

~The West Coast of Norway and the Arctic Circle~ Summer Solstice Travels 2013 ~ Part 2



~Geiranger~ and Mt. Dalsnibba



Above: Waking up to our view of the morning sun rising over the little town of Geiranger was like waking up to Tolkein's description of utopian "Rivendell" in Lord of the Rings!

Photography truly cannot do it justice.

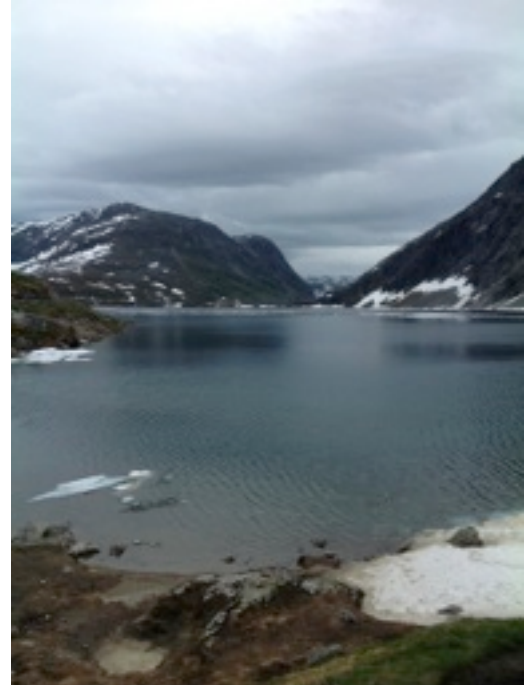


We enjoyed another beautifully warm and sunny morning while exploring the idyllic little village of Geiranger at the head of the Geirangerfjord. Geiranger has been called one of the most scenic destinations in the world and we couldn't agree more ~ this includes the famous waterfalls and vistas along the fjord as one travels from the sea to and from Geiranger. We had just missed by a few days the famous Fjord to Summit Cycle Race held there every June where the toughest cyclists in the country cycle from the town on up to the summit of nearby Mt. Dalsnibba (5000 ft of elevation in 13 miles).

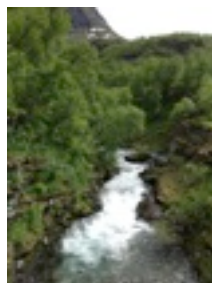
Ouch ~ maybe some day.....

We contented ourselves with privately arranging to be dropped off at the top of the mountain with some good mountain bikes and gear so we could take our time enjoying the complete ride DOWN on our own. Even though the weather looked forboding at the top of Dalsnibba (and there is summer glacier skiing nearby) it really was quite mild and it only sprinkled on us for a moment (we were lucky with that). We heard from everyone back in Geiranger that it had remained sunny and very warm there all day ~ another world at each elevation along the fjords! One of the best experiences of our trip.

Below: Starting at the top!



Below: Winding our way down back into the green!



Below: Views from a mountain plateau to the finish





Enter the Land of the Midnight Sun!

We spent our next 5 days at sea and in ports within the Arctic Circle ~ with the sun next to set for us in our travels in 6 days time. We actually crossed into the Arctic Circle sitting by the pool midday in our bathing suits sipping delicious Linie Aquavit Bloody Marys ~ John shot a video of the moment, only later to accidentally erase it! The weather was sunny, warm and just gorgeous, as it was for most of our trip. We had time to explore 3 towns within the Arctic Circle: Tromso, Honningsvag and Hammerfest.

~ Tromso ~



Above: Waking up to the coast of Tromso

Tromso has much to see and enjoy, so definitely do not judge the city by my lack of photography! We spent our day largely indoors at The Polar Museum, Polaria Museum and also in the lovely Art Museum of Northern Norway.



Above: Central Tromsø and the traditional wooden houses and shops of northern Norway

The weather was picture perfect outside and our only regret was that we ran out of time for our plan to also explore the Arctic Alpine Botanical Garden, which we heard was fabulous as the world's northernmost botanical garden! Next time.....



Above: John enjoying a beer (and bear!) at Mack's ~ which claims to be the northernmost brewery in the world. Note the missing claws of the polar bear ~ apparently tourists have snapped off and absconded with each and every one over the years!



Above: A few red king crabs as part of the large population of huge king crabs now to be found in the Barents Sea of northern Norway ~ yum!

Left: Tromsø Domkirke in the center of town ~ one of Tromsø's Cathedrals

~Honningsvag~



Above: Our first sailing around the Nordkapp (the North Cape) as we headed east and around the corner to Honningsvag in the morning hours. Seen above is the northernmost point in the European continent.



Amazingly, the town of Honningsvåg dates back 10,000 years and further surprises the visitor with its very mild temps along the ice-free Barents Sea. Fishing, oil, tourism and serving as a final town for greater Arctic expeditioning are the main industries of both Honningsvåg and Hammerfest to its west. What surprised us both were the abundant gardens and wildflowers in Honningsvåg, due to the mild gulf stream air that most of the Norwegian coastline enjoys. We took our time and simply relaxed with good hikes in both of the small Arctic cities of Honningsvåg and Hammerfest ~ the main event for us was late each evening enjoying the Midnight Sun!



Left and below:

The native Sami people of northern Norway are to be seen everywhere in the Arctic Circle, as are the reindeer that figure largely into their existence. Reindeer and polar bear skins and items are all frequently offered for sale.



~The Midnight Sun and Hammerfest~



Above: The sun and the full moon together on the northern horizon just after midnight during the weekend of the summer solstice as seen from the Arctic Ocean across from the Nordkapp (North Cape) on our way to Hammerfest.

Below: Looking southwards at that same moment. Blue sky over the North Cape and the coast of Norway!



Hammerfest claims to be the northernmost town in the world, with nearly 10,000 permanent residents. We were there on a Sunday and arrived to beautiful warm weather and full sunshine, so we decided to hike to the top of Mt. Salen for the views. That weather was quickly to change after we explored the town ~ so our hiking was cut short and we ended our day there with an ubiquitous stop at the Royal and Ancient Polar Bear Club!



Above: A walk through a beautiful old church yard and cemetery on our way up to Mt. Salen. A huge extent of hillside barricading, as seen above, has been done in an effort to keep the wild reindeer from entering the center of town. A significant problem for Hammerfest.....and we think that normal traffic jams and rush hour are big problems?!

Below: A walk on the wild side. More specifically, on our way down from Mt. Salen as some rain, fog, and clouds quickly moved in!

