On the other side of that mountain (2.5 miles West via the Seimsdalstunnele tunnel) is the Seimsdalen valley and the village of Seim. Where great grandpa Sime and his parents came from.

We're almost there... the homeland of my people.



Seim, Seimsdalen valley, Norway.

Welcome to Seim!

From Årdalstangen, just on the other side of the 5,000 foot long Seimsdalstunnelen tunnel, is the Seimsdalen valley and the tiny village of Seim! Such an incredible moment to arrive at this land from where the Sime Family comes. Here's a video of Seim I found:

[https://youtu.be/7IucigSf\\_24](https://youtu.be/7IucigSf_24)

The Simes immigrated from Norway to "the new world" on The Valkyrien, sailing from Bergen, Norway on May 4th, 1873 and landing in Quebec on June 22nd, 1873. The Valkyrien's passenger list has my great, great grandparents, Ole T. Seim (age 32) and Sonnevi Seim (age 33), and their children Anne Olsen Seim (age 9), Thomas Olsen Seim (age 3 - my great grandfather) and Henrik Olsen Seim (age 9 months).

The Valkyrien had 307 steerage passengers and 8 cabin passengers. There was an outbreak of measles on board. As the ship arrived at the quarantine station on Grosse Isle, Quebec, twenty were sick and there had been two deaths. There were two births on the voyage. Measles were the least of the passengers' worries, as all had nearly died after the ship collided with another ship off Dover (there were no survivors on that other boat).

More on the voyage of the Valkyrien:

<http://www.norwayheritage.com/articles/templates/voyages.asp?articleid=81&zoneid=6>

Immigrants at Grosse Île Quarantine Station, 1832-1937:

<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/immigration-records/immigrants-grosse-ile-1832-1937/Pages/immigrants-grosse-ile.aspx>



Seim, Seimsdalen valley, Norway.

This is the view of the from the road at Seim out at the Årdalsfjorden. Gorgeous!

Now that we've arrived in Seim we're going to get a \*bunch\* of pictures of the village in a row here. As this is such a tiny village in a mostly unpopulated valley, tucked far away from the rest of the world, there is just \*so\* little information on the place or the people. But I still have a bunch of photos to share. This is, after all, the homeland of my people.

I believe if you follow this little river upstream you will find the adorable Torlifossen waterfall. You can find a couple photos of that if you search it on Instagram.



Seim, Seimsdalen valley, Norway.

The rocky Årdalfjord beach at Seim. There is an annual (?) 4 1/2 mile long uphill footrace that starts here in called the "Aosen Up". It goes from the beach in Seimsdalen, up the valley and through the world's steepest tunnel (7,217 foot long) to Aosen in the Offerdalen valley.

This is where Ole Seim and Sonnevi Seim and their children (Anne age 9, Thomas age 3 - my great grandfather, and the baby Henrik Seim) first put the boat in the water and headed off to America.



Seim Beach, Seimsdalen valley, Norway.

My folks on the waterfront at Seim, right where my ancestors put their boats in the water, and where my great, great grandparents and their children began their journey to "the New World".

My dad might not be the most overly emotional or sentimental guy but he is a starry-eyed romantic at heart who loves mountains and rivers and trees and delicate wild flowers most of all. And this part of Norway is pretty much nothing but. Here he is gathering a few souvenir rocks to give to his sisters back home.

This is really one of those spectacular moments I will remember and treasure for the rest of my life.



Seim, Seimsdalen valley, Norway.

Kirsten on the waterfront at Seim, right where my ancestors put their boats in the water. Her expert travel planning (and driving!) made this moment possible.

This photo is awesome.



My dad on Seim waterfront, Seimsdalen valley, Norway.

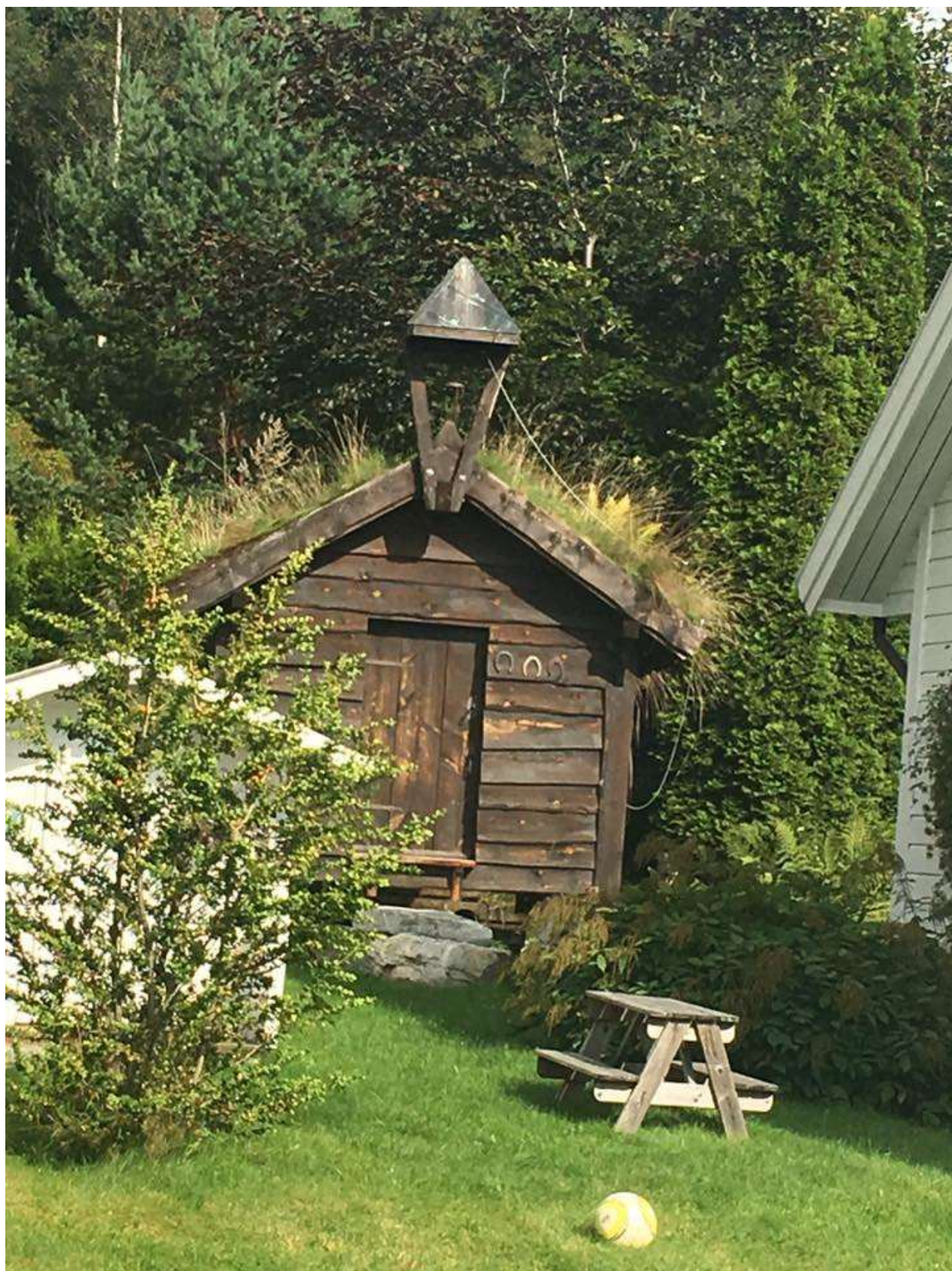
Beautiful clouds in the sky over Årdalfjord, right where my ancestors put their boats in the water. And where my great, great grandparents and their children began their journey to America in 1873.



My dad at the Seim waterfront, Seimsdalen valley, Norway.

I think my grandparents would have really loved to see these pictures of their son on the waterfront where my great, great grandparents Ole and Sonnevi and their children first left on their grand adventure to America in 1873.

So this one is for them, Adolf and Margaret Sime.



Seim / Øyane, Seimsdalen, Norway

Remnants of yesteryear, this little old school house in a yard in the village of Seim / Øyane. There are a few of these ancient buildings scattered around Seim / Øyane and, as you will see, I'm posting photos of them all. The valley of Seimsdalen (where Seim is located) has a population of just 467 for the entire valley.

Of course I don't know much about this particular adorable little old schoolhouse aside from "Hey look, I got a picture of it!" but... in case some member of my family wants to go further with the research & learn more about this, or any of the other vintage buildings in Seim / Øyane, I \*did\* manage to track down the local historical society. The group is called Årdal Sogelag, their website is:

<http://www.sogelaget.no/>

and their Facebook page can be found here:<https://www.facebook.com/ArdalSogelag>

Here's an amazing historical film they made (in Norwegian) which features a bunch of photos from Seimsdalen from the 1800s.

Stølsdrift i Årdal - Årdal Sogelag

<https://vimeo.com/43337199>



Seim / Øyane, Seimsdalen, Norway

Old farmhouse. If you want to see \*actual photos\* of what life was like in 1800s Seimsdalen valley around the time my great, great grandparents were there, and see photos of people they surely knew, we are fortunate to have discovered these.

Page One:

<http://tinyurl.com/h2rs8pg>

Page Two:

<http://tinyurl.com/zt7ecud>

Page Three:

<http://tinyurl.com/hs7d9zv>

Page Four:

<http://tinyurl.com/j4w424q>

Page Five:

<http://tinyurl.com/jsyodlh>

Wow!



Seim / Øyane, Seimsdalen, Norway

Hard to know how old this farmhouse actually is, so instead of just guessing, I found another little piece of vintage Seimsdal history for you guys to enjoy... I put in a ton of hours into doing searches on the internet in Norwegian to find stuff for this photoset... and this Seim photos and footage is definitely some of the coolest stuff of all!

Check out this 1974 video of a ski event in Seimsdalen with Olympic gold medalists Harald Grønningen, Gjermund Eggen, Oddvar Brå and Petter Northug: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=lpS5DvkNsSk>



Seim / Øyane, Seimsdalen, Norway

My dad was \*very\* interested with this falling down old barn in Seim / Øyane. I wish I'd gotten some photos of the other side which was being propped up to keep it from falling down completely.

If anyone wants to get some answers for him on the age of this barn and what they were farming here, please contact Årdal Sogelag, the local historical society. Their website is:

<http://www.sogelaget.no/>

And their Facebook page can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/ArdalSogelag>



Seim / Øyane, Seimsdalen, Norway

Another old Seim / Øyane schoolhouse. Check out this Google Translated page with even more photos of Seimsdal and local farms from around 1915-1920. It's a pretty poor translation, where it even works, so reading will take a bit of mental calisthenics. But neat nonetheless.

<http://tinyurl.com/jago8th>

Once again, the local historical society is Årdal Sogelag. Their website is:

<http://www.sogelaget.no/>

And their Facebook page can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/ArdalSogelag>



Seim / Øyane, Seimsdalen, Norway

This old farm house doesn't really look all that old to me, but I'm not a dendrochronologist (the scientific study of dating trees & wooden structures) so I could very well be wrong. And if we're going to document these buildings in Seim / Øyane, I figured I should include it here.



Seim / Øyane, Seimsdalen, Norway

Here's a look at Seim / Øyane from "in town". On the other side of that mountain (2.5 miles West via the Seimsdalstunnelen tunnel) is the Årdalstangen Church. Directly to the left here is where all those old buildings, schoolhouses and farmhouses stand. Down the road, on the other side of that tree, is the Seim waterfront where those other photos were taken. There's more of Seim up a hill further to the right, homes with some of the greatest views on Earth! You can see these houses very clearly in the video where it says "Velkommen til SEIMSDALEN"[https://youtu.be/7IucigSf\\_24](https://youtu.be/7IucigSf_24)

What a great privilege to have gotten to visit the ancestral home of the Sime family! Words cannot express how profound and powerful this sojourn to this small little village was for me. I am deeply thankful to have visited. Thanks to Kirsten & my folks for making it all come true. And also thanks to Michael, Josh & Kate who took such good care of the Isotope while I was gone.



Fly Agaric Mushroom in the Utladalen valley. Norway.

While taking our hike to the Avdalsfossen, Høljafossen, and Vettisfossen waterfalls, I discovered a number of \*huge\* bright red wild mushrooms growing on an embankment. I scrambled up to get a picture of one.

As I was taking this photo, using my hand for scale, my parents (who are life-long outdoors naturalist types) yelled up at me "DON'T TOUCH IT, THEY MAY BE POISONOUS!" I laughed and said "DON'T WORRY, I'M NOT GOING TO TOUCH IT. SHEESH!" Come on, I'm not an naturalist, but I'm also not an idiot, I know better than to touch some strange random super poisonous looking Norwegian wild mushrooms! So I got my photo. And then... (of course)... my foot slipped on the embankment... and my pinky TOUCHED THE STRANGE RANDOM SUPER POISONOUS LOOKING NORWEGIAN WILD MUSHROOM! Ah, dammit!

Fortunately we had a wetnap in a pocket so I quickly wiped off my pinky. And for a day or so I teasingly threatened Kirsten with my "Poison Pinky of Dooooom!" until I managed to finally remember to look up the mushroom when we had internet access.

And what I found out was it \*is\* classified as highly poisonous... because it is psychoactive... a by-product of Muscimol and Ibotenic Acid. Yep, I'd found myself a patch of very famous huge hallucinogenic wild mushrooms!

Now even if you're like me and know nothing about psychedelic mushrooms, you'll know this one. The Fly Agaric (*Amanita Muscaria*). As seen in cartoons like DISNEY'S FANTASIA and THE SMURFS, in video games like SUPER MARIO WORLD and METAL GEAR SOLID 3, on stage with psych-rockers Hawkwind and on the cover of kraut rock godfather Mani Neumeier's PRIVAT album, in books like CITIZEN OF THE WORLD and HANSEL & GRETEL, and in comics like ASTERIX AT THE OLYMPICS, as Vishanti's toadstool chair in DOCTOR STRANGE, and in Mœbius' A TRUE WONDER OF THE UNIVERSE.

Interestingly the psychoactive effects of *Amanita Muscaria* are said to cause size distortions, making people feel either very, very large or very, very tiny. Yep, that's right, this is the mushroom from ALICE IN WONDERLAND. I think Lewis Carroll found a patch of these too.

So this was a cool find & a fun little thing to research. I have a couple friends who are probably screaming at me through the monitor by now.

No I did not eat one. I'm not a naturalist but I know better than to just eat some strange random super poisonous looking Norwegian psychedelic mushrooms! SHEESH.



Utla River, downstream from the Avdalsfossen Waterfall. Norway.

This is the trailhead to the Utladalen Waterfalls, including the Vettisfossen, Høljafossen, and Avdalsfossen. The famous Vettisfossen is over 900 feet high, and the tallest free-falling waterfall in all of Norway. This riverside hike, all along a pretty easy grade, is about 7 1/2 miles round trip. Along the way lots of stunning views of the Utla River, and several un-named waterfalls too,

Somewhere near the Høljafossen Waterfall I couldn't resist scrambling down the embankment to a nice looking rock, taking off my shoes and socks, and putting my feet into Utla River in a spot protected by the fast rushing rapids. It was VERY COLD but felt incredible. And fortunately I didn't fall in or lose a shoe in the process!

This hike was one of my dad's favorite parts of the trip.



Utla River, downstream from the Høljafossen Waterfall. Norway.

This is the best photo I managed to get on this entire trip of the amazingly blue / turquoise color of the Norwegian glacial meltwater rivers. These brilliantly colored glacial waters get their "glacial milk" color from sediment from rocks grinding together underneath the glacier. The fine "rock flour" powder is then suspended in the water and absorbs and scatters varying colors of sunlight, giving these

glacial rivers and lakes a milky turquoise appearance. If the amazing sentient-like clouds, majestic mountains of myth, abundance of epic waterfalls, and mind-blowing vistas aren't enough to make you feel like you've walked into an ancient folktale of a mystical land... seeing the completely weird and gorgeous color of the water will convince you... Norse mythology is real. And you're living it.

You can see some red berries in the Mountain Ash here, those were \*everywhere\* along the Utlå River, In Norway and Europe they are known as Rowan Trees. In Arthurian Legend, the evil Morgana le Fay has a staff carved from the wood of the Rowan Tree which allows her half-sister Morgause, The Seductive Necromancer, to bring skeletons to life.

While some people believe these berries of the Mountain Ash to be poisonous, they are not, and are often used in jams, jellies, wines and cordials.



Utlå River, downstream from the Høljafoossen Waterfall. Norway.

We stopped several times along the way to sample tiny, wild Norwegian strawberries (Markjordbær) which, if you've not had them, are itty-bitty explosions of the most intense, delicious and intoxicating strawberry flavor.

A Norwegian wild strawberry tradition is making Markjordbær På Strå, by threading the tiny, deep-

red berries onto long blades of grass, like jewels on a necklace, which translates directly as "strawberry on straw".

With so much time to look at wildflowers and plants this hike was one of the real highlights of the trip for my naturalist dad.



Avdalsfossen Waterfall, Utladalen. Norway.

At the top of the Avdalsfossen Waterfall is the Slufsedøla en de Gravdøla river which is fed by melting glacier water of the Hurrungane mountain range (in Jotunheimen) and here falls 567 feet and joins into the Utlå River.



Skjolden, Norway. End of Day 6.

With a trip over the Tindevegen, a visit to Årdalstangen and reaching our destination on the shoreline of Seim, and then also a long hike along the Utlå River... we probably over-stuffed this day a bit. So it was extra nice to be back to our hotel to catch the sundown.

This will always be one of the most beautiful views in my life to come "home" to.



### Day 7 - Norwegian Glaciers in Fjærland

To give our exhausted feet and legs a break today we'd planned to spend most of the day driving the windy roads and seeing the majesty of the Norwegian Glaciers. As the day turned out to be kind of rainy this was perfectly timed!

I tried searching the metadata on this photo to figure out where exactly it was taken to no avail. We're somewhere in Jostedalsbreen National Park, up among the clouds, on our way to Brævasshytta Cafeteria in Fjærland.

Brævasshytta Cafeteria sits at the base of the Bøyabreen Glacier in Fjærland and has one of the greatest views I have ever seen. The panoramic video coming up in this series (which is just jaw-dropping) I took standing above the cafe.

Brævasshytta Cafeteria in Fjærland is not to be missed. Here's a bit more info: [https://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g1439211-d4502946-i142507531-Braevasshytta-Fjaerland\\_Sogndal\\_Municipality\\_Sogn\\_og\\_Fjordane\\_Western\\_N.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g1439211-d4502946-i142507531-Braevasshytta-Fjaerland_Sogndal_Municipality_Sogn_og_Fjordane_Western_N.html)



Briksdalsbreen glacier, Stryn, Norway

The Briksdalsbreen is most accessible arm of the massive Jostedalbreen glacier. You can literally drive up, take a short walk upstream, and put your hand right on the Briksdalsbreen.

Of course... as these signs clearly demonstrate... there is a hint of danger!



This glacier warning sign tells an entire story about how you will die in a single image.

I wish all graphic design could be this perfect.



Norwegian Glacier Museum, Fjærland, Norway.

Everything about this part of Norway is gorgeous!

The Norwegian Glacier Museum (Norsk Bremuseum) building was designed by famed Norwegian architect Sverre Fehn, who also did the 1958 Norwegian Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair and the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo. Sorry guys, they don't want you to try to ride the the Woolly Mammoth statues out front.

Fun Fact: The exhibit "Our Fragile Climate" was opened in July 2007 by former US vice-president Walter Mondale.

Here's a clip from a film by Ivo Caprino that they show at the Museum: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPLt-dkcQIY>



Norwegian Glacier Museum, Fjærland, Norway.

First thing inside the Norsk Bremuseum is an actual chunk of real glacier ice you can play with and also this friendly 10 foot tall polar bear. If you want to get some glacier hikes or glacial skiing in while in Norway, the Norsk Bremuseum is a great the starting point for your adventures!

Exhibits here include detailed explanations of glacial flow, meltwaters and history, a 30,000 year old Siberian Mammoth tusk, and 5300 year old iceman Ötzi who was found in a glacier in the European Alps in 1991.

Gorgeous video of the Fjærland countryside: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtvWuKO6Bz0&feature=youtu.be>



Somewhere near Fjærland, Norway

I took this picture thinking about my Aunt Linda and Uncle Al, who I'm sure would love to see what a random Norwegian Farm. I hope these photos and write-ups inspire them to go here and visit the Sime Homeland sometime.



Kaupanger Stave Church

Yet *\*another\** Stave Church! This one, Kaupanger, is the largest in the Sogn region. Design wise it is less spectacular compared to some of the other ones we saw, but I think my photos are still incredibly striking.

Recent restorations have revealed that there were two churches here prior to the one we see standing here. The first of which some has survived and is incorporated in this "modern" church. And under that church is a layer of ash that is the only remains of the original Kaupanger church. In this ash was discovered a coin minted in 1130 AD, the year when Norway was first Christianised. So this is very likely one of the first Christian churches built in Norway.

Kaupanger village has been a trading post since the Viking age. The town also features the Sogn Fjordmuseum and also the Kaupanger ferry landing.



Kaupanger Stave Church

Inspired by the sounds of the medieval bells in Kaupanger stave church, composer Arne Nordhei created his work "Klokkeson." Nordhei has the distinct honor of having a celestial body named after him, a dwarf planet in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. Also Frank Zappa was a huge fan.

Kaupanger Stave Church is still an active church and has been in regular use as Kaupanger's parish church since it was built.



Ferry Landing at Kaupanger

Here begins out ferry ride from Kaupanger to Gudvangen. A two and a half hour long ferry ride along the Sognefjord (Norway's longest and deepest fjord) and the Nærøyfjord (which is, as you can probably guess from the name, very narrow).

It is pretty amazing how good they are at squeezing cars on to this tiny ferry. Apparently they can fit up to 27 cars on a single trip.



Amlabukti Bay, near Kaupanger.

On our ferry ride, just off shore from Kaupanger.

For those friends of mine interested in Norwegian heavy music - this part of Norway is home to a very region-specific genre of heavy metal music, Sognametal, springing from the Northern shore of the Sognefjord. Very epic and atmospheric in style, this Viking folk-infused black metal boasts only a handful of highly influential bands. A lot of the Norwegian music I like best either comes from here or is influenced by the bands that call this area home.

Most famous of these Sognametal bands is Windir who popularized the genre and style of this kind of melodic fjord Viking metal. Other bands in this genre include Cor Scorpii, Mistur, Vreid, Soknangr, Sigtyr, Myrkgrav, and Skald.



Clouds of Norway over the Sognefjord.

It is impossible for me to look at this series of photos from this boat trip along the Sognefjord and not think of Norse mythology. Especially that Norwegian sky. Frigga (also known as Frigg, The Beloved) is the sky goddess, responsible for weaving the clouds and for weaving the fates. She is also the goddess of love, marriage, and destiny. And the wife of Odin, The All-Father.

As you'll see Frigga the Sky Goddess sure likes making awesome looking clouds over Norway.



Sognefjord ferry ride. Near Frønningen.

We will soon pass the tiny village of Frønningen, yet another tiny Norwegian fjordtown with a rich history and home of a famous artist. Frønningen has literally 17 inhabitants total and the town is only available by boat.

Among the few buildings here is the Frønningen-godset, a historic manor built in 1901. The manor hosts a gallery of famous Norwegian painter Knut Rumohr's original work.

More on Knut Rumohr:

<https://www.mutualart.com/Artist/Knut-Rumohr/BADD319F31F74D95>



Sognefjord ferry ride.

Here's a shot of my dad hanging out by the Norsk flag on the ship's stern. I believe in the background in this shot is part of Bleia Mountain, which runs alongside the fjord. Bleia is a popular ski spot with some seriously wicked elevation.

For reference how big the fjords and these mountains are, the top of Bleia is 1717 meters above sea level (that's 5,633 feet). But what about under the water? It is 2850 meters from the top of Bleia to the bottom of Sognefjord (a total of just over 9.350 feet... that is over five times as tall as the World Trade Center tower).

The Grand Canyon is a mere 1857 meters (6,093 feet).

So when people tell you these fjords are "epic" you know what they (and me) are talking about!

My dad is just about 6 foot tall. And something of a giant in my eyes.



Sognefjord to Nærøyfjord ferry ride.

This part of the whole vacation was just the \*perfect\* trip. Above us on this 2.5 hour boat ride were mostly fluffy white dramatic clouds and blue skies but we had some rain earlier which means we also got to catch a couple gorgeous rainbows on this ride.

I knew this would be one of my dad's favorite parts of the whole trip. There just really is nothing like being on a boat in the Norwegian fjords.

Just look at those smiles!



Sognefjord to Nærøyfjord ferry ride.

Here we are (still on our boat ride) entering into the Bleia-Storebotnen Nærøyfjord Conservation Area and the Nordheimsdalen nature reserve. Things are about to get very dramatic as we get into the Nærøyfjord proper.

My dad is a naturalist so he'll love to hear all the following details and features of the local flora and fauna.

## PLANT LIFE

- A famous ancient pine forest
- A rare sub-species of arctic poppy (*papaver radicatum* ssp. *relictum*)
- linden forest
- endangered cryptogam flora (spore-reproducing plants)
- drooping woodreed.
- Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), but birch (*Betula* spp.) woodland communities are the most common. A somewhat richer grey alder (*Alnus incana*)

## COMMON WATER ANIMALS

- Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*)
- Norwegian seal (*Phoca vitulina*)
- Norwegian lobsters
- sea pens.
- Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)
- White-beaked dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*)
- Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)
- Minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)
- Killer whales (*Orcinus orca*)

## COMMON LAND ANIMALS

- Norwegian reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*)
- Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*)
- Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)
- Fallow deer (*Cervus dama*) non-native
- A rare Norwegian Elk (*Alces alces*)
- Arctic fox (*Alopex lagopus*)
- Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*)
- Lynx (*Lynx*)
- Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*)
- Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

## BIRDS

- Norwegian dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)
- Gyrfalcon
- White-tailed sea eagle
- Golden eagle
- Northern goshawk
- Eurasian sparrow hawk
- Merlin
- White-backed woodpecker
- Common kestrel
- Rough-legged buzzard
- Norwegian ducks

Some 100 bird species typical of western Norway breed in the area, ranging from coastal birds to

high mountain species. The rivers have Norway's densest population of the national bird, the dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*). The alpine and subalpine mires attract many waders and the cliffs host several raptors. The invertebrate fauna is not well known, but most of the habitats may have quite a rich range of species.

The vegetation ranges with altitude between boreonemoral in the valleys to taiga on the plateaus. It is typical of this part of West Norway, and is moderately diverse. Pockets of peridotite and serpentinite rocks in the Geirangerfjord area give nutrient-rich soil. Its main vegetation types are temperate woodland, rock and scree, alpine grassland and man-made meadows. The woodland includes old deciduous woods, pinewoods on peridotite, wooded pasture and small patches of very diverse deciduous woods on warm south-facing slopes. Around Nærøyfjord woodlands are similar but vary with the soil, moisture, exposure, altitude above sea level and use. There are large natural woods of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), but birch (*Betula* spp.) woodland communities are the most common. A somewhat richer grey alder (*Alnus incana*) community dominates on avalanche fans beside the fjords. The best virgin pine woodland in western Norway is found in Nordheimsdalen and below Bleia. In a belt of phyllites around Flamsdalen 500 species have been recorded including unusual species.

The Alpine flora of the Geirangerfjord area is dependent on snow cover and ranges from dwarf birch (*Betula* spp.) and polar willow (*Salix polaris*) to herb-rich grassland. The grasses of the grazed meadows host many rare fungi. Above the tree-line between 800m and 900m are scree, blockfields, snow fields and glaciers. The tree-line above Nærøyfjord is between 900 and 1100m. Half the alpine flora of Norway is found on its mountains, on carbonate rocks and lenses of phyllite. In the ungrazed highland of Bleia there is natural grassland and on its screes, a rare sub-species of arctic poppy (*Papaver radicatum* sp. *relictum*).



Sognefjord to Nærøyfjord ferry ride.

Since this photoset contains all sorts of random things I am interested in, I guess we should talk about Norwegian suits, too, right?

The suit I'm wearing here is a Falcone. But My \*favorite\* suit in my entire closet is a Moods of Norway Rolf Tønning in dark purple plaid. And my second favorite is a Moods of Norway blue narrow pinstripe. Those Norwegians sure do make some great suits!

Founders / designers Simen Staalnacke and Peder Børresen started Moods of Norway in 2003 in the town of Stryn, Norway (population 7,218), which is North of Skjolden on the Nordfjord. Their quirky suits celebrate the local Norse heritage, each one embroidered with the number of tractors in Norway and also boasting some funny labels like "Made With Love By Really Really Pretty Blonde Girls" and "Pants Inspired By Deep Fjords, A Few Cocktails, And A Grandmother With Exquisite Taste."

In 2014 the Moods of Norway became the official designers of both the Norwegian Olympic team and also for Norwegian Airlines. Those mens' and womens' flight attendant outfits are so great.

I discovered this Norwegian company's amazing suits the way many other Americans did by seeing Ru wear them on RuPaul's Drag Race.

They had stopped most production on their full suits by 2015 / 2016 so I didn't get to buy any in their Oslo store. But I did get some Moods cufflinks and an umbrella. I wear those cufflinks all the time.

Although I seriously considered it, I didn't bring my Moods of Norway suits on this trip because I'm trying to keep them as pristine as possible. As they're my two most expensive and also my most impossible-to-replace suits, I don't wear them all that often. And very rarely take them on a trip. If I'm hanging out with you in one of my "Happy Suits for Happy People" we're either at a very special occasion together or simply you are one of my favorite people. You know who you are. Or maybe you don't. But I do! (laugh)

Sadly the company declared bankruptcy in September, 2017. So I probably won't be getting many more suits by these two awesome designers.

2019 UPDATE: It appears Moods of Norway has \*not\* gone out of business!



Sognefjord to Nærøyfjord ferry ride.

This part of Norway is the definition of epic. To give you a sense of scale of what you're looking at, the "hills" here reach heights of 4593 feet, which is just about the length of 13 football fields.

Waterfalls are everywhere in fjord country (as you've probably come to realize by now)... and also... the Fossegrimmen!

Fossegrimmen is a mythological water-creature who sits naked under waterfalls, playing his fiddle. He is said to teach humans his magical fiddle techniques in exchange for a food offering made on a Thursday evening and in secrecy. They're picky though! Legend has it they prefer an offering of a white goat thrown (with head turned away) into a waterfall that flows northwards. Or if you're willing to steal smoked mutton (fenalår) from your neighbor as an offering for four Thursdays in a row? Ok, that'll do, too.

But don't be skimping on those offerings hopeful student! Because if there's not enough meat on the bone the Fossegrimmen will only teach you how to tune your fiddle!

But if you've done your offering right, and your offering is to the fussy creature's satisfaction, you're in luck! You are going to get a violin lesson you will never forget! The Fossegrimmen will then take

your right hand and roughly run your fingers along the strings until they all bleed.(laugh)! But that is a small price to pay for a fiddle player because after your fingers heal you will be able to play so well that "the trees shall dance and torrents in their fall shall stand still."

Famous legendary virtuoso violinists who are said to have learnt from a Fossegrim are Myllarguten and Ole Bull.

Oh if only I'd known before I went to Norway! Next time I will have to plan better.



On the Nærøyfjord

Our car ferry has taken us through the widest fjord (Sognefjord) and into the narrowest one (Nærøyfjord) as goats graze nearby on land and playful seals circle our ferry.

Truly one of life's most magical experiences.



On the Nærøysfjord.

Want to learn some more Norse mythology? How about how the world (Midgard) was created?

From Ymir's skull the sons of Bor made the sky and set it over the earth with its four sides. Under each corner they put a dwarf, whose names are East, West, North, and South. The sons of Bor flung Ymir's brains into the air, and they became the clouds.

Then they took the sparks and burning embers that were flying about after they had been blown out of Muspell, and placed them in the midst of Ginnungagap to give light to heaven above and earth beneath. To the stars they gave appointed places and paths.

The earth was surrounded by a deep sea. The sons of Bor gave lands near the sea to the families of giants for their settlements.

And it was into this world that the Norse People were born.

Disney fans will probably notice that Arendelle from FROZEN was inspired by this area.



On the Nærøyfjord.

Just another snapshot of a small moment on our two and a half hour ferry ride from Kaupanger to Gudvangen.

If you look in the background of this picture you'll see the tiny little farm houses at Nobbi point. That's all that is there, just 5 buildings. This is such a significant area of population that I was able to locate it on a map. That's how small some of these Norwegian fjord villages are.



On the Nærøyfjord.

I spoke of magic earlier and in the presence of this magical place let's discuss two forms of Old Norse magic(k) practiced in ancient times.

Galdr, is a verbal rune / stave magic, also known as "sacred singing." This magic is often associated with Oðinn and also Freyja. The art of Galdr magic is a practice which one's will and self control of conscience and environment. Protection, luck, intuition, knowledge, even curses and inertial / entropic control are attributed to Galdr magic.

Seiðr is a trance magic, the art of altering the course of life by re-weaving part of destiny's web. This

magic was first taught by the goddess Freyja to Oðinn. This practice is realized by the loss of one's control of self, conscience, and environment. the inhibited submersion of one's self into something outside the practicer's persona. Prophecy, magical healing, astral travel, and shapeshifting are attributed to Seiðr magic.

Both forms of Norse magic(k), Galdr and Seiðr, are said to be very dangerous. Tread carefully, novice sorcerers!



Pinstriped Viking in Gudvangen, Norway.

Posing with the at the end of the Nærøyfjord in Gudvangen, Norway. Gudvangen means “Gods place by the water” and having been here I can tell you I agree, this place is magnificent. Gudvangen has an annual Viking

Festival and Village. As far as this photo goes, as Darwyn Cooke once said, "James Sime is James Sime, 24 hours a day!"

In 2017 I was asked by our friends at American Express to apply to be featured in a nationwide "this is my small business" ad. What an amazing opportunity for my comic store, [Isotope - The Comic Book Lounge](#)! The truth is I don't really enjoy being on camera and that level of exposure totally freaks me out (ask me sometime about the day I saw the page-sized photo of me in the SF Chronicle while commuting to work - I hid for days after that!)... but there was no way I was going to turn down a free American Express ad! So I filled out my application and told them about all the fun, quirky, and awesome things I do with my comic shop. And I wrote passionately about my philosophies and approach to small business. "They're either going to love me or they'll pick someone else!"

The American Express ad application requested a recent photo. Of course they wanted one of those classic shots of me in my comic shop. Sure, I've got those photos. Some great ones too. But instead I included this photo because it made me laugh. (LAUGH)!

They didn't pick me for their ad. But I'm not too upset about it. (laugh) They said they'd ask me again. But if not, oh well, the shop is doing well without a national ad campaign so I can't be too unhappy about it.

This whole endeavor pretty much sums up my entire small business philosophy:

They're either going to love you or they'll pick someone else. It's okay. Just keep doing good work, stay true to your vision, and never be shy about being the best version of yourself you can be.

Now go forth & find your own inner Pinstriped Viking. You may not get a national ad campaign but when you're true to yourself there simply is no advertising needed.



Viking ship detail at Gudvangen.

If you do the "Norway in a Nutshell" trains + boat tour from Oslo to Bergen (recommended, I did that exact tour on my previous trip to Norway) the town of Gudvangen at the end of the Nærøyfjord, will be one of your stops.

Here in Gudvangen you will find a recreation Viking longboat to pose with for photos and also one of the most beautiful valleys and town ever. They have a Viking Camp here called Njardarheimr and the Village of the Vikings so you can learn some Norwegian history and also an annual Viking festival that looks like a lot of fun. Sure it's a tourist trap. But it is a \*Norwegian\* tourist trap so that makes it cool.

For those wondering, according to my internet research "Njardar" is a Norse god among the Vanir associated with sea, seafaring, wind, fishing, wealth, and crop fertility. His name means "devoted to Njord." I haven't had a chance to look up Njardar in my old Snorri Sturluson books yet.



At the Tvindefossen near Voss, Norway.

[Kirsten Baldock](#) and I don't take too many cheesy couples photos but who doesn't love a romantic picture at a waterfall?

Voss, Norway is famous for bottling the most expensive "Artesian Water" in the world, roughly \$15 a gallon, from right here in nearby Voss. So these hundreds of thousands of gallons of water cascading down the cliff in this photo would set you back a pretty penny!

The Tvindefossen is said to be 152 meters high, so for scale - If you stood the "W" from the famous Hollywood sign on top of the highest point on the London Eye... you'd still be 2 meters too short!

Or how about - Shaquille O'Neal is 7 feet 1' tall, so this waterfall is about 71 Shaquille O'Neals high!

Speaking of romantic, the waters of the Tvindefossen are said to increase sexual potential, so hundreds of thousands of tourists come here to get some of this sexy, sexy Voss water.

Those people in the background of this photo? Some of them are filling their water bottles!



Tvindefossen near Voss, Norway.

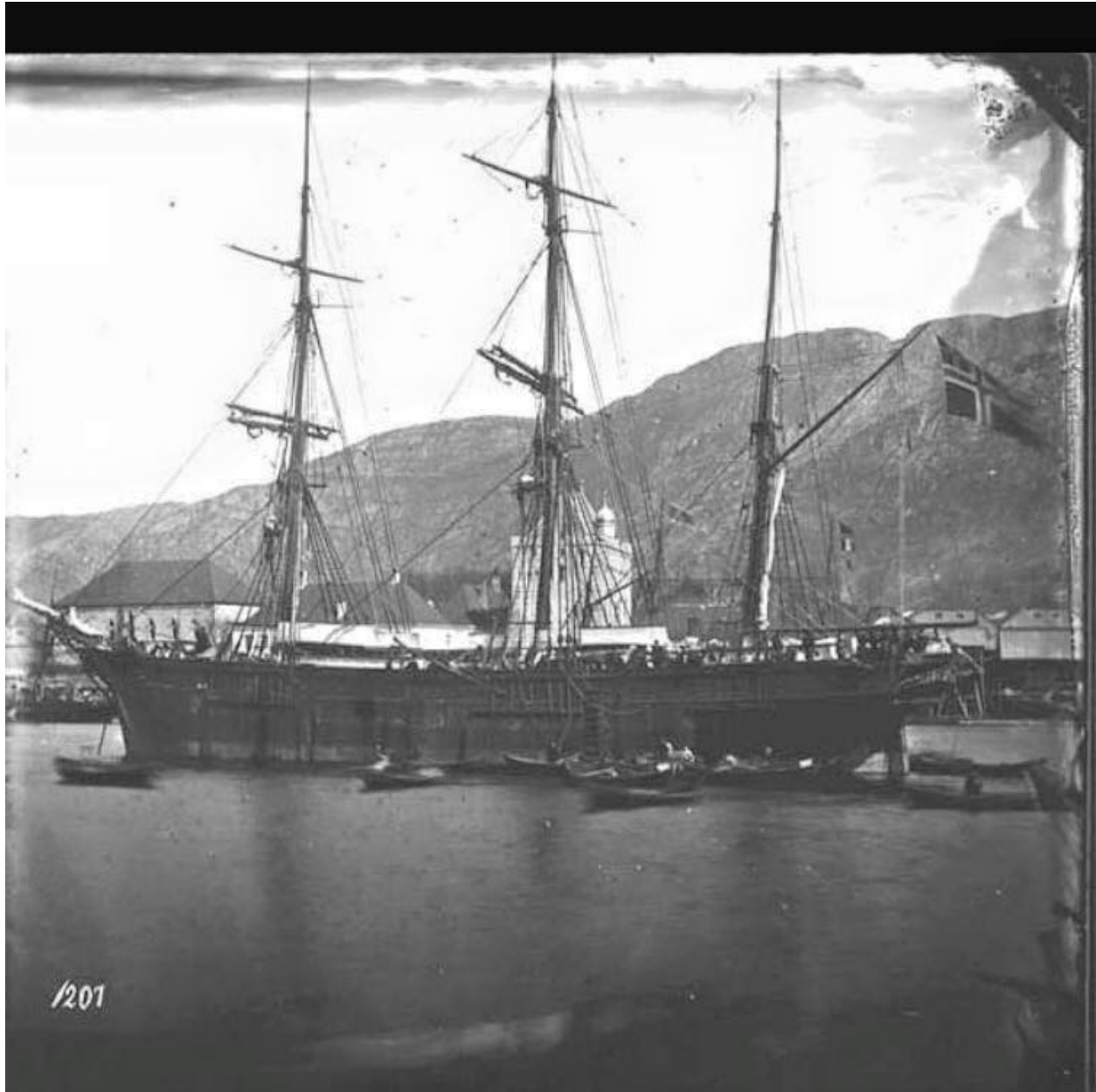
The Kroelvi river crashes over a cliff and falls almost 489 feet here - the mighty Tvindefossen! This was one of the most beautiful waterfalls that we saw in all of Norway, photos definitely do not do it justice.

Near Voss (where the most expensive "Artesian Water" on Earth comes from) and just off the road to Flåm. With a reported 272,000 visitors in a year the Tvindefossen is sure to have a bus or two in the nearby parking lot every day and hordes of tourists visiting and filling containers with the rejuvenating waters that promise sexual potency.

We were pretty lucky that there weren't many people when we arrived. And this photo is just awesome! Every time I see it I think "We should make a poster out of that!"

My dad was feeling pretty wiped out by the time we got here and we'd already seen roughly a thousand waterfalls on the day already so he stayed in the car (who can blame him, have you seen how much we did on this day?!). So we got this triumphant solo photo of [Rose](#) standing in front of this massive, empowering waterfall. You go, Rose!

Next stop... Bergen, Norway! Where a bark boat, The Valkyrien, took the Sime family across the ocean to the New World in 1873.



The Valkyrien at Bergen, Norway in 1873.

Aside from visiting the village of Seim and to get to stand on that rocky shore where my great, great grandparents and their children first boarded a boat for the New World... it was equally monumental for me to get to go to the dock in Bergen, Norway where they boarded this boat, The Valkyrien, and sailed from Norway across the turbulent Atlantic Ocean to North America!

It is pretty amazing to have these photos of the very boat my ancestors took. And to get to learn of the horrific and near-fatal journey they took!

My grandparents, Adolf and Margaret Sime, visited Bergen in the 1980s and they stood at this harbor too. I'm sure they looked towards the East and thought of the Seim family before them who

took this journey. Ole (aged 32), Synneve (aged 33), Anne (aged 9), Thomas (aged 3) and Henrik (aged 14? months). I'm not aware if my grandparents were lucky enough to have seen these photos of The Valkyrien but I hope they did.

The launching of The Valkyrien was the inspiration for artist J.F. Løsting's carpenters' banner painting from Bradbenken dock-yard. Seen here:

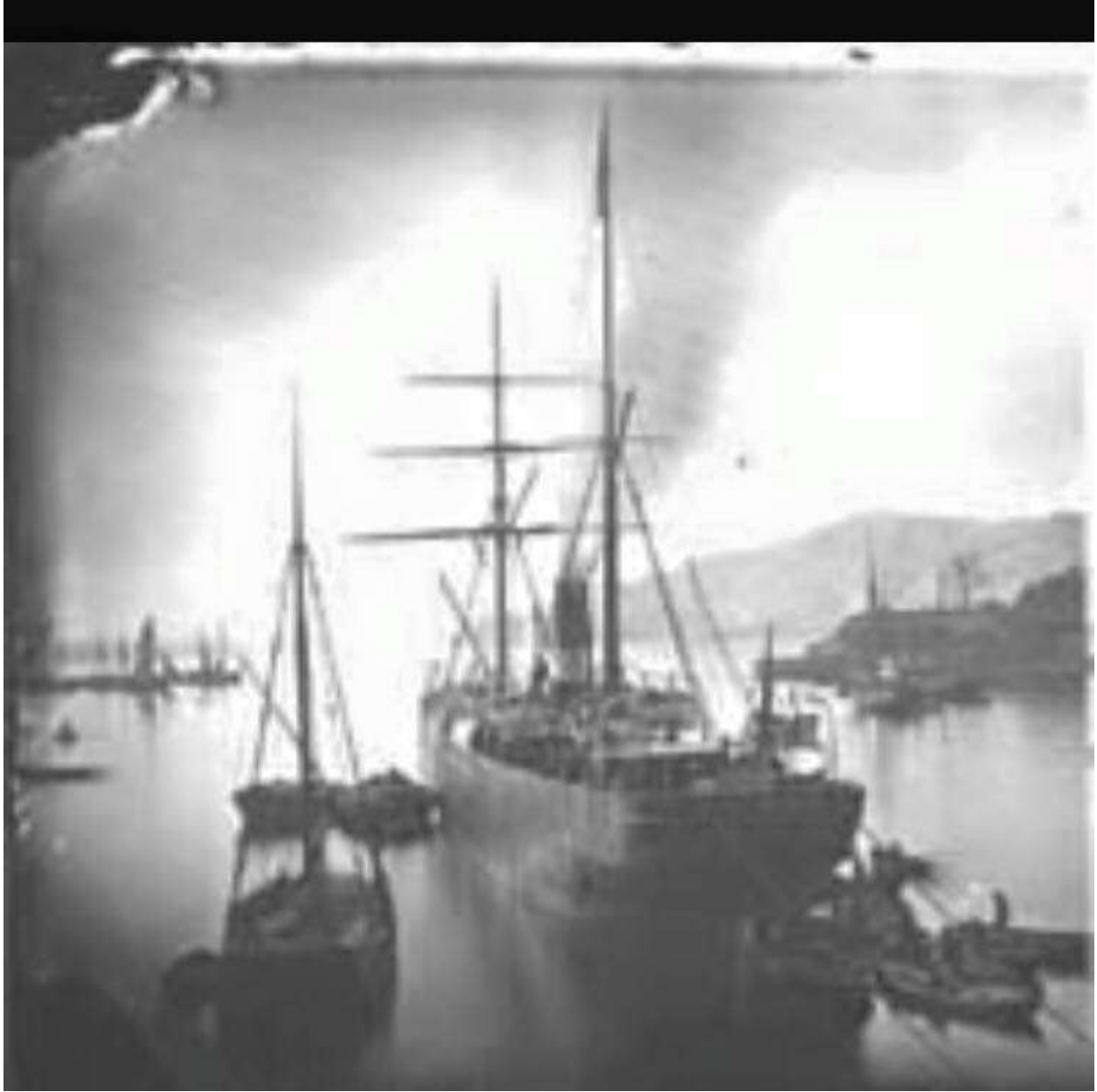
<http://digitalarkivet.uib.no/utstilling/eng/valfane.htm>

The passenger list of The Valkyrien's last trip to America in 1873 can be seen here. My cousins will probably be interested to see our great, great grandparents and their kids on

there: <http://digitalarkivet.uib.no/utstilling/eng/pasli2.htm>

More info on The Valkyrien here:

<http://digitalarkivet.uib.no/utstilling/eng/valkyri.htm>



The Valkyrien at Bergen Harbor, Norway in 1873.

We're going to feature all three of these photos of The Valkyrien because they're cool.

The Valkyrien departed Bergen at 1 o'clock in the afternoon on April the 25th, 1873. The 63 day voyage is a tale of misfortune, terror, survival, and of hope. An escaped prisoner (who had been jailed for not paying a mortgage debt) had snuck on board, hoping to abscond to the New World. One of the emigrants paid his debt! And there was also a thief on board stealing other passenger's provisions.

the Valkyrien, badly damaged, and flooding

It was the end of the era of wind-powered sailing vessels bringing people to America, either the last or one of

the last, before the steamships took over. And judging by the tale told by the survivors of this trip in 1873, rightfully so.

We Simes are lucky to have made it!

More info on The Valkyrien here:

<http://digitalarkivet.uib.no/utstilling/eng/valkyri.htm>



The Valkyrien at Bergen, Norway in 1873.

Okay, last photo of The Valkyrien for now... but I'll have one more of these coming up as I managed

to line up the perfect 1873 vs 2016 shot. This is the boat that brought the Simes from Norway to America. It was a horrific voyage and the passengers and crew nearly all died within a couple days of leaving the Bergen port.

This story is featured in the book ACROSS THE DEEP BLUE SEA: THE SAGA OF NORWEGIAN IMMIGRANTS by Odd S. Lovoll.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=VJvABgAAQBAJ&pg=PT119&lpg=PT119&dq=brigantine+valkyrien&source=bl&ots=EZvckbLfEg&sig=VWhHTss2KcJeWN0BgmS-13MkvcU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiGns7okePcAhUEI6wKHUDpCcsQ6AEwAXoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=brigantine%20valkyrien&f=false>

<http://www.norwayheritage.com/articles/templates/voyages.asp?articleid=81&zoneid=6>

You can see my previous photo for more details, or read about it here:

<http://www.norwayheritage.com/articles/templates/voyages.asp?articleid=81&zoneid=6>



The Bergen Warf, Norway.

Bergen, Norway Day One. The iconic wooden buildings at this UNESCO world heritage site, the Bryggen Hanseatic Wharf in Bergen, have been standing here since 1702 and this area has survived many fires over the centuries.

We stayed just up the block here, Kirsten found us a hotel that looked right out onto the dock where The Valkyrien once took on my great, great grandparents and their children 143 years before. Ole (aged 32), Synneve (aged 33), Anne (aged 9), Thomas (aged 3) and Henrik (aged 14? months). It was amazing to stand here and just soak up my family's history and heritage.

Here's footage of this area from the 1930s:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I78HNB-y1PI>

These buildings have been renovated over the years only using the old traditional techniques.



The Bergen Wharf, Norway.

Here's another shot of the famous storefronts at the Bergen Wharf.

Later, at dinnertime, we ate here on the wharf at the fantastic Bryggeloftet & Stuene Restaurant,

which has been serving up "bergensk gjestfrihet" (mountain hospitality) and traditional Norwegian food for over 100 years.



Fisketorget Fish Market on the Warf. Bergen, Norway.

Of the many things I was excited to indulge in while visiting Norway, few were more anticipated for me than getting to try some Norwegian Crayfish!

The Fish Market (Fisketorget) on the Bergen Warf was where I was told I'd be able to get some... I was pretty excited to go there and see these nice fish mongers. And they were happy to see me too!

"I'm here for the crawfish and a Norwegian beer."



Hand Sized Sjøkreps at Bergen Warf!

Sjøkreps (sea crayfish) are also known as Norwegian Lobster (or Langoustine) is a close relative of the common lobster but is significantly smaller and slimmer with long narrow claws.

Innsjøkreps (lake crayfish) are the freshwater variety,

I'd heard legends of the greatness of Norwegian Crayfish (in Norwegian: Innsjøkreps or Sjøkreps) and I couldn't help but think about the Icelandic Lamb (In Icelandic: Lamb) I'd had on my trip in 2015, which was truly the best lamb I'd ever had. And if those Norwegian crawdaddies were like that... (swoon)!

I'd just narrowly missed having some Norwegian Crayfish for dinner back in Skjolden... but it was here, on the Bergen Warf at the famed Fisketorget Fish Market, that I would finally get my chance.

As a lifelong fan of crayfish / crawdaddies / mudbugs I'd dreamed of this moment. My friends, especially those who I took on my epic Mudbuggin' Adventure Tour of the Sacramento Delta in 2015, all know how much I love those critters. So this was something I had definitely been anticipating the whole trip!

The Fish Market (Fisketorget) on the Bergen Warf was where I was told I'd get some... but also probably my last chance, since my trip was almost over. I felt both a wave of relief that I'd managed to find some... and also a wave of terror as I saw the SIZE of them!



Sjøkreps on the grill at The Bergen Warf, Norway.

After all this time of searching for Norwegian Innsjøkreps or Sjøkreps this was indeed my moment! I ordered three. They sliced them in half and tossed them on the grill.

The guys working at this fish stand were super cool and you could tell they enjoyed having such an enthusiastic customer.



Sjøkreps and a Grans Lettøl for dinner at the Bergen Warf, Norway.

With my Sjøkreps coming off the grill I asked, "What local beer should I have with these?" The guys at the Fisketorget (fish market) suggested a Grans Lettøl Beer. "I drink it every day!" one said with a laugh.

Grans Lettøl is a light, easy drinking (2.4% ABV) Norwegian beer brewed in the city of Sandefjord, Norway since 1899. One of Norway's oldest breweries this lager was butterscotchy and a bit grassy. I enjoyed this Grans Lettøl but probably not as much as those Asse beers from Drammen, Norway.

#### Grans Lettøl Beer

<https://www.ratebeer.com/beer/grans-lettol/13526/>

#### Aass Beer

<https://www.ratebeer.com/beer/aass-pilsner/2329/>



Kjøttbasaren Market in Bergen, Norway.

Looking out over the Bryggen warf is the Kjøttbasaren Market. Built in 1874 this famous building houses the Hanseatic Museum and a historic "Meat Bazaar."

Restaurant Egon Kjøttbasaren is the outside portion here, with gorgeous views of the Bergen Warf. They serve Kyllingkebab, burgers, pastas and also a variety of "Amerikansk" pizzas.

Just past here is the Fløibanen Funicular that will take you to the top of Mount Fløyen and give you a beautiful view of Bergen and the Bergen warf.



Bergen from on top of Mount Fløyen.

We took the Fløibanen Funicular, the mountainside railroad, operating by cable with counterbalanced ascending and descending weight. My dad really was loving checking out how the Funicular worked.

The Fløibanen has been taking people up that steep mountainside since January 1918 and carries around 1 million passengers each year to this scenic overlook.

One hundred and forty three years earlier my family set sail from the Festningskai dock here to travel to North America and start their lives anew in a new world.

What an amazing view. Especially as the sun was setting.



The historic Bryggen Bergen Warf, Norway.

My folks are very active and were just as excited as I was to soak in as much of Norway as we could on this trip. And we'd scheduled in as much as the trip would allow. By this point we were all starting to feel the exhaustion setting in from running hard all trip, including several fjord hikes (up to 2,066 ft above sea level).

So as the Nordic sun was setting over the Bryggen Bergen Warf, we made our way back to our hotel. Which was right at the end of this row of historic buildings and looked out over the Festningskai dock.



The Festningskai dock at Bryggen Bergen Warf, Norway.

Just off shore here is where the Valkyrien was docked in those old photos.

On the right you can see the famous Bryggen Bergenhus Fortress which was right next to our hotel. We will be going there tomorrow and be surprised to run into a Renaissance Festival being held there. It was amazing.

We had one more day in Norway.

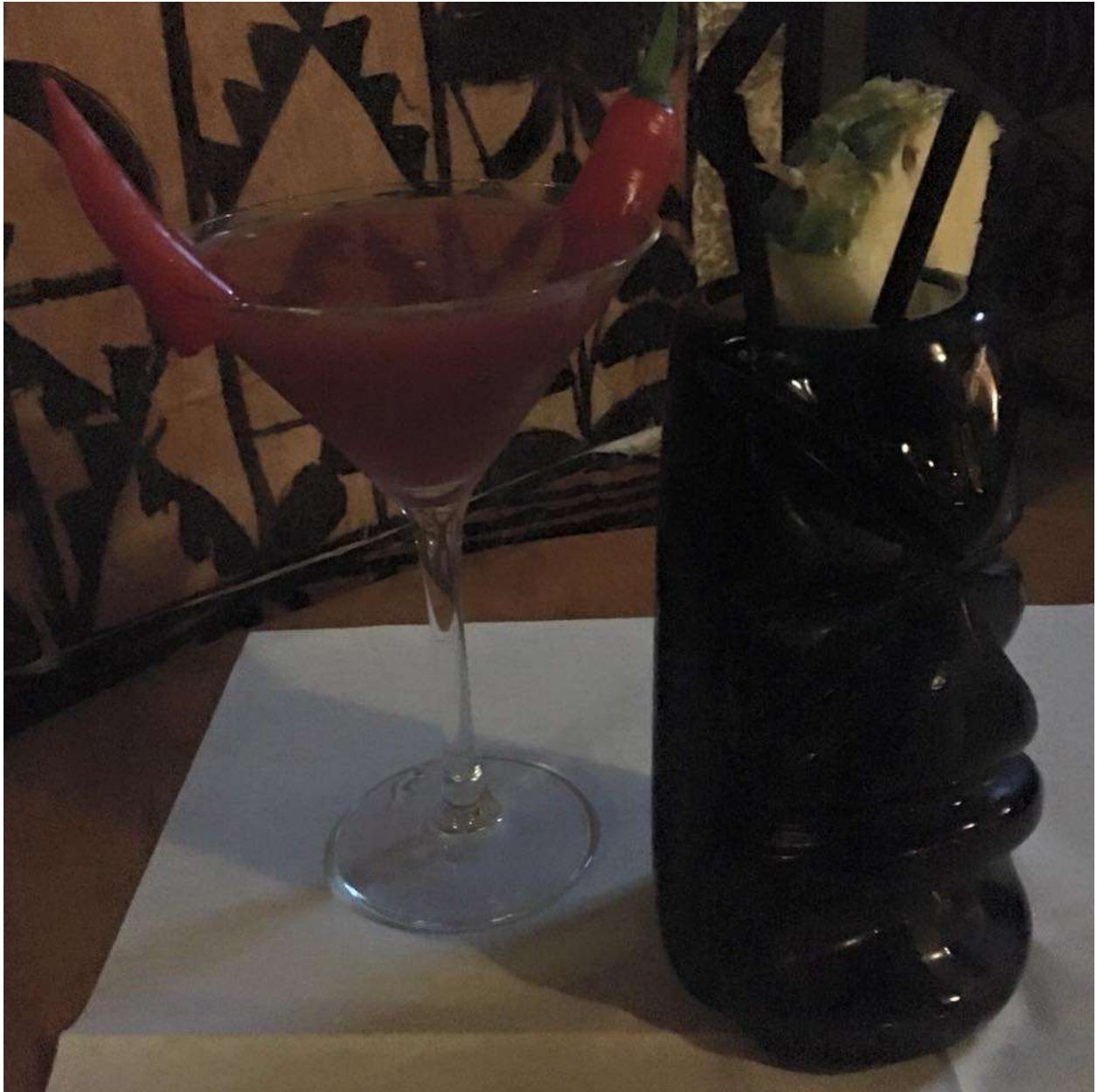


I had to get a photo of this!

Here's a bit about the music scene in Bergen, Norway. In the early nineties, Bergen was considered the "pop city" of Norway, while its rival Oslo was considered the "rock city." Of course that only made the underground rock scene in Bergen that much more intense and things have changed a lot in those years. The Bergen music scene includes all sorts of cool bands. Here's some notable ones you might want to check out.

Norwegian Black Metal legends Immortal and Gorgoroth, punk bands Aller Værste and Elektrisk Reg, indie rock bands Megaphonic Thrift and Kakkmaddafakka, synthpop bands Datarock and Casiokids, viking/extreme bands Enslaved and Helheim, pop bands Pogo Pops and Chocolate Overdose, electronic artists Lindstrøm and Todd Terje, folk pop bands Kings Of Convenience and Julie Stokkendal, Norwegian rap groups Hester V75, A-Laget, and Myra.

And while you are in Bergen be sure to check out the rock club Garage, which literally has a shrine to Lemmy from Motorhead in it.



Tonga Bar in Bergen, Norway.

After my parents went to bed we went and checked out the city's nightlife... including the hidden third floor Tonga Bar.

Yes, I went to \*another\* tiki bar in Norway! ([#IFindTikiBarsEverywhere](#)) The Tonga Bar in Bergen has a great staff and a delightful tiki-overload ambiance.

I had a "Sweet N' Spicy Aloha" cocktail and enjoyed the combination of strawberry, chili peppers and Tabasco. Kirsten got a Tonga Bar Mal Tai served up in a great mug.

Of course this wasn't the only place we stopped that night. We also went to the delightful bar Cafe

Legal at Christiesgate 11. Like Garage, where all the metal bands were playing, we never miss visiting there when we're in Bergen. I'm looking forward to making a visit to the Tonga Bar a tradition too.

#### SWEET N' SPICY ALOHA

Cointreau  
Lemon Juice  
Strawberry  
Fresh Chili  
Tobasco

#### TONGA BAR MAI TAI

White Rum ("Room" on the menu)  
Dark Rum ("Room" on the menu)  
Orange  
Pineapple  
Orgeat  
Grenadine



It's a Brunost Party!

Aside from the traditional Geitost brown cheese I also discovered two more varieties of brown Scandinavian whey cheese... Fløtemysost and Gudbrandsdalsost.

I'm seriously as excited as these girls on the package about these Norwegian brown cheeses! I make this exact same expression \*every time\* I think about how great this stuff is!

Fløtemysost is a 100% cow's milk Brunost with a mild taste and bright color. Invented in a mountain farm near Gålå, Norway by Anne Hov in 1863. Anne originally called this original brown cheese Feitost ("Fat Cheese").

Gudbrandsdalsost is a 24% goat's milk and 76% cow's milk Brunost with a richer taste and a darker caramel color. Gudbrandsdalsost is made in the Gudbrands Valley near Lillehammer.

In case you've lost your cheese notes - traditional Geitost is a 100% goat's milk Brunost which has both a caramel-like flavor and also an intense, Chèvre-like taste. Sometimes referred to as Ekte Geitost ("true goat's cheese").

I ended my first day in Bergen with Norwegian cheese and some Norwegian Aquavit. Or maybe it was the next morning... it all gets a bit fuzzy when you're taste-testing aquavits and eating the best cheese on the planet.



The Sjøfartsmuseum in Bergen, Norway.

We thought, perhaps, that there would be some more information on The Valkyrien and its historically tragic trip from Bergen, Norway in 1873 to be found here at the Bergen Maritime Museum. But no such luck.

Although this was a pretty great museum!

Bergen, Norway Day Two.



Henrik Ibsen statue in Bergen, Norway.

Like Oslo, Bergen has no small amount of fantastic statues all over the city. But this was definitely my favorite one we saw on this trip!

Henrik Ibsen is a famous Norwegian playwright, known for *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), and *Peer Gynt* (1867) among many others. According to my research, Ibsen is apparently the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare.

I love the slightly crazed look Ibsen has here (and those insane muttonchops!) c/o sculptor Nils Raa.

In the background is the Bergen National Theatre (Den Nationale Scene), Norway's oldest permanent theatre which was founded in 1850 by the Norwegian violinist Ole Bull.



The Baker Brun Bakery has been open at this location since 1893. The home of the world-famous Norwegian cinnamon bun Skillingsbolle (pronounced "schillinsbolleh").

Of course the cinnamon bun's original origin is hotly debated among historians and connoisseurs alike. This Norwegian variation was first developed right here by Ferdinand Brun in the 1890s and differs slightly from Swedish variations Kanelbulle (and the giant sized Hagabullar), Finnish variations Bostonkakku, and German variations Franzbrötchen.

Norwegian Skillingsbolle have that special something that makes them unique, ground cardamom in the dough and sprinkled granulated sugar on top.

The Baker Brun had huge enthusiastic groups going in and out carrying these so we had to get one straight out of the Brun family oven. It definitely did not disappoint.

Here's a recipe for traditional Norwegian Skillingsbolle from Norwegian baker Morton Schakenda, who runs the Bakeriet i Lom in Lom, Norway.

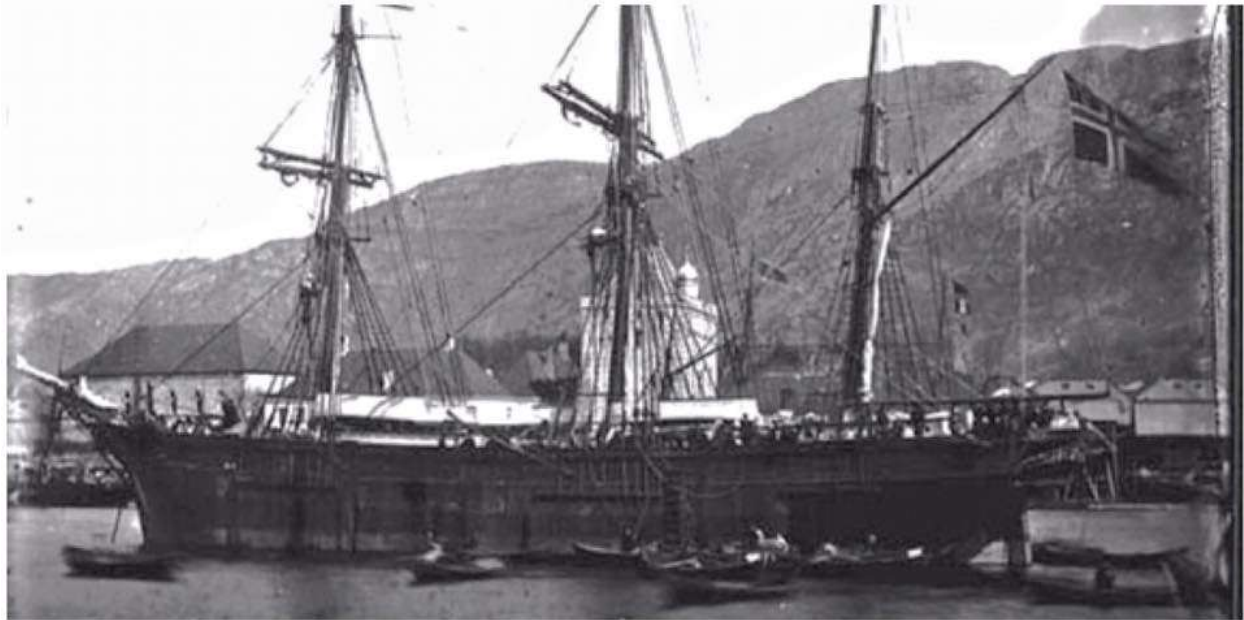
[https://transplantedbaker.typepad.com/the\\_transplanted\\_baker/2011/04/skillingsboller-schilling-buns.html](https://transplantedbaker.typepad.com/the_transplanted_baker/2011/04/skillingsboller-schilling-buns.html)



## Renaissance Festival @ Bryggen Bergenhus Fortress

Right next door to our hotel was the Bryggen Bergenhus Fortress ... and they were having a Renaissance Festival. This was probably one of the best places to have a Renaissance Faire ever, inside an ancient Norwegian castle. How funny.

We saw sword fighting, jewelry making, horseback racing and watched this band. I'm pretty sure I also got a meat pie.



The Valkyrien at Festningskai dock at Bryggen Bergen Warf, Norway in 1873.

That same Festningskai dock at Bryggen Bergen Warf, Norway in 2016.

I was so excited to get this photo.



## St. John's Church. Bergen, Norway

Built in 1893, St. John's Church (Norwegian: Johanneskirken) stands majestically over the city of Bergen. Over 200 feet high, about 4 1/2 times as tall as the highest section of the Great Wall of China.

The church's famous 183 key three-manual organ was built by Schlag and Söhne of Wurttemberg, rebuilt by JH Jørgensen in 1967 and restored by Christian Scheffler Orgelwerkstaff in 1999. This organ is played often, including a summer series of organ recitals by famous players and even a student showcase.

Other concerts are held in the church, usually the type of thing you'd expect, but occasionally things you wouldn't... like San Francisco electronic / glitch band Matmos in 2009! Crazy!

We didn't go inside this church but after seeing photos of the interior and the alter by Bergen painter Marcus Grønvold I wish we had!

A couple interior photos of this stunning church: <http://bergendomkirke.no/om/kirkene-vare/johanneskirken/>

Outdoor drone footage: <https://youtu.be/rAzg1ZuZyeo>

Super talented kids playing the famous Johanneskirken organ: <https://youtu.be/lQQSoI8gqLY>



Black Metal in Bergen, Norway.

Beyond The Gates Metal Fest @ Garage.

This flyer for the famous four-day black metal festival was hanging in the window of renowned metal bar Garage. What a great bar! Garage has a huge shrine to Lemmy from Motörhead so you know I'm definitely a big fan of that place.

The 2016 Beyond The Gates festival featured metal gods Venom Inc (Mantas + Abaddon + Demolition Man) and Gaahls Wyrd, fronted by the legendary Gaahl and playing a special set consisting solely of songs from his pre-Gorgoroth band Trelldom.

Gaahl's Wyrd (Sunnfjord, Norway)  
 Venom Inc. (Newcastle, England)  
 Destroyer 666 (Melbourne, Australia)  
 Secrets of the Moon (Osnabrück, Germany)  
 Degial (Uppsala, Sweden)  
 Gravidal (Bergen, Norway)  
 Black Anvil (New York, USA)  
 Infernal War (Częstochowa, Poland)

Sortilegia (Toronto, Canada)  
The Spirit Cabinet (Asten, Netherlands)  
Magister Templi (Oslo, Norway)  
Saturnalia Temple (Stockholm, Sweden)  
Gehennah (Forshaga, Sweden)  
Nekromantheon (Kolbotn, Norway)  
Malthusian (Dublin, Ireland)  
Sahg (Bergen, Norway)  
Black Magic (Leikanger, Norway)  
Ritual Death (Trondheim, Norway)  
Reptilian (Fusa, Norway)  
NettleCarrier (Oslo, Norway)



SEPTEMBER 2 & 3 2016 30 KM FROM PARIS

OPEN AIR

EXCITER



Dead  
Congregation

MANILLA ROAD

STEVE GORMAN  
Grim Reaper



ÎLE DE LOISIRS DE  
VAIRES-TORCY

+20  
BANDS

2 DAYS PASS:  
70€ + FEE  
FREE CAMP SITE

2 DAYS  
2 STAGES

www.fallofsummer.fr

REPUBLICA

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S-webzine

fhac

Fall of Summer 2016 metal festival in France!

This was a huge extreme metal festival just a short train ride from Paris, France... pretty cool to see a poster all the way here in Bergen, Norway for it! This was also in the window of Bergen's legendary rock club Garage.

Fall of Summer 2016 was a massive festival and later versions of this poster are just mind-bogglingly crammed with band logos, including bands like Satyricon, Unleashed, Paradise Lost and Goblin. But the ones we have here are:

Exciter (Ottawa, Canada)  
Revenge (Alberta, Canada)  
Nifelheim (Dals Långed, Sweden)  
Dead Congregation (Athens, Greece)  
Manilla Road (Wichita, Kansas, US)  
Grim Reaper (Swindon, England)  
Hell Militia (Paris, France)  
Abigail (Tokyo, Japan)

Velkommen  
til  
Pingvinen

HOS OSS FINNER DU ET BREDT UTVALG  
KORT- OG LANGREISTE DRIKKEVARER  
TIL HYGGE OG NYTTE HVERDAGS OG FEST.

FRA KJØKKENET KOMMER SMÅ  
OG STORE RETTER BASERT PÅ  
TRADISJONELLE NORSKE  
INGREDIENSER OG OPPSKRIFTER

VI LAGER GOD KAFFE OG  
BAKER KAKE HVER DAG!

WELCOME TO PINGVINEN!  
WE SERVE A WIDE VARIETY  
OF TRADITIONAL NORWEGIAN  
FOOD AND BEVERAGES.  
ASK THE STAFF FOR TODAY'S  
MENU IN ENGLISH.

### Tilsynsresultat

FOOD HYGIENE RATING

Prosjekt:  
KJØKKENET I  
BILHOLLEN



Tilgjengelighet: 17.04.2014

Smilende ansatte Smilende ansatte Smilende ansatte

#### DETTE HAR MATILSYNET SETT PÅ:

Ledelse og rutiner  
Hva forvent regjeringskontrollen å se i  
regulering

Markedsføring og informasjon  
Hva forvent regjeringskontrollen å se i  
regulering

Salg og utstyr  
Hva forvent regjeringskontrollen å se i  
regulering

Spørsmål og merking  
Hva forvent regjeringskontrollen å se i  
regulering

#### TEKSTENE TILGJENGELIGGJØR:

Hjelpen til å forstå og håndtere de  
mest vanlige spørsmålene. Du finner  
svarene på de vanligste spørsmålene  
i de ulike delene.

Informasjon, gi til  
ansatte



The Pingvinen!

We went and had lunch at the super quaint local spot, Pingvinen (The Penguin). They serve traditional Norwegian food here and we heard they might be a good place to find more Norwegian Aquavits. They were!

On my trips I often will take photos of signs like these that I cannot read and then later will painstakingly transcribe them into Google Translate so I can know what they say. Sometimes I don't realize until I am done typing everything in that the English translation is already right there on the sign itself! (laugh)

Such is the case with this sign. For those of you who do not read Norwegian (like me) you can either read the bottom of the sign or you can also check out what Google Translate told me after I typed everything in.

"With us you will find a wide selection of short and long-distance drinks for fun and benefit. Everyday a party.

From the kitchen comes small and large dishes based on traditional Norwegian ingredients and recipes.

We make good coffee and bake cake every day!"



At the Pingvinen in Bergen, Norway

The Pingvinen is a fantastic little eatery serving up traditional Norwegian food, Norwegian beers and also some great Norwegian Aquavit. While my dad went to take a nap Kirsten and I went to the Pingvinen for lunch.

Here's what Google Translate tells me those signs say.

"Take smile Hefeweizen"

And on that chalkboard...

"Pick fish"

"Jølster trout"

"Lamb and Rams"



More aquavit at Pingvinen!

Bergen Aquavit 1818 is made by master distiller Halvor Heuch. Somewhere I have tasting notes from this day but haven't been able to locate them.

My research on this bottle provided me with this fantastic translation: "Bergens Aquavit 1818 is based on an old prescription from HR Martens Brenneri in Bergen." Well if this is what you're prescribing, doc, sign me up!



### Gilde Non Plus Ultra Aquavit at the Pingvinen

The Glide Non Plus Ultra is a limited, 12 year aged, in hand-numbered bottles. This was the gold medal winner at the 2015 IWSC International Wine & Spirits Competition. At twelve years, is the longest aged aquavit in all of Norway. Uniquely it is aged in sherrywood barrels and has a strong sherry, vanilla and oak influence as a result.

I cannot recommend a visit to The Pingvinen more highly for folks visiting Bergen who are looking for fantastic Norwegian food and/or some great Norwegian Aquavits. The staff was a total delight.



### A couple more beverages at the Pingvinen

Åkre Gard Edel Sider Frå Hardanger is a Norwegian Ice Cider

Krönleins A Lonely Roscoe Alcoholic Ginger Beer 4.7% vol. from Halmstad, Sweden.

Inngang / Entrance



Enhjørningen Fiskerestaurant sign

Back at the Bryggen warf. I don't remember why we didn't end up eating here at the Enhjørningen (Unicorn) but we definitely went in and checked it out.

Enhjørningen Fiskerestaurant is Bergen's oldest seafood restaurant in the heart of the historic Bryggen warf.

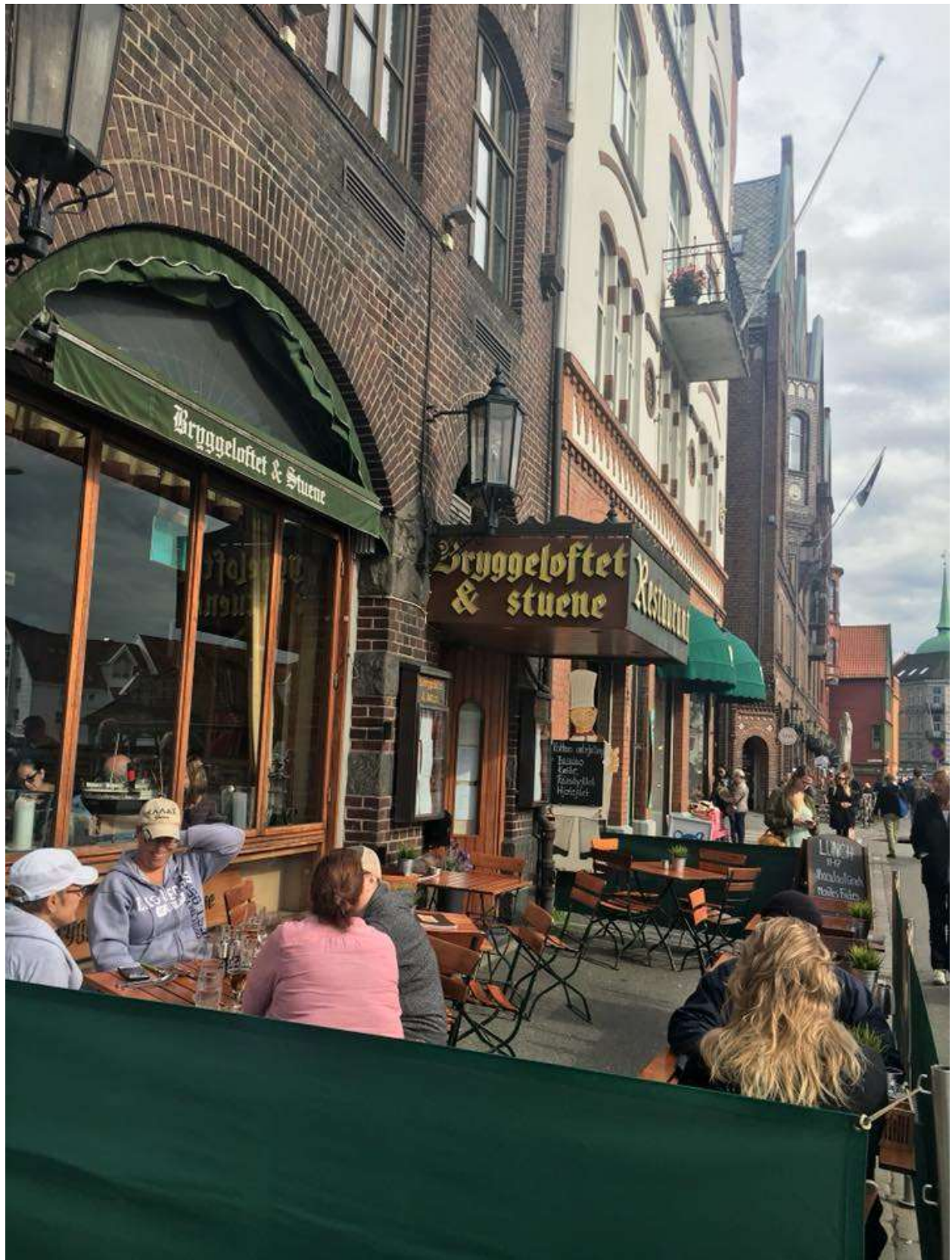
I really love the art on this sign.



Enhjørningen Fiskerestaurant sign

How could I not include a photo of the Enhjørningen's \*other\* sign?!

For some historical context of these mythical creatures and Norway... here's an interesting article on Erik The Red, Greenland and "the great Viking outlaw Unicorn Horn Hoax" <https://medium.com/@stevehatterton/when-vikings-cornered-the-market-on-unicorn-horns-d17a081043f5>



## Bryggeloftet & Stuene Restaurant

Although we didn't eat at the Enhjørningen we did here on the wharf at the fantastic Bryggeloftet & Stuene Restaurant, overlooking the exact spot on the Festningskai dock at Bryggen Bergen Warf where the Sime (Seim) family boarded the Valkyrien and sailed to America in 1873.

The Bryggeloftet & Stuene Restaurant has been serving traditional Norwegian food with "bergensk gjestfrihet" (mountain hospitality) for over 100 years.

My notes tell me I got a delicious reindeer fillet. The perfect choice for my final night in Norway.

After dinner we were treated to the greatest full spectrum double rainbow I have ever seen in my entire life. What a way to send us off, Norway! Hopefully my video for that uploaded, it was truly spectacular.



## Longboat Bar @ Sjøboden

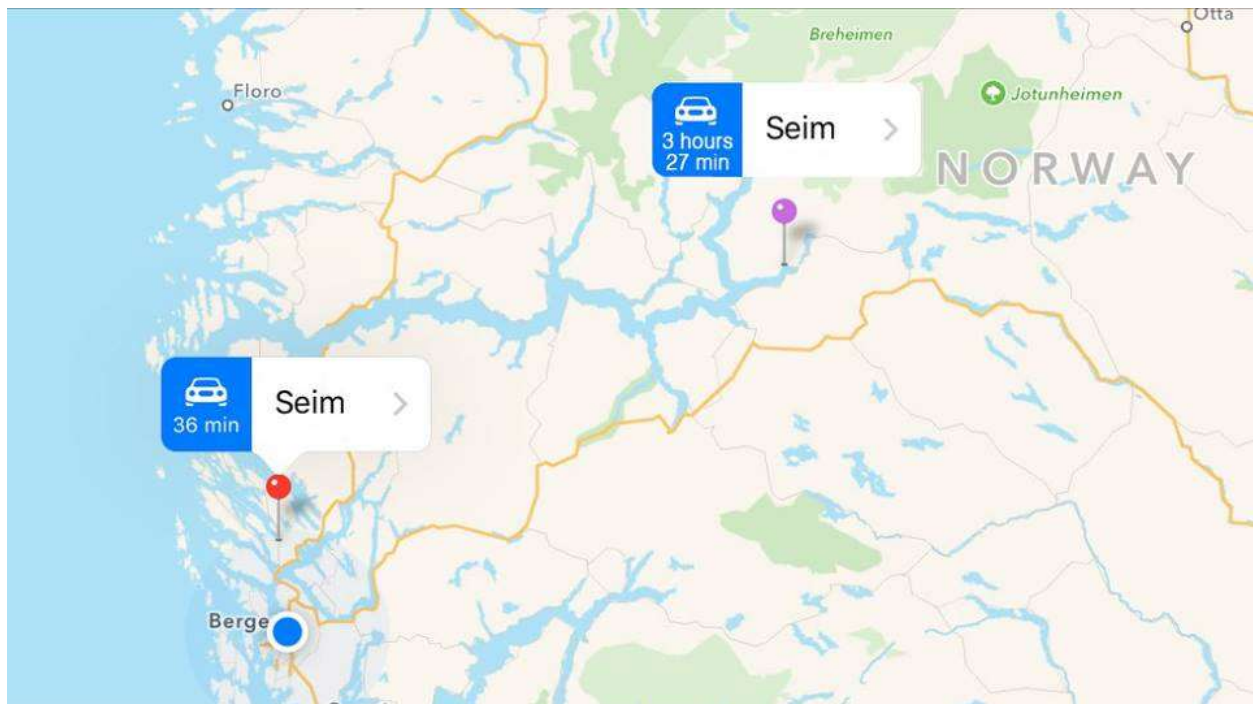
Last night in Norway! And we went out with a bang at Sjøboden!

According to our friends at Google Translate "sjøboden" means "warehouse."

The most hilariously (mis?)translated review I found for this place reads as follows: "A tragic place for clown farmers from the city Os !!" (LAUGH)

We had 4 aquavits here, hand picked by the bartender. After seeing Kirsten and I taste testing aquavit all trip my folks decided they wanted to try some too. They... found it... a bit strong! (laugh) By this time in the trip everyone was exhausted and we were just living in the moment so we did not write down what aquavit we had. (slaps head) Looks like we've got a great excuse to have to go back and visit Sjøboden again!

Since this is the final night and one of the last photographs in this set (lots of videos to come), this is probably where I should thank those of you who read all of this travelogue! The whole photoset project kind of spiraled out of control, with me going off on weird research tangents. I had a blast making it and getting all obsessive about details. Which, admittedly, got a bit much in this last portion! Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed it.



### The Two Villages of Seim

For those interested in more of my family history, I mapped both the villages of Seim from the port town of Bergen, Norway. The Eastern village of Seim on the right is where my family is from. The Western village of Seim is where Siri Dalehaug (the owner of the Skjolden Hotel) has family from.

My grandparents visited Norway sometime in the 1980s and near Bergen they saw a road sign for that Western village of Seim. Which was the closest (as far as I am aware) that any member of my family had ever gotten to our ancestral home.

Western Seim is where those previous photos are from. The only sign we saw for that Seim was in

Årdalstangen and it was for "Seimsdalen" which is the entire valley of Seim. That Eastern Seim. my family's true ancestral home, is too small to get an actual sign.

**Bakka, Norway** This adorable little fjord town of Bakka sits on the western shore of the Nærøyfjord, just a short distance (3 miles) from Gudvangen. Bakka means "on the hill" which is a pretty cute name for this adorable little town. The church here was built in 1859. It apparently has a pretty grim history but I couldn't find any info online... if you go there and find out please let me know!

For whatever reason Facebook moved these videos from earlier in the set to wherever they are in this set now. And doesn't seem to have a way for me to move them back to where they're supposed to be. So my apologies this video portion of my photoset are a bit out of order.

**Bakka, Norway** The town of Bakka sits right at the bottom of the Tuftefossen waterfall which starts at the Tufteelvi river, fed by several lakes on the Vardafjellet (way way up there at 4822 feet above sea level), and ends here in the Nærøyfjord.

The Tuftefossen waterfall crashes down from a total height of 2230 feet, that's almost half a mile!

### **Fog on the Nærøyfjord**

This foggy footage is the perfect ambiance to to discuss three more mythological creatures of Norway that can be found along the Nærøyfjord.

**Nøkken** - This terrifying male creature with a mouth full of razor sharp teeth dwells in rivers, ponds and lakes. They are especially powerful after sunset. A shape-shifter, they are known to appear as a stunning white horse, a handsome young harp player, and even a floating tree trunk or wooden boat. Of course all of this is to help the Nøkken lure hapless victims into deep water to drown and devour them. Spitting and then throwing a steel needle or cross into the water, and uttering a riddle for protection which includes the creatures name, will banish the Nøkken. For your travels this is the riddle of protection: "Nøkken! Nøkken! Needle in water. Virgin Mary tossed steel into the water! You are sinking I am floating!"

**Ratatoskr** - These mischievous mythic squirrels are known as troublemakers and for fueling spiteful relationships. And yet they have an important role in Norse Cosmology because they are the messengers of the Gods, running up and down the world tree Yggdrasil with messages between the eagle and the hawk Veðrfölnir, perched atop Yggdrasil, and the dragon Níðhöggr, who dwells beneath one of the three roots of the tree. Ratatoskr means "drill-tooth" or "bore-tooth."

**Draugar** - The Draugar are undead corpses brought back to life and reanimated by the force of their own personal will. They are always surrounded by the unmistakable stench of decay. Both land and water versions live in their graves, often guarding treasure or existing to wreak havoc on living beings, or torment those who had wronged them in life.

One more just for good measure...

**The Origin of the Nærøyfjord** - According to Anita Yasuda's EXPLORE NORSE MYTHS book, an ancient legend tells of magical creatures using Mount Beitel to carve the Nærøyfjord. This is the first I've heard of this legend so clearly more research on this is required. Beitel means "chisel."

### **Sognefjord to the Nærøyfjord**

More footage of our ferry ride along the Sognefjord to the Nærøyfjord.

As Facebook has decided to shuffle up my videos this one was actually filmed before the others in this set, and is part of the Sognefjord just before the Nærøyfjord.

The Sognefjord is Norway's longest and deepest fjord, extending all the way from the coast near Bergen all the way to the vast mountains of the Jotunheimen at Skjolden. At its deepest, Sognefjorden plunges more than 4,265 feet deep and the mountains along the fjord rise to more than 5,570 feet.

The narrowest and best known of the many arms of the Sognefjord, the Nærøyfjord is famous for steep mountainsides, hanging valleys, towering peaks, snowfields, and hundreds of waterfalls everywhere you look.

**Just past Amlabukti Bay on the Sognefjord** This is from the beginning of our ferry ride, just off shore from Kaupanger in Amlabukti Bay.

The nearby town of Amla, Norway has a webcam  
here: <https://www.webcams.travel/webcam/1479854583-amlar5-mannheller-ferjekai>

We'd just had a quick little rainfall and some great rainbows over the fjord but I didn't have my camera out and I missed them.

### **Bøyabreen glacier at Fjærland, Norway.**

This place was amazing! Æsir brings his rain as Frigga spins the clouds on her loom! Standing just above the gorgeous Brævasshytta restaurant I shot this 360° panoramic shot of the Bøyabreen glacier and the view at Fjærland. There are something like 30 waterfalls in this shot. I caught this footage as the rain lightened and the clouds were descending over the mountains upon the valley. Within minutes this entire view was completely obliterated as the white clouds took over the entire valley. By the time we were done with our lunch, the clouds had retreated and it was all back again. In a country filled with majestic sights this was definitely one of the most awe-inspiring. Truly epic in epicness.

The giant windows of the Brævasshytta Cafeteria overlooking the Bøyabreen glacier make this spot one of the most beautiful lunchtime views on Earth. More here: <https://www.facebook.com/brevasshytta>

For those of you who like a little Norwegian metal, here's some appropriately epic, doom-y, Norwegian metal from Trondheim's The 3rd and the Mortal to go with your watching: <http://youtu.be/ijxu3XSS1Mw>

**Sheep Stampede on the Tindevegen.** This footage is from back at the Tindevegen in the Jotunheimen Mountains, Norway. I only managed to catch about half of this stampede, and there were a lot more to come, it seemed to go on forever! Lots of laughing as these cuties charged across the only road that goes through this area.

I'm no sheep expert but I believe this breed are the Spælsau, the famous Old Norwegian Short Tail Sheep, that were saved from extinction in the 1970s and are now a common sight once again. (Norway is magical)

If you want to get to know some of Norway's sheep, check out the biographies and the #sheepwithaview map here:  
<https://www.visitnorway.com/sheepwithaview/>

**Avdalsfossen Waterfall, Utladalen, Norway.** Witness the Utle River and also the 567 foot high Avdalsfossen Waterfall!

When we were first planning this trip to Norway I got it into my head that we should stay up at Avdalen Gård Farm which is at the very top of this waterfall. All the way up there! That idea was just kind of crazy to be doing on this trip because it would mean a several mile and very steep hike each way to even get to the car. But someday I hope to visit the Avdalen Gård Farm, It may very well have the single the greatest view on Earth. Wait'll you see these photos and videos:

Avdalen Gård Farm: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avdalen>

View of Avdalsfossen from Avdalen Gård Farm: <https://youtu.be/gDeuLHIQ01E>

### **Descent to Øvre Årdal, Norway.**

It's very exciting to be this close to where my Great, Great Grandparents and their kids (Great Grandpa Sime) originally came from!

Enjoy these fantastic mountain road switchbacks from out the front window on the descent to Øvre Årdal from high up in the Jotunheimen Mountains. This is Utladalen, Norway's deepest valley. We'll soon be on the Årdalsfjorden, where the village of Seim is located.

In this footage you can really see how tight these roads are. We literally had to pull over to let the \*motorcycles\* squeeze by. And look at how far on the edge of the road they had to go to do it.

While it's impossible to really see how steep this grade is (up to 12.5% in some places) but on our way back through here (going \*up\* that time) a camper truck in front of us was literally spinning tires and sliding backwards towards us on some of these turns. Very scary.

### **Urnes Stave Church, Norway.**

Hastily-filmed shaky-cam footage of the outside of Urnes Stave Church (built around 1130 AD). You can see our Fortidsminneforeningen guide showing my folks and Kirsten the detailed carvings on the side of the church, which date back to 1070 AD, and define the "Urnes style" which is equally influenced by Viking art and The Book of Kells.

There is a \*lot\* of controversy about what these carvings symbolize. A WORLD HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE (2003) suggests the carvings are intertwined snakes and dragons representing the end of the world according to the Norse legend of Ragnarök. Still others believe the bottom carving is of a lion, symbolizing Christ, fighting the evil serpent Satan.

More info on Urnes here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes\\_Stave\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes_Stave_Church)

### **Urnes Stave Church, Norway.**

This is a \*very\* rare, very quick video walk-through of the Urnes Stave Church. You can see how detailed the carvings are inside this oldest stave church on Earth (1132 AD).

In fact, when filming, I was not aware of how rare this occasion would be! Fortidsminneforeningen, the Society for the Preservation of Norwegian Ancient Monuments, supposedly forbids photographs for purposes other than research from being taken inside Urnes. I was not aware of this until very recently (otherwise I certainly would not have asked). Fortunately I was politely given permission to film this quick walkthrough, as long as it was quick. As you can see I was a \*very\* quick!

Also a research group had taken over the church and we were fortunate to have arrived just before they closed to the public. The gentleman in the video literally locked the door behind me.

So I consider myself extra lucky to have gotten this footage for you guys! I hope you enjoy it.

More info on Urnes here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes\\_Stave\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnes_Stave_Church)

**Hjellefossen Waterfall, Utladalen, Norway.** Norway is home to some of the tallest, most magnificent waterfalls on Earth, and the spectacular Hjellefossen Waterfall is definitely one of the best. There are \*so many\* waterfalls in this part of Norway that you have to completely redefine your definition of what "impressive" is. The Hjellefossen is right off the Utladalsvegen road (no hiking required) and here the Hjelledola-Utla river drops a full 1,197 feet. "Hjelle" is from the Old Norse word hjalli meaning "ledge".

Standing at the bottom of this I can tell you that the Hjellefossen ROARS.

### **Tindevegen in the Jotunheimen Mountains. Norway.**

Jotunheimen translates to "home of the Jötnar"... and as you'll remember from our aquavit tasting, Jötnar are a mythological race of giants that live in Jötunheimr, one of the Nine Worlds of Norse cosmology. And the breath-taking views as can be seen here on the Tindevegen in the Jotunheimen Mountains will definitely make you a believer in those giant trolls and mythical Nine Worlds.

The steep and narrow Tindevegen is the highest mountain pass in all of Northern Europe, a 20 mile snake-like mountain road, among the beautiful mountain summits (which at least feel like they are) high above the world of Midgard far below.

One of the most awe-inspiring roads on Earth, the Tindevegen reaches 4,347 feet above sea level, over an 11-mile climb with sections at 12.5% grade and an average of 7.3%. This mountain pass is only open from May to November each year, as mighty mountain snows make this route impossible for much of the year. According to Norwegian myth, the most extreme snowfall is expected during Fimbulwinter, the "mighty winter" that is the immediate prelude to the events of Ragnarök, the end of the world.

More on the Tindevegen here: <http://www.dangerousroads.org/europe/norway/6092-tindevegen.html>

**Above the Clouds. Sognefjellsvegen pass, Norway.** Ascending into the lands above the skies. somewhere near Turtagør, Norway, Continuing on Sognefjellsvegen pass heading up to the Tindevegen, the highest mountain pass in all of Northern Europe, to Øvre Årdal on the other side.

Day six.

More info on the Sognefjellet: <http://www.nasjonalturistveger.no/en/routes/sognefjellet>

### **Romantiske Veggen tunnel, Norway**

There are a few tunnels on the Romantiske Veggen (the romantic road) but none as epic as this!

One lane wide. No lights, No reflectors. No end in sight.

Enjoy this white-knuckle journey through this tight, seemingly endless tunnel, which also happens to have a cloud lurking within! Thankfully there wasn't a car coming from the other direction!

Not for the weak of heart. But don't worry, those oppressively ever-shrinking walls are just an optical illusion. Trust me.

Enjoy!

**Romantiske Vegen, the "romantic road". Lusterfjord, Norway.** Driving the "romantic road" to Urnes in a light rain. You can get an idea how narrow this road is. Here we pass the farm where Kroken Fukt og Bær organic juices and jams are made. They make juices out of locally-picked Rhubarb, Gooseberries, Raspberries, Blueberries, and apples. There are few things in life better than a bottle of their amazing uncarbonated Rhubarb soda!

More about the farm & museum: <http://en.sognefjord.no/things-to-do/the-juice-house-museum-sorheim-luster-p832823>

More about the juices / jams they make (in Norwegian): [www.haukadal.no](http://www.haukadal.no)

**Hopperstad Stavkyrkje in Vik, Norway.** Explore with me the Hopperstad Stavkyrkje in Vik, Norway built around 1130 AD!

Since there wasn't any fellow tourists around except us, I decided to film a little walk-through video for you guys.

**Where EMPIRE STRIKES BACK was filmed.** Snowspeeders, AT-AT Walkers, Echo Base... welcome to the Battle of Hoth! Finse, Norway is the tiny mountain village where the greatest STAR WARS movie of all, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, was filmed. If you ever wanted to stand on the exact spot where Han Solo cut open a dead Tauntaun's stomach to save Luke Skywalker's life... this is it!

At 4,009 feet above sea level, Finse is the highest train station in all of Norway. And to get here you will have to take the train. Because there simply are no roads to Finse.

Read all about STAR WARS filming locations, artifacts and where to stay in Finse on [StarWars.com](http://www.starwars.com/news/galactic-backpacking-visiting-real-world-hoth) here: <http://www.starwars.com/news/galactic-backpacking-visiting-real-world-hoth>

**Lonely farmhouse near Ål, Norway.** A short video outside the Bergensbanen train window. Extreme black metal / viking metal band Disintegration hails from Ål, and is supposed to have recorded their music in a tiny farmhouse just like this one.

Check out Disintegration's song "Nattemørket" and others here: <https://disintegrationband.bandcamp.com/track/nattem-rket>

**Double Rainbow over Bryggen Warf in Bergen, Norway** What an amazing end to our epic trip to Norway and visit to the Sime (Seim) family homeland! On our very last night we saw this mind-blowing full-spectrum double rainbow over Bryggen Warf. This is the brightest rainbow(s) I have ever seen, they just lit up the sky. My iPhone footage just doesn't do justice to the spectacularness. Thanks, Norway!

