



RON'S DIARY

BY RON MOON

# Mountains, Fjords and Midnight Sun in Norway

**W**e're at the best 'bush' camp we have ever had in Europe. At 2000km north of Oslo in Norway and 200km into the Arctic, after officially crossing the Arctic Circle at 66°33'N, we are camped on a small bay where its white sands are washed by clear blue, near ice-cold, water.

Across the 20km wide stretch of the Vestfjorden Fjord, on what is our western horizon, the bare black rock and snow-draped peaks of Lofoten Island are slashed across the skyline. Often shrouded in dark black cumulus, as I write, the peaks are only touched with white fluffy cotton wool clouds. With luck, the weather will stay that way for another few days.

We've now been in Norway for about ten days after crossing the North Sea from Newcastle in the UK to Stavanger, an historic port off the southwest coast. It was a bit lumpy aboard the ferry but the 19-hour trip could have been much worse - for the North Sea, at least, it was calm!

We've been pushing north, first close to the coast where you quickly realise that driving in beautiful, dramatic Norway is a series of getting on and off ferries, driving through tunnels and/or cruising across bridges. One day we drove through 40-odd tunnels, used a half-dozen ferries and crossed a few bridges in a 'big day' that saw us cover about 300km.

You also very quickly realise is that nothing comes cheap in Norway. Recognised as the dearest country in Europe in which to travel, fuel is currently between \$2.80 and \$3.10 a litre, tolls on the roads and ferries quickly mount up to \$30 to \$50 a day, while a non-powered camping site will see you fork out between \$35 and \$50 a night. A 'Big Mac' will set you back \$17.50 and, while beer in a discount supermarket can be had for 'just' \$4.50 a can, a single drink in a hotel will easily cost you \$15. Needless to say our budget is taking a hammering!

When we first arrived here our days were about 20 hours long with just a few hours of darkness. Now, further north and in the region of the 'Midnight Sun', it is daylight for all 24 hours; this morning at 3am the sun was up, the sky was

From top: campsites like this are hard to find; cathedral, Trondheim; whale for sale at local fish market; Arctic Circle monument; a cruise ship dwarfed by towering cliffs; brightly coloured houses in Bergen's old town

This is an incredibly beautiful country, with mind-blowing scenery

blue, the water temptingly calm and the wind just a tickling light breeze. But what is that sun doing - it's going the wrong way!

The roads are pretty good, although nearly always just a single lane each way. Speed limits are restricted to 50km/h in any built up area, 60-70 on the open road, while 80 is about as quick as it gets on the motorways. They are heavily policed and speed cameras abound, but one big advantage of all that is our improved fuel economy.

I know John Cadogan has reminded us all in his column about the advantages of lowering your speed and here is dramatic proof - I'm averaging better than 14L/100km when cruising through hilly terrain - back home I'm lucky to get 20L/100km in the same conditions when pushing along at our speed limits of 100-110km/h.

Getting off the road for any distance though is almost impossible. Few tracks exist as the bogs of alpine moors and tundra mean that any road capable of taking a vehicle needs to be made with a base of crushed rock. Those forest tracks that penetrate the fir trees are consistently chewed-up logging tracks that are mostly locked off.

But this is a beautiful country with very dramatic, mind-blowing scenery. Seemingly around every corner there is another great vista of towering cliffs, plunging waterfalls,

snow capped peaks, vivid green valleys, wide fast flowing rivers, babbling brooks, pretty farms and calm blue fjords.

The towns and cities we've passed through perch on the edge of the fjords seemingly somewhat precariously. While the 'old' centre of town, with its harbour and fish market, is nearly always on flattish land, the larger cities have expanded, clinging to ever steeper country.

The scenes around the wharves are always colourful affairs with orange and blue ferries chugging to and fro, stained fishing trawlers with their sprawl of nets being mended, larger blue-black ships readying to set sail, while heavily built ocean-going work boats, resplendent in vivid orange, puff smoke and rumble out to the next North Sea oil rig that needs repairs or a tow to a new location.

Old wooden double-storey houses with narrow wooden sidewalks almost invariably line the nearest roadway, their structures leaning heavily on one another in a mutual display of support.

Most these days are tourist shops selling jewellery and tacky stuffed toys, postcards and trinkets. The nearby 'fish market' sells everything from herring and cod to salmon and trout, king crabs to lobster, to the dark liver-like flesh

that is whale meat (yes, Norway still continues whaling, for which it cops a bit of flack - but, as they say, we cull kangaroos!).

We've still got about 700km to go to get to North Cape, the northern most point of Europe and closer to the North Pole than remote Barrow in Alaska. Then everything will be south from there - Finland, Russia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia.

Regards,  
Ron and Viv

You can read more of Ron and Viv's adventures at their website: [guidebooks.com.au](http://guidebooks.com.au). Follow links to Africa and/or Russia Overland.



From top: Glacier spawned of Europe's biggest ice cap; cable car above Bergen; Arctic beach camp

