

A Norwegian Fjord Road Trip

Documented for members of the Tesla Owners' Group UK, Summer 2019

Preface

We have written up a road trip from the UK to the fjord region of Norway, for use by members of TOGUK. (Please respect copyright and do not forward or republish content or images.) Huge thanks to TOGUK members who helped us plan: especially Tim Batten whose trip we based our route on. We hope that sharing our experience will encourage others to visit this amazing place.

Norway is an astonishingly beautiful country, with lovely people, many tranquil places, and some fabulous roads. Our trip was about 3,500 miles and took 24 days.

Your experience in Norway will be very dependent on the climate (many of the roads in our route are closed in Winter). Our trip was in August, when we had nice warm weather with the beginnings of rain and mist settling in at times. The local holiday season was well past and some places caught us out by shifting to their winter opening hours as early as 12 August.

Norway is an expensive country (for UK people) to visit. We paid more than we had hoped, not just for accommodation but also for groceries and everyday living expenses (probably not helped by our addiction to various Norwegian sweets: we got through mountains of chocolate coated marshmallow bears called Bamse Mums!).

Getting to Norway

There are several options to reach Norway, via Denmark or Sweden. We drove up through Germany and Denmark, taking the ferry from Hirtshals (at the northern tip of Denmark) to Kristiansand. This route allowed us to make a couple of interesting stops in Denmark too.

On our way back, just for variety (and for a day's rest!) we took the world's largest car ferry, which also describes itself as a cruise ship, from Oslo to Kiel in northern Germany.

It was mostly straightforward driving. The worst traffic bottlenecks were the M25 (>3 hours each time!) and Antwerp.

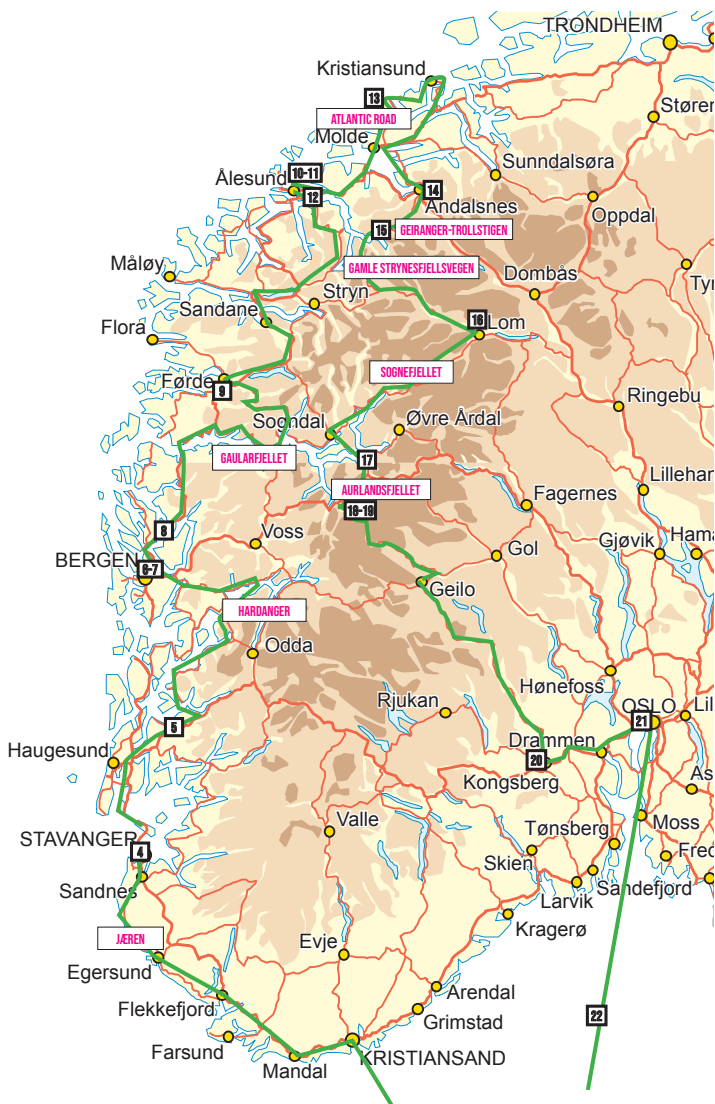
Seeing the fjords

We structured our trip around the Norwegian National Scenic Routes (referred to as NSR below). There are 18 of these in Norway, and we visited 8 of them (see map on next page): Jæren, Hardanger, Gaularfjellet, the Atlantic Road, Geiranger-Trollstigen, Gamle Strynesfjellvegen, Sognefjellet, Aurlandsfjellet.

Many Scenic Routes have been very carefully developed to include scenic viewpoints, built in an environmentally sensitive modern style and worth visiting for the architecture as well as the scenery. We soon developed a deep respect for the

Trollstigen (Troll's Footpath)





Our 8 National Scenic Routes

way Norwegians relate to, and care for, their environment.

There is a good website (www.nasjonale turistveger.no/en) which describes the journey you will make (and includes a section on each of the stopping points on these routes).

We had to work hard to keep away from cruise ship crowds. Most of rural Norway is delightfully empty, but in certain places cruise ships will dump 3000, 5000, or even 10,000 people into a tiny town. (Locals told us this is a significant problem, because the huge crowds do not spend money ashore: they bring pollution and traffic without contributing to the local economy.) We found that Flåm, in particular, had turned into a high-volume ship/train/coach interchange point. The better-known mountain roads, especially Trollstigen with its tight turns and narrow passing places, can be choked by tour buses, caravans and campervans.

The solution if you seek the quieter side of Norway is to avoid major cruise ports (docking dates are listed on some websites), and in a couple of cases to get up very early (eg be out by 0600) so you can have mountain roads to yourself. The latter made a huge difference to how much we enjoyed the mountains.

We added some side-trips to see Stave Churches. These are very special buildings, constructed in the middle ages with no nails (using crafts learned from Viking shipbuilders). Norway had 2000 of these but only 28 have survived. Each is unique.

Our plans were arranged to do at least one significant, and new, thing each day. Our priority was the countryside, but we did visit bigger centres like Stavanger (with an interesting museum about Norway's oil industry, which has been central in their economy); Bergen; Ålesund; Kristiansund; Kongsberg; Oslo. While the cities had their own attraction, the real beauty is out on the mountain roads so if doing this again we would spend less, not more, time in towns.

Accommodation

Accommodation is a matter of budget and taste, so you will make your own choices. We constructed a varied plan, allowing us to save money in some places and splurge in others. Including our journeys to/from the UK we booked four stays in cabins in campgrounds; 8 in apartments (mostly AirBnB); 6 in cheap or moderate hotels; 2 in special hotels; and 1 on a cruise ship/ferry. We booked months in advance to get lower prepaid rates.

Cabins are everywhere: these are the Norwegians' standard holiday destination. They are fairly cheap, have plenty of space, and if you choose carefully they can be at a good standard. You need to request linen and towels (for a rental fee) or bring your own. Before departing, you need to clean the bathroom and kitchen and sweep or vacuum the cabin.

Because accommodation is such a personal choice we've not listed everywhere we stayed. A few special places warranted a mention.

Generally we stayed one night in each place, with a 2-night break every 5-6 days and a 3-night rest in the middle of the trip. We economised by bringing a "larder" and a "fridge" (a big plastic box, and a cool box prepacked with 20 frozen water bottles, refreshed when had access to a freezer mid-trip) so we could eat some meals from our own supplies.

Driving a Tesla in Norway

Norway is, as a local advised us, "Tesla country". Thanks to a range of successful government incentives, electric vehicles are everywhere; there is a great charging infrastructure; and there are various discounts available to EV drivers.

Our Model S was a fabulous car for this trip. Teslas just eat up mountain roads, whisking us comfortably and quietly through Norway's wonderful nature and scenery.

We suggest four preparation steps:

1. Although we did most of this journey using Tesla's super-charger network, we also made half a dozen stops at rapid chargers in the Grønn Kontakt network which worked flawlessly (CCS or ChaDeMo). A few weeks before travelling you can order an RFID card from them and they will post to the UK at no extra charge.

2. Order a Norwegian toll tag (autopass.no). The process is a little complicated as you have to specify which regional toll provider you want (we used Fjellinjen AS for no particular reason) then this is tied to your pass. You also have to make sure their database has your car as electric so you get the discounts.

3. Sign up on Facebook for the Tesla Owners' Club of Norway (TOCN). They are a wonderful, helpful group and if you get into trouble they will advise. As with TOGUK, if you do appreciate what they are doing you may also sign up as a paid member of TOCN for a modest cost, which helps their work.

4. Get very familiar with abetterrouteplanner.com which we used constantly to plan charging and multi-leg journey times. Learn all ABRP's useful functions and pre-load segments of your route into ABRP before you left.

ABRP, and the inbuilt Tesla software, generally did a good job of understanding hills (eg on one leg we lost half our available charge going up a mountain, causing us to panic, but both systems accurately estimated that we would reach the charger 20 km away with 6% *more* battery than we had at the top!).

Within Norway, driving is quite sedate: it is rare to find a speed limit higher than 70 or 80 km/h (rather different from 200 km/h on the Autobahn earlier in the trip!). We soon settled into this pace, which is necessary because of the narrow roads. However we did have to calculate our journey times quite carefully because what looks like a 2-hour drive could easily be twice that. Our longest days were about 5-6 hours driving and charging time.

You will be hopping on and off car ferries on most days, and this also needs to be accounted for when planning your days (typically 15-30 minutes wait then 10-30 minutes crossing). They are used to Teslas and there is generally plenty of room: some ferries even sell ice-cream and hotdogs!

Bring clothes for all reasonable seasons and a towel to dry off before getting back into the car. We took our hiking boots but didn't use them much. One thing which we hadn't expected was the lack of places to pull up and get out for a wander: many of the fjord routes are along the edge with a mountain on one side and water on the other; you can only stop where a rest area has been constructed (there are passing places but you may inconvenience other vehicles if you pull up there).



Hopperstad Stave Church

Days 1-3

We drove through the Channel Tunnel, stopping overnight in Germany (Tesla charger at Hotel Landgut Stemmen, a decent family hotel and a change from the usual motorway places). Then on to Denmark: we visited Ribe, the oldest city (an alternative break point would be the fabulous Moesgaard museum in Aarhus which we had visited on a previous trip).

We spent a morning in Billund, home of LEGO—not Legoland, which is just a franchised theme park, but the new LEGO House, an architectural must-see and a great place to soak up some of the amazing LEGO company (and to play!).

Day 4

Stopping overnight in Hirtshals, we took the Fjord Line fast ferry to Kristiansand in Norway. The ferry's "comfort seats" give you a prebooked table and buffet brunch.

Then along NSR Jæren (Ogna-Bore) which was a gentle introduction to Norwegian countryside, arriving in Stavanger in time to visit the Petroleum Museum and have dinner.

Day 5

Drove Rosendal/Jondal including the first part of NSR Hardanger (Jondal-Herand).

Day 6

Followed the rest of NSR Hardanger up to Utne, across on the little ferry and back down the other side of the fjord then onwards to Bergen.

Day 7

Rest day in Bergen. We visited Troldhaugen, the lovely villa of composer Edvard Grieg (going early to avoid a rush of tour

buses) and enjoyed a nice piano recital in Troidhaugen's little concert hall.

Day 8

From Bergen we drove Lavik / Balestrand / Dragsvik.

Day 9

Morning side-trip to Vik and back (Hopperstad Stave Church) then NSR Gaularfjellet from Balestrand to Viksdalen—a spectacular route with stopping places for waterfalls and views. (We blew a tyre on this road so had the special treat of an hour's fast mountain driving on a flatbed recovery truck: amazing to see how relaxed the locals are with these twisty narrow roads!).

Finally on for an overnight stop in Førde (which a local described as “Norway's ugliest city” and he may have had a point there).

Day 10

After charging in Sandane, we took the impressive electric ferry from Anda to Lote and drove the scenic route via Hornindal to Ålesund.

Day 11-12

Rest days in Ålesund. The Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) architecture was interesting, but there were many tourist crowds and if we did the trip again we would spend less time here.

On our last evening here we moved to the Storfjord Hotel, a short drive from Ålesund. This luxurious hotel was stunning and we were very glad we had reserved some of our budget for a stay here. The staff were delightful, food was good, and the views from our room were super. It was probably one of our best hotel stays ever: we would love to come back here in Winter!



Hustadvika Gjestegård

Day 13

Reluctantly prising ourselves out of the Storfjord Hotel, we drove via Molde to reach the start of the Atlantic Road.

We stayed at Hustadvika Gjestegård (Tesla Destination Charger) in a cabin, built in the traditional Norwegian style (with plants growing on the roof). It is right by the sea so we started to feel the brisk, biting winds of the north Atlantic.

Day 14

Up early (out by 0615 so we would have the countryside to ourselves) and along NSR Atlantic Road, with its bridges hopping between tiny islands. As we had beaten the tour buses, we drove the route a second time to experience it again.

Then after a stop at Kvernes Stave Church we went to Kristiansund for brunch. Then Rødven Stave Church and on to Åndalsnes for the evening. We stayed in a delightful log cabin (in Breivikstranda) through AirBnB. By staying in this area we were able to drive early the following day.

The Atlantic Road





Rødven Stave Church

Day 15

By this point of the trip, every day was revealing another stunning landscape.

A very early start (out by 0600) and on to the 11 hairpin bends of the Trollstigen, often described as the best drive in Europe. It is indeed an amazing road, although we found a couple of others of similar standard. The problem is that this road gets very congested with tour buses: it was coloured dark red on Google Maps by mid morning for most of the week we were visiting. However at 0630 we had the road to ourselves: we drove up, down, and back up again! (Just as we finished at the last viewpoint, the tour buses arrived and we were surrounded by 100 agitated people racing to get to the best spot with their selfie sticks...)

We continued on, still just ahead of the tour buses bringing crowds up from the cruise ships in Geiranger, through peaceful countryside to reach our hotel for breakfast, a walk along some streams, and a well earned rest.

This was our second of our two high-end hotel stops: the Juvet Landscape Hotel. It is a memorable, fascinating place, built to merge almost completely into the surrounding woods and hills.

Day 16

A long driving day today. We made our way to Grotli and took the NSR Gamle Strynefjellsvegen, then back by tunnel. This is an old, narrow mountain pass through rocky landscape, with turquoise streams and lakes catching the melted snow from fast waterfalls. Tour buses are not allowed (hoo-ray) and we had a picnic, completely undisturbed, overlooking a vast valley below.

We made it to Lom in time to see the Stave Church, then dinner at BrimiBue (a beacon of gastronomy in this surprisingly remote little town).

Day 17

We drove via Skjolden to NSR Sognefjellet, yet another amazing landscape. Then a lovely detour along a narrow road to the stave church in Urnes, taking a little ferry back to rejoin the main road at Solvorn. Then via another stave church in Kaupanger to Lærdal for an overnight stop.

Day 18

Another beautiful mountain drive: NSR Aurlandsfjellet (the Snow Road which twists its way from Lærdal to Aurland).

We briefly visited Flåm, which sadly has become a ghastly tourist interchange and little else. We retreated to a fabulous apartment in Aurland (highly recommended: Otnes Sør, found through booking.com) with a stunning view for a long rest.

Day 19

Rest day, Aurland. Much needed.

Day 20

Most of the spectacular scenery was now behind us. We drove through the Lærdal tunnel (the world's longest road tunnel), and via stops to see stave churches in Borgund and Torpo, ending in Kongsberg (there may be better options) as a convenient break point overnight.

Day 21

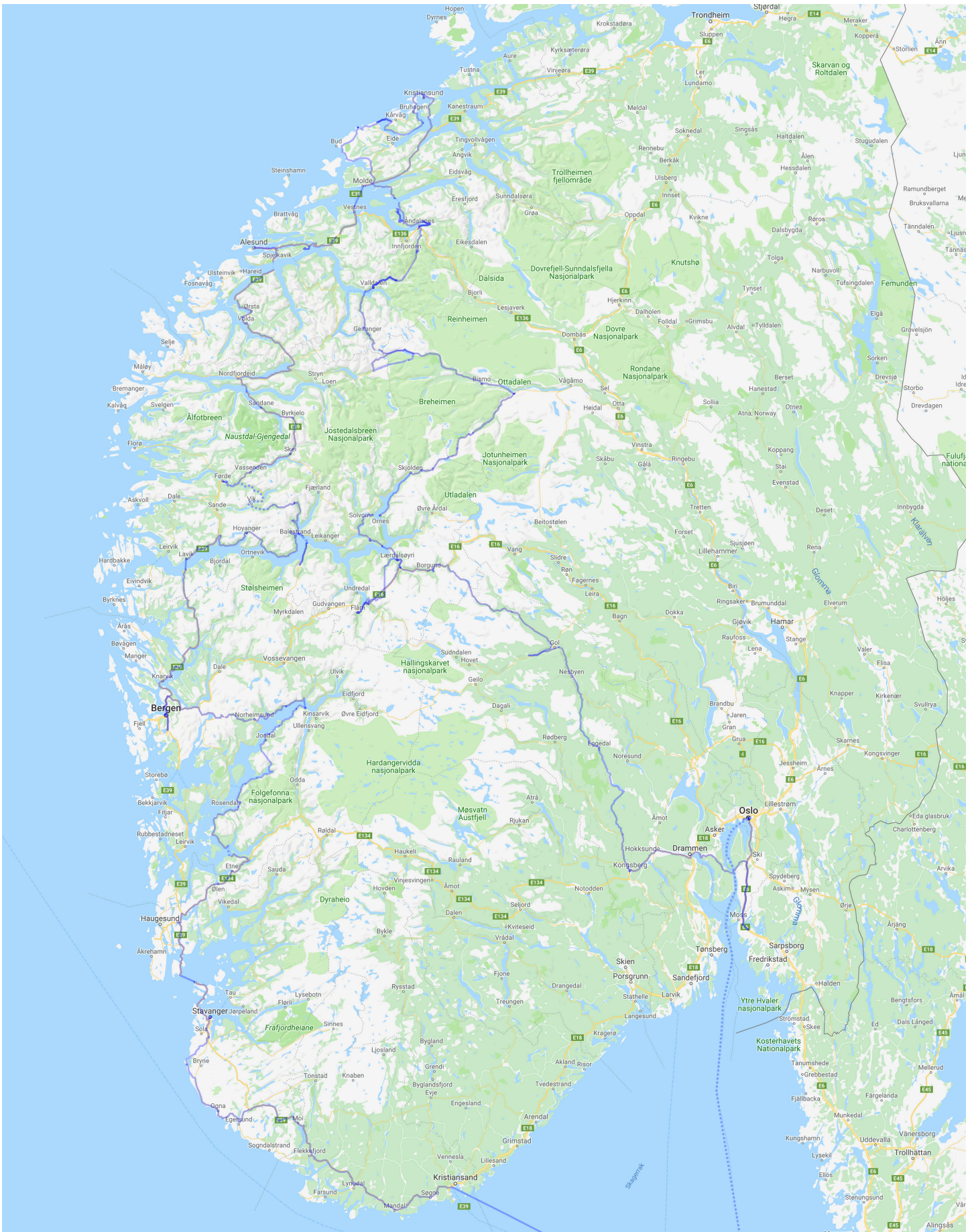
Into the morning traffic jams of Oslo, and a big shock to be in a city again. At the insistence of our son we made a side-trip to Europe's largest Tesla supercharger (42 stalls, but in a very bleak location). We enjoyed the Viking Ship Museum and a night at Oslo's stunning modern opera house.

Day 22

Onto the Color Magic, the world's largest car ferry which also thinks of itself as a cruise ship. We holed ourselves up in a nice suite and took a breather before the rest of the journey home. The ship departs at 1400 (loading from 1200) and we could have been in Kiel by midnight if we had driven flat out all the way there; but it was far better to have a day's rest.

Day 23-24

Ship arrived on time at 1000 and we drive home via an overnight stop in the Netherlands.



Route travelled (as tracked by TeslaFi)

Disclaimer: This document describes a route we travelled, not necessarily a route you should travel. Please do your own research about road closures, ferry routes, travel times, traffic conditions, charging facilities etc.