



2019 Norway Cruise

Saturday June 29th – Depart Home



Today Marcia and I (Jim) and Marie and Kal start on our 25 day trip to Norway and Scotland. Marcia and Marie are sisters and this will be the 21st international trip the four of us have taken over the past 15 years. Marcia and I live near Pittsburgh and Marie and Kal near Dayton Ohio and these trips give us an opportunity to spend quality time together.

Marcia and I fly from Pittsburgh at 3:33 PM for Chicago and then board a Finnair flight to Helsinki Finland. We saw Democrat Presidential hopeful Elizabeth Warren power walking around the airport. I resisted the urge to call out “Hi Pocahontas”!

Yesterday, Kal and Marie drove from Dayton to Chicago, spent the night at a hotel near the airport, and boarded a Lufthansa flight to Frankfurt Germany at 4 PM today.

Sunday June 30th - Oslo, Norway



Our Finnair flight from Chicago to Helsinki, Finland lands on time but our commuter flight from Helsinki to Oslo is delayed due to mechanical problems. We land one hour late at 2 PM and are delighted to find that Marie and Kal have waited for us for two hours in the baggage claim area of the Oslo airport.

After clearing passport control and customs we hire a taxi for the trip to central Oslo. We are surprised at how many “electric” cars are on the road. Our driver tells us that Norway has been offering large incentives for folks to buy electric powered cars; discounts off the price, no registration fees, and free recharging. Norway has bought more electric cars

than any country, he says. Elon Musk (Tesla) has famously said if a car manufacture can’t sell an electric car in Norway they should give up trying to sell cars. It does appear that 30 to 40% of the cars on the road are electric or hybrids. Our driver tells us the government is now scaling back on the incentives.

We are a bit shocked when we arrive at our hotel and find that our taxi fare for the four of us is over \$250. We know that everything in Norway is expensive. The minimum wage is quite high and all Norwegians are proud to say they are paid well and their semi-Socialist state takes care of those who do not work. Taxes are high but the continuing North Seas oil revenues keep the Norway budget balanced.

Marcia has researched and found a good hotel that we will be staying at for one night, the Saga. It is in a nice area of Oslo and it will be an easy taxi ride for us, tomorrow, to get to the cruise ship pier.

We check into our rooms at the Saga and find them quite nice.



It is a beautiful weather day in Oslo. Clear skies and temperatures in the low 70s. We are in Northern Europe, quite a bit north of where we live in the USA, so daylight hours here are very long at this time of year. Sunrise is at 4 AM and sunset at 10:40 PM; almost 18 hours of sunshine.

We are all a bit tired as none of us were able to get much sleep last night on our overseas flights. We find a good restaurant and enjoy dinner on their patio. Then, off to bed.

Monday July 1st – Oslo, Norway

We wake after a good night's sleep at the Saga hotel and are starting to feel "normal" again. Marcia and I walk around our hotel this morning and find the area quite nice. Marie and Kal explore two parks.

Oslo is the capital city of Norway, with a population of 550,000 people, making it the smallest capital, population wise, in Europe. Norway is a large country in land area but only has 5.3 million inhabitants. Most of the residents live along Norway's long coastline; very few live in the mountainous interior. Although Norway is at the same latitude as very Northern Canada, and 1/3rd of the country lies above

the Arctic Circle, the climate along the coastline is somewhat moderate due to the warming effects of the Gulf Stream.

We see many folks out walking, traveling on their bicycles or zipping around on little electrical scooters. A beautiful and very clean city. Clear weather today with a high temperature around 70 degrees.



EMBARK PORT/DEBARK PORT PORT OF CALL
PORT OF CALL OVERNIGHT

Now, we are in Oslo to start a 16 day cruise up and down the coast of Norway. Marie and Kal found this cruise on the Azamara Journey, “Norway and the Midnight Sun”, and it looks like a great way to explore the fiords of Norway. We don’t think we could really see as much on a land tour of Norway.

We have learned that Azamara is the small ship “upscale” division of Royal Caribbean. They have three identical ships. We will be on the Azamara Journey. It was built in 2000 and refurbished in 2016. It is 593 feet long, 95 feet wide, with a 20 foot draft. Top speed is 20 mph. It has capacity for 690 passengers and boasts a crew of 400.



This will be an “all inclusive” cruise with all food, drinks and entertainment included. Azamara prides itself on spending more time than other cruise lines in ports to allow passengers to explore on land. We have signed up for some of the ship’s shore excursions, which they have charged us for. The four of us have reserved Balcony Cabins, which are the most common accommodations on this ship. We think we will be most comfortable.

At 12:30 PM we take a taxi from the Saga Hotel to the cruise ship pier. We are quickly checked onboard the Azamara. We enjoy our first lunch on board and explore the ship. At 2:15 PM we are escorted to our cabins and find that our luggage has been delivered. Our rooms are great with plenty of storage.

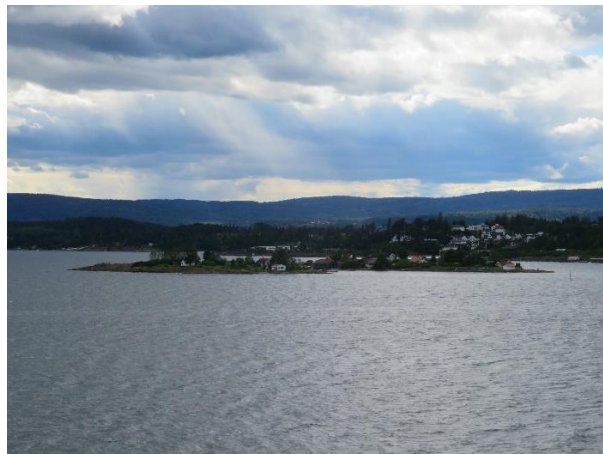


We know we will enjoy our balconies. Also, the mini fridge.

We check out our 40" flat screen TV and find that in addition to several "ship channels" (showing info about the ship, excursions, replays of ship activities, and interviews with key employees) we also will receive several movie channels, BBC, Britain's Sky News, the ESPN

channels and MSNBC and Fox News. We just must get used to the fact that we are 6 hours ahead of USA East Coast time.

We go to one of the lounges and get a good ship and cruise overview from our cruise director. Then a Life Jacket Drill. At 5 PM our ship departs the pier at Oslo and sails thru the beautiful fiord into the North Sea. We continue unpacking.



At 6 PM we meet in a lounge for a reception for folks that are users of the internet's "Cruise Critic" site...a wealth of knowledge on cruising. Later, we enter the main dining room (Discoveries) for our first dinner. We each order off the menu and it is great! Our Head Waiter, Edward, is the best and we promise to ask to be seated in his area whenever we dine at Discoveries. We are then off to bed, still a little jet lagged.

Tuesday July 2nd – At Sea



We left the pier at Oslo yesterday at 5 PM and cruised westerly all night thru the North Sea. The sea was just a little rough. Marcia and I, in a cabin located in the middle part of the ship, found the gentle rocking motion relaxing while Marie and Kal, further to the rear of the ship, reported it bothered their sleep a bit.

This will be “a day at sea”. We will be sailing all day and all night before anchoring at Flam tomorrow morning.

We enjoy a buffet breakfast in the Windows Café and then explore areas of the ship that we have not yet seen.



We view the pool area, the lounge on the front of the ship, the living room, the library, excise room, spa, casino, shops, Mosaic Café and other great areas. This is a beautiful, but relatively small, ship.





I attend a talk on the available ship shore excursion in the morning. Marcia attends the daily session on jewelry making, a specialty of hers. I finish unpacking while watching Roger Federer play at Wimbledon on ESPN. Later, some of us attend the talk by Dr. Short, "Introduction to Norway".



We continue sailing on the North Sea. The seas are smooth, and our ship is very stable. We are cruising at 13 knots, 7 knots below our top speed, possibly to minimize any roughness. Our Captain, Johannes Tysse (a native of Bergen Norway) announces that the sea temperature is 50 degrees and the air temperature is 50 degrees. English is the only language used on the ship, although we have fellow passengers from all over the world. The largest group are probably from the USA with the United Kingdom coming in second. We are told that the 400-man crew comes from 80 countries! Azamara Cruises only offers the Norway cruise this one time a year, in early July, and Captain Tysse is said to always make sure that he is assigned to the cruise so that he can help showcase his country.

Despite the 50-degree temperature and the breeze, we spot people in one of the two 90-degree hot tubs on the pool deck. At 3 PM we near land and pick up the required local pilot to help guide us up the fiord to Flam. This fiord is said to be the longest, eventually the narrowest and most scenic fiord in the world. As we enter the fiord, we see several sailboats out; these are hearty people. Many great views from our balcony and from the ship's many viewing areas.



Another great dinner and then off to bed as we continue cruising up the fiord to Flam on calm seas.

Tuesday July 3rd – Flam, Norway



We cruise all night up the fiord towards Flam. As we get further North, the days are getting longer. Sunrise today is at 4 AM and sunset at 11 PM, 19 hours of daylight. The high temperature today is forecast to be only 41 degrees and the low 35 degrees.

This fiord and the one tomorrow, in Geiranger, are said to be possibly the highlights of the cruise and the most beautiful in the world. We have read, however, that Norway's commitment to become "Carbon-Neutral" by 2040 includes a provision that will ban cruise ships from these two fiords starting next year! Only cruise ships running on LNG (liquefied natural gas) or solar power (both yet to be developed and built) will be allowed in the fiords.

Holland-America lines has already dropped Flam and Geiranger from their itenearies next year. The locals, that depend on the tourist trade in the summer months, are not happy about this, so maybe it will not happen so quickly. In any event, we are happy that we picked this year for our cruise!

I am up early this morning to watch the cruise thru the fiord. I see great views, waterfalls, and snow on the mountain tops. It fell last night.



We cruise to the end of the fiord near Flam and anchor at 6 AM. The four of us have signed up for the ship's all day excursion "Voss, Tvinde, Stalhein Excursion". As we are not docked we will have to take one of our ship's tenders to shore to start our tour. We do so at 10:15 AM.



At 11 AM we board a train for our initial 1-1/2 hour trip. We learn that work on the Flam Railway started in 1923 and was completed in 1940. It rises steeply from Flam up the valley to connect with the Bergen-Oslo railway, connecting Norway's two largest cities.



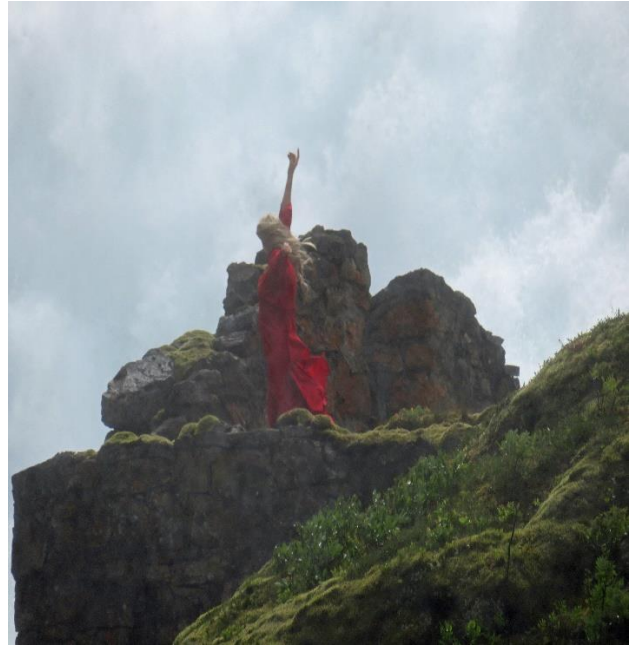
Great views; waterfalls, steep cliffs, and small farm towns.



The train makes three stops during our ascent for photos.

The last stop is at the Kjosfossen Falls where we all exit the train and have ten minutes to take pictures.

The falls are quiet nice but the surprise is the "Siren" or "Valkerie" that suddenly appears on the cliffside and sings, reinforcing the story we had heard on the train about how a beautiful woman would tempt travelers and offer to marry them. Only after marriage would her "cow tail" then re-appear. Hey, I am not making this stuff up!



At 12:20 PM we board another train for the trip 50 minutes to the village of Vonn, where we have an included lunch and some time for shopping. Great views and a nice church.



At 2:30 PM we board a motor coach for more exploration. Our first stop is at the pretty spectacular "Twin Falls".

We next go to a hotel high up in the mountains for a coffee break. Great views of the valley below from the Naeroy fjord Overview at the Stihheim Hotel. We are 4000' above sea level. We reboard our motor coach and start down a steep one lane road, built in 1867, back to the floor of the valley.



Now, the Azamara Journey departed Flam at 2:30 PM while we are still on our all day tour.

It has cruised thru a fiord to anchor in Gudvangen, where our motor coach takes us and we tender back to the ship at 5:30 PM. This was a day full of really spectacular scenery.

Tonight we have decided to dine in the Windows Café

rather than the main Discoveries Restaurant, as Windows is featuring an Italian Buffet. Marie and Kal have secured us a great table next to floor-length windows that so we can enjoy the great views.



After dinner I decide to take in my first show in the ship's Cararet Lounge (Marie and Kal went to see the comedian last night and said he was great). Tonight's show is "Jump, Jive and Swing" (think "The Boggie Woggy Bugler Boy of Company C....40's stuff") put on by the talented singers and dancers of the Azamara's staff backed by the excellent "Journey" band, who are all from the Ukraine.

I was blown away by the great ambience of this venue, the acoustics, and professionalism of the 45 minute show.

It's still light at 10:30 PM...nice views as we travel thru the fiord towards the North Sea.

Wednesday July 4th – Geiranger, Norway



We continued sailing down the fiord overnight, towards Geiranger. It is a smooth cruise with only a little gentle rocking.

We see maybe hundreds of waterfalls cascading down the cliffs. Marcia is most happy!

In honor of the 4th of July the Azamara puts on a fancy buffet Brunch in the Discoveries Restaurant with entertainment by the Journey's band.

Hey...I don't like the weather forecast. Coldest 4th of July I've seen!



We anchor in the fiord at 12:30 PM. At 1:00 PM the four of us tender to shore to start our “Mt. Dalsnibba” excursion. We board a motor coach and stop to view the Journey at anchor.

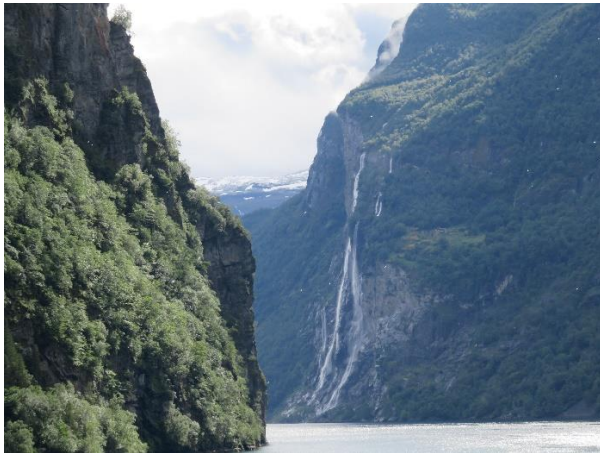


We are only half-way to the “Top of Norway”, which is at 4875 feet above sea level.

When we get to the “Top” we find that it is snowing and the temperature is below freezing. Happy 4th of July! Our guide says this is the first time he has seen snow in July in his ten years of conducting this tour. He does give us some excellent commentary on Norway’s Social Welfare State and life in Norway. He immigrated to Norway from Italy.



We tender back to the ship at 5:30 PM and we raise anchor and depart for Alesund. We cruise down the beautiful fiord and see magnificent waterfalls like “The Bachelor” and “The Seven Sisters”.



We have another great dinner in the Discoveries restaurant. We have learned that the Head Chef has 60 other Chefs working for him! I must say a few words about the crew on this ship. To a man (and woman) they are the most diligent, friendly and hard working that I have ever interacted with. Nothing is too great for them to respond to. You would not believe these folks.

We continue traveling down the fiord and dock at Alesund at 10 PM. It's still light outside.

I attend the late show in the Cabaret Lounge and it's another good one ...Broadway songs and a tribute to the Scandavian group, ABBA.

Thursday July 5th – Alesund, Norway



We traveled from Geiranger last night and docked at Alesund at 10 PM. We will remain docked until 5:30 PM today.

Alesund has 45,000 inhabitants and is a famous fishing port, but is most known for its Art Nouveau style architecture. On the night of January 23rd, 1904 a fire broke out and completely destroyed the center of the city. Of the 12,000 residents at that time, 10,000 were left homeless. Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany was a big fan of Norway at that time, vacationing here every summer, and sent thousand of troops and ships (that were scheduled to go to Germany's

Africa colonies, filled with food and provisions), to sustain the Norwegian inhabitants. They spent seven years rebuilding the town and chose the Art Nouveau style.



It is supposed to start warming up a little today. High temperatures should be around 55 degrees and lows about 46. We will again have about 18-1/2 hours of sunlight. We have great views of the city from our balconies.

There is said to be an excellent overlook of the city from Mount Aksla. Marie and Kal leave the ship early and hike to a park where they climb the 418 steps to the summit of Mt. Aksla. Marcia and I are looking for something a little less strenuous. We walk into town and discover a small "tourist train" that will take us all thru the city and then up to the summit of Mt. Aksla and back. How great is this! This turns out to be comfortable way to see the city and also pick up a lot of good information from the headsets, available in eight languages.



The views from the mountain top are great. It is warming up and there is almost no breeze. We can see the Azamara Journey docked in town.



We see the 418 steps that Marie and Kal climbed. Also, many nice views on our return trip around town.





Marcia and I return to the ship for a late lunch.

We are enjoying our fellow passengers. They are very well traveled. Probably more than half of them have cruised on Azamara before, some as many as seventeen times! Everyone is most friendly and courteous. The average age on the ship is around our age (minus ten years to plus 20 years). We have no problem keeping up with these folks!

Sanitation on this ship is excellent. A crew person is stationed at all of the entrances to the dining areas to make sure that everyone entering uses hand sanitizer. At some of the stations at the buffets you must be served by a crew member. Common surfaces are frequently wiped down. We don't think we will experience what occurred on our River Cruise last September when everyone on the ship eventually came down with a chest cold.

After lunch we return to town for some souvenir shopping. It is tough...all the shops are selling pretty tacky "troll sculptures" or very nice woolen sweaters, which we don't really need.



Back on board I check out the special "cheese sampling" in the Scenic Lounge, served by the ship's officers. I decide I don't really need more food and go to the gym for a quick workout on the resistance machines which I have found to be the same brand as my local gym, so I know how to use them. Then I go to the pool deck where I catch some sun. It is probably now about 60 degrees and quite comfortable in the pool deck areas that are breeze-free.

Our ship departs Alesund at 5:30 PM and sails through a nice fiord towards the North Sea.



Marie and Kal like Indian food so eat tonight in the Windows Café, featuring an Indian Buffet. Marcia and I dine in the main Discoveries Dining Room, ordering off their excellent set menu or the nightly Chef's Specials. We have a blast chatting with a couple at the table next to us.



Now, tonight's visiting entertainer in the Cabaret Lounge was to be Irina Guskova, a renowned Violinist from St. Petersburg. We had seen her arriving, earlier in the day. Marcia and I were not really planning to attend her show. Shortly before it was due to start at 8:15 PM there is an announcement that she has dropped her violin and broken it! They were scrambling to find a replacement entertainer and the show would now start at 8:45 PM.

Marcia and I decide to go, and find out that our Entertainment Director and found the gentleman scheduled to perform tomorrow night, enjoying his dinner on our ship, and has convinced him to do tonight's show. He is Paul Emmanuel from the UK. Now, they also quickly assemble the Journey Band, and with no practice, Mr. Emmanuel and the Band put on a great show! A mix of soul songs and classic love songs. This ends up being our favorite evening performance.

At 10:30 PM I get a good shot of the start of sunset.

We have now entered the North Sea and are cruising on very smooth waters.

Saturday June 6th – At Sea



We sailed from Alesund, yesterday, at 5:30 PM and cruised all night going up the coast of Norway. Today will be a full day at sea. We will continue sailing all of this day and night. I am surprised at how calm the North Sea is. We are cruising at the relatively slow speed of 13 knots which I believe makes the ride even smoother. Even though we are going further north, the weather is warming. Today's high is expected to be about 55 degrees with a low of 48.

We will be crossing the Arctic Circle today, and once we are north of the circle the sun will never set at this time of year!

At 8:30 this morning Captain Tysse announced, over the ship's PA system, that he has requested and received permission, to cruise thru Norway's North Sea Oil Fields. He also tells us that he started his career at sea working in the North Sea oil fields, advancing to become a Captain of an oil tanker. We have learned that the oil fields, first developed in the early 1970s, have been a huge boom to Norway's economy (and the reason they did not join the European Union....they are self-sufficient). The country has no debt. They realize that the oil fields may go dry in a few years so they have been putting oil revenues into a "Sovereign Fund" that now totals \$200,000 for each Norwegian! Quite impressive.



These are massive floating platforms that have driven pipe down over a mile thru the sea to access the oil fields.



We are really not cruising that far off of the Norwegian coast and get some nice views of it.

At 12:30 PM there is an "Arctic Circle Crossing" ceremony on the pool deck.



It's a bit of a hoot. The Entertainment Team is all dressed up in silly costumes and good music is playing over the PA system. Passengers that volunteer get to have ice and water poured down their backs by the Captain and crew and are then awarded with a shot of of the Norwegian spirit, Aquavit. Much of the crew (bartenders, room attendents, restaurant servers) come to watch this ceremony, as this is the only time the Journey crosses the Arctic Circle in a year so the ceremony is rather unique for them to watch.



The four of us have a nice lunch in the Discoveries Dining Room, grabbing a great table at the very stern of the ship.

We spend an afternoon relaxing and reading. I attend an interesting presentation by Dr. Short on the geopolitics of the region.

After dinner, Marie and Kal enjoy the Tango Show in the Cabaret Lounge while

Marcia and I do not stay for very long!

Sunday July 7th – Svolvaer-Loften



We cruise all night on very calm seas. We dock at Svolvaer-Loften at 7:30 AM. This is great, as we were not scheduled to be anchored, requiring tendering to shore, but now we can just leave at any time and return to the docked ship on the gangway.

We are 124 miles north of the Arctic Circle but this will be the warmest weather day since we boarded the Azamara. It must already be up to 60 degrees.

I enjoy another good workout on the machines in the ship's gym; my aches and pains are going away! Marcia reads on our balcony.

Marcia and I depart the ship to shop for souvenirs and find Wi-Fi. We run into Marie and Kal who have been walking around looking for hiking trails up into the mountains.



In the afternoon Marcia, Marie and Kal depart the ship for a walk while I go to an excellent private museum that I have read about on TripAdvisor and the internet, The Lofoten War Museum; it's all about World War II in Norway. I find it most fascinating.



Back on board, I catch some sun by pool side and then attend the 5 PM lecture by Baard Kolltveit "Land of the Midnight Sun – Norway North of the Arctic Circle".



At 5:30 PM our ship departs and continues towards Tromso on the beautiful Inside Passage. We will be sailing all night. The sun will not set.

After dinner we take in the show "Broadway Bandstand" which is quite good.

It's hard to go to sleep with the great views on the Inside Passage.

Monday July 8th – Tromso, Norway



We dock in the city center of Tromso at 8:30 AM. The further North we go the warmer it gets! This morning is clear and sunny with a high temperature predicted to be 66 degrees.

After breakfast the four of us depart the ship for a 1+ hour walk to the cable car that goes up to the summit of Storsteinen Mountain. We want to get there early before long lines form.

On the way we pass the Arctic Cathedral. Yes, it's a long bridge that we cross!



The cable car run is 2500 feet long and rises 1250 feet. The cars only hold 28 people and take the 4-minute trip about every fifteen minutes. Perfect weather and the views are great.





After we descend on the cable car Marie and Kal start walking back to the ship. My “vertigo” bothered me on the walk over the long bridge, so Marcia and I take the local bus back to mid-town. It’s 50 Krone (\$5) for both of us, and we get to see some more neighborhoods in Tromsø, a city of 72,000 folks.

After lunch Marie and Kal walk to the Botanical Garden, Marcia does two loads of laundry in the ship’s free laundry facility, and I sun by the pool, where it’s almost too warm!

On every cruise Azamara has a “White Night”, a fancy buffet on the pool deck with entertainment. This is the night, as the weather will be ideal. It’s said to be quite an event! Passengers are asked to dress in white. They have delayed this night for a few days until we have a warm one for this outside activity.



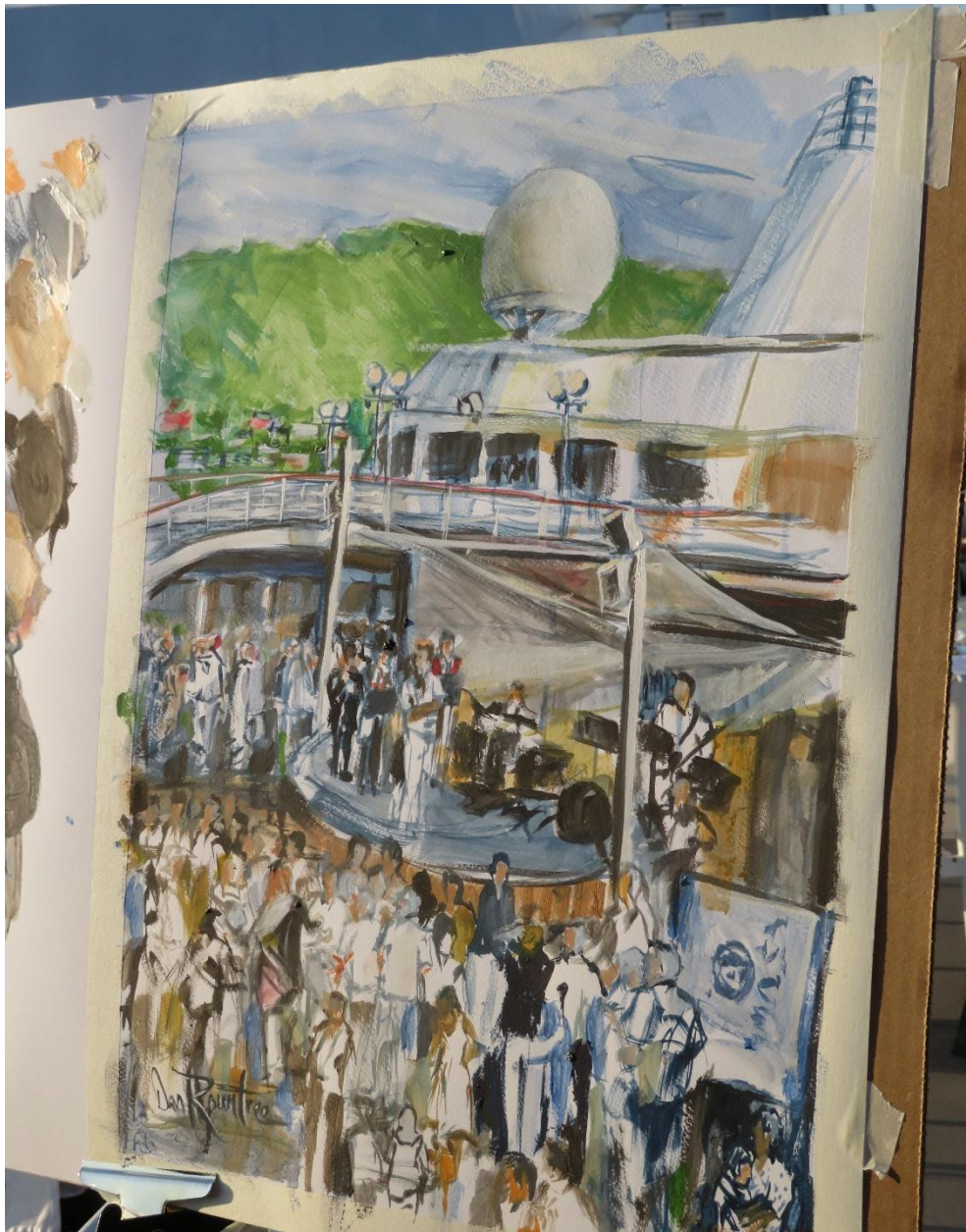
The party starts at 6 PM. There are several buffets on deck, each built around a different food theme. None are really crowded. Delicious. The weather is perfect!

At 7:45 PM Captain Johannes leads the crew on a parade around and above the pool deck. They assemble in front of the stage and he gives a short talk.



At 8 PM the live music resumes and it's party time. Some folks have improvised white clothing!





There is a guest painter on board and he set up his easel near my table. It has been interesting watching him paint the view from basically where I have been sitting.

The live music and singing from the ship's entertainers is excellent.

I really enjoyed this night.

At 9 PM the Azamara leaves Tromso and continues North towards Honningsvag on the Inside Passage.

Tuesday July 9th – Honningsvåg, Norway



We cruise all night and dock at 11 AM this morning in Honningsvåg, said to be the world's northernmost village.

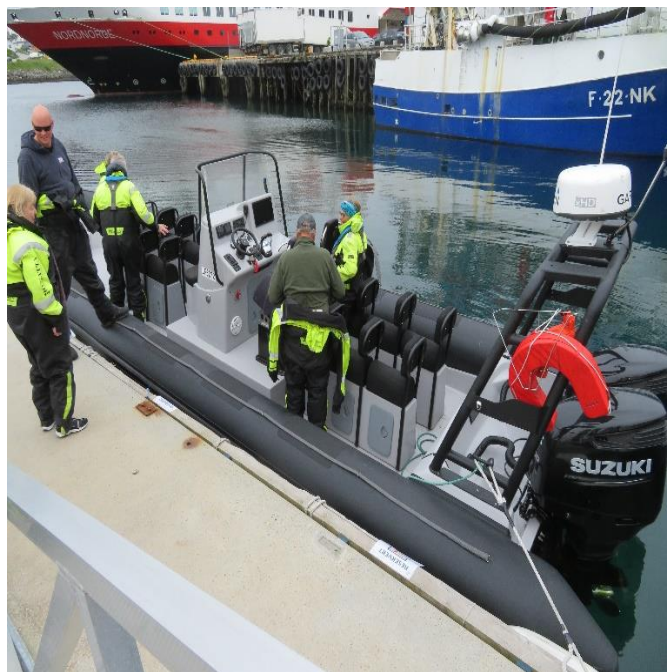
We continue to enjoy 24 hours of daylight. The temperature is not bad; it's 48 degrees when we dock right in the center of town.

We are almost at the very most northern part of Europe, way north of the Arctic Circle. We are at 71 degrees northern longitude.



Now, Marcia and I have previously signed up for an excursion from 1:30 PM to 5 PM the “King Crab Safari”. We are not really sure what to expect. I joke to Marcia that this could be really great or really bad. Marie and Kal join the motor coach tour to the North Cape; the most Northern part of Norway.

We depart the Azamara and walk a short distance to the start of the excursion. We are outfitted in special insulated suits that are said to be a flotation device. We board a twelve passenger RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat) powered by twin 300 horsepower outboards.





We travel for 15 minutes at speeds of up to 54 mph to the “King Crab” pots. The trip is “bracing”. Our two-man crew pulls up one of the pots and picks half a dozen or the best (largest) crabs. We motor for 10 more minutes to the village of Mageroya, mostly populated by the indigenous Sami people. We are told that we are now near the northern most part of the island, the most northern part of the land mass of Norway and Europe. On shore, we pose with our catch. We are counseled not to hold the live crabs too close to our privates!



Our excursions' shore crew now takes over and explains to us the lifecycle of the King Crab and then starts the preparation of our meal, separating the edible parts of the crab from the rest.



We now walk to a "Sami" tent where the crab parts are cooked (boiled).





We go back outside where they cool off our cooked food in water. All the time they are giving us more fascinating information on life on the North Cape.

We now go back into the tent where we relax on reindeer fur covered benches and are served delicious King Crab.

Our trip back to Honningsvåg is a wild ride, as we travel at maximum speed with our driver doing tight "figure eights" as we near the Azamara. We hold on for dear life! Well, this excursion exceeded our expectations. Five Stars!

Back on the ship the four of us decide to dine at the Windows Buffet as it is British Night and some of us would like Fish and Chips.



After dinner we take in the show by a British performer, Helen Jayne, who is not so great. The Captain surprises us by announcing he will take the Azamara around the North Cape so that we can see the very north part of the cape in the Midnight Sun. We depart Honningsvåg at 9 PM.

Right at Midnight the Azamara cruises around the North Cape of Norway. On the right, below, is the lookout point that Marie and Kal were at today. These pictures were taken from the balcony of our stateroom. Yes, the sun is still out.



Wednesday July 10th – At Sea



We cruise all night on a very calm North Sea. Today will be a full day at sea. Temperatures are expected to hit 60 degrees even though we are well above the Arctic Circle. We are cruising much closer to the Norwegian coast than shown on the map, above. The coast is on the port, or left, side of our ship so both couples get good views of the shore from our cabins. Later, we cruise thru the inner channel and the Azamara must lower its radar mast to get under the lower bridges.

I work out in the gym and Marie and Kal walk laps on the raised track above the pool area.

There are two presentations by our guest lecturers this morning which most of us take in. The 10 AM presentation is by Baard Kolltveit on the history and features on the next five ports that we will be visiting. The 11 AM lecture is by Dr. Short on the history of the Hanseatic League, the merchant network that settled and modernized many of the Northern European key trading areas in the 1600 and 1700 hundreds.



Marcia takes in a computer class and then a jewelry making session. Later Marcia, Kal and I have fun participating in the daily trivia contest. All the time there are great sights to view of the Norwegian coast and towns.

After a good dinner we attend an excellent show in the lounge, "Sail Away".



Thursday – July 11th – Bodo, Norway



We cruise all night on calm seas.

At 8 AM the Azamara docks at the small city of Bodo.

During the Second World War, Bodo suffered severe damage during the German invasion in mid- 1940, as the Germans conquered and occupied all of Norway, in a surprise attack, to protect their flank as they prepared to launch “The Battle of Britain”. Almost all of the central area of the town was destroyed by fire. The town was rebuilt in a modern style and is now a commercial center with numerous factories, a shipyard and several technical colleges. It is also the home of the Stilla NATO Air Base.

We have some nice views of the coast as we near Bodo and as we enter the harbor.



To the left is the view of Bodo from our stateroom balcony. We are docked right in the heart of the city. The temperature is in the 60s with a little bit of a cloudy sky.

After breakfast Marie and Kal head out for a hike.

At 10 AM Marcia and I walk into the city to find some free Wi-fi and then at 10:30 we start off on a 1-1/2 mile walk to the Norsk Luftfartsmuseum, the Norwegian Aviation Museum. It is said to be the largest of its kind in Scandinavia and one of Europe’s most modern.

We find the museum to be outstanding; hundreds of planes and informative and interactive displays. It is large and is laid out in three modern buildings. I enjoyed, as I did earlier at the War Museum on Lofoten, the displays on the Norwegian Resistance during WWII, especially their eventual destruction of the German Heavy Water plant that the Nazis built to help produce a nuclear bomb. Also, the Bodo NATO Base was where Francis Gary Powers' U-2 spy plane, which took off in Turkey but was shot down, was to land after its mission over the Soviet Union in the early 60s. They have an extensive exhibit on the incident and have a U-2 on display.





Above, left, is their USA U-2 plane. We really enjoyed this great museum.

At 1:15 PM Marcia and I started walking back to the ship, mostly thru a residential neighborhood, and enjoy viewing the homes. We have a late lunch and then time for some relaxing and reading.

The Azamara departs Bodo at 4 PM for a 280 mile journey to Trondheim.

At 4:30 PM Marcia, Kal and I again tried our hand at the Trivia Contest. Today's theme was "Music". The young Polish born Master of Ceremonies focused on weird and fairly recent European Disco, Techno and Rap music which really stumped most of us American and British Baby Boomers in the contest!

The four of us had another great dinner in the main dining room and enjoyed the evening entertainment in the Lounge, "Cervila's Gaucho Revue". The accoustics and lighting in this lounge are excellent.

Friday July 12th – Trondheim, Norway



We cruise all night, again on calm seas, down the West Coast of Norway towards the city of Trondheim.

We have learned that Trondheim is the third largest city in Norway. It was founded over 1000 years ago by the Vikings. This is the location where Leif Eriksson, in the year 1000, sailed off and discovered Greenland. On later voyages it has been documented that he and his crew set foot in America and established some relatively short-lived settlements.

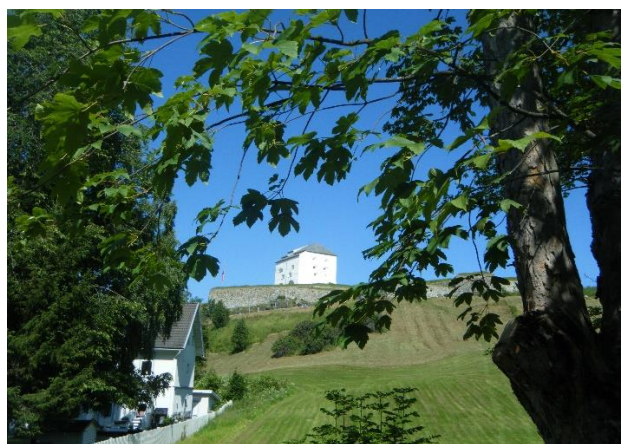
The Nidaros Cathedral, which we will be visiting, is considered Norway's religious center.

Today's weather should be great, sunny and in the mid-60s. We have nice views of the coast as we continue sailing south this morning.



We dock at Trondheim at 1 PM. After lunch we take a shuttle to the city center and the four of us start out on an independent walking tour.

We climb up to the heights and get great views. It is nice seeing the residents enjoying a great weather day. We see the Cathedral and later the Fortress we are hiking to.



We arrive at the Kristiansten Fort and learn that it was constructed in the late 1600s and was a key in repelling invading Swedish forces in 1718. Great views from up here.



We walk back down to the city center and enjoy walking thru the old town. We see and walk over the Old Town Bridge, first built in 1681.





This is a very beautiful city. We have found that interacting with Norwegians is easy, as it seems like nearly all that we meet can speak English.

We catch the shuttle bus and return to our ship. Dinner is early tonight at 5:15 PM, as we have a special event tonight. On every cruise the Azamara ship offers an “AzAmazing Evening”, an included concert at a historical site. Ours will be held at the historic Nidaros Cathedral, built in the early 14th century. It is credited with bringing Christianity to Norway. This concert is just for the passengers on our ship. Shuttle buses take us to the cathedral at 6:45 PM.



The cathedral is beautiful but unfortunately the concert is just OK at best. It starts with long speeches from the Deputy Mayor and then the Cathedral Chaplain. We are seated at floor level, facing each other, and we must look sideways to see the orchestra; poor sight lines. The music is unfamiliar and not too great. It featured solos by a fiddler, the organ player, and a singer.

We return to the ship at 9 PM where extensive snacks have been set up for everyone.

At 10 PM the Azamara leaves Trondheim and starts cruising south to Molde. We are now south of the Arctic Circle so now can enjoy a sunset!

Saturday July 13th – Molde, Norway



We cruise all night, on calm seas, further down the west coast of Norway.

We really like the itinerary on this cruise. Azamara tries to cruise between ports at night, frequently at a moderate speed for passenger comfort, so that the ship is in a port-of-call for most of the day to allow folks almost a full day to explore on shore.

Today's weather calls for a high temperature around 60 degrees with some clouds.

We dock at Molde at 9 AM, right in town. Molde is said to be a nice town with about 26,000 residents.



As the Azamara approaches Molde we see an old fort on an island in the channel.

Above, we prepare to dock. On the left is a view of the town from our balcony.

After breakfast, Marie and Kal start out on a hike to a lookout point up on the hill. Marcia and I walk into town to find Wi-Fi and then head off on a hike partway up the mountain to an Open-Air Museum. We have some nice views. Molde is known as “the city of roses”.



We arrive at the Romsdal Open-Air Museum which we find to be quite nice. Many of the old houses have grass on the roofs, traditionally used for insulation and protection.

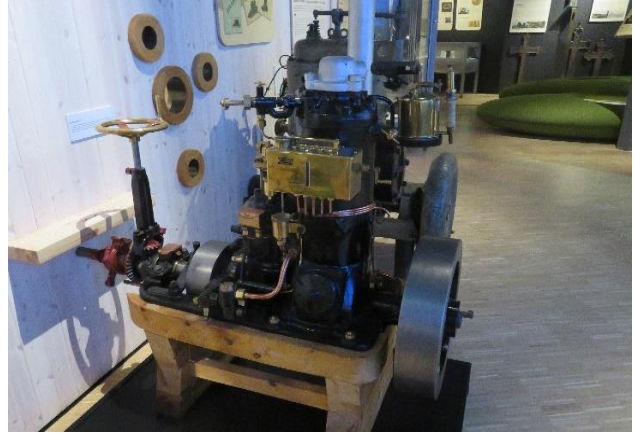


We are delighted when Marie and Kal arrive at the museum on their way down the hill from their hike to the lookout. We've been told that there is a folklore show arranged for another tour group, but it is OK if we watch it.



We walk thru more of the houses. Some have narrators describing what we are seeing.





There is a nice museum on the site.

We see an antique car that was used today to bring a bride and groom to their wedding on the site.

On the walk back to the ship we see some nice homes and gardens.



We find the Azamara very easy to get around on as it is not huge. There are a pair of high-speed elevators fore and aft that we seem to never have to wait for.

At 8 PM our ship departs for Olden, Norway.

Sunday July 14th – Olden, Norway



We have another smooth night, cruising on a calm sea.

Today we will be docking in Olden at 7:30 AM.

Olden is a small town and is known as a gateway to outdoor activities such as fishing and boating in the chilly glacier-fed waters of Oldevatnet Lake.

At the far end of the lake lies Briksdal Glacier. It has been shrinking during the past fifteen years. It's a branch of the Jostedalsbreen Glacier, the largest on mainland Europe.

Today Marcia and I have an early excursion "Cruise on Lake Leon" starting at 8:15 AM (Marie and Kal are going on a similar, later tour...they did not sign up in time to get on the tour

we pre-booked). Because of the early start Marcia has ordered a room service breakfast for the two of us.



There are nice views of the town and the shore as we travel down the fiord prior to docking.

Today is my 70th Birthday. I open nice birthday cards from our daughter and Marie and Kal.

The forecast for today calls for a cloudy day with temperatures in the low 60s. Right now, it is foggy.



Marcia and I are picked up at 8:30 AM by a chartered motor coach and we head out on a scenic drive to Lake Leon. We make a couple of stops at nice sites. Our Tour Guide seems great! He is a lifelong resident of Olden, has been conducting tours for many years, and is a wealth of knowledge.



Our group boards a nice boat, with a Captain and First Mate in command, and we start on an hour trip up the lake. More good commentary from our Tour Guide and occasionally the Captain.





The lower deck on the boat is totally enclosed with padded seats and huge windows. Many of us choose to camp out on the upper deck for better views and photos.

We get some great views and see many waterfalls coming down from the top of the mountains rimming the lake on both sides.

We are told the lake is 7 miles long and 450 feet deep. This is a glacier fed lake, so the water has a greenish tint from silt.



About halfway up the lake we come to the “narrows” which our Captain carefully squeezes our boat thru.

Our Guide tells us that the narrows are a result of three rockfalls down the sides of the mountain. The first one was in the early 1900s. 61 people died from the resulting landslide and tidal wave. The town was rebuilt but another rockslide in 1936, and the resulting 400-foot-high tidal wave killed 42 people. A third rockslide occurred in 1950 but caused no major damage.



About 10 AM we arrive at the far end of the lake and dock at a restaurant, family owned and run, now by the third generation. They are all set to serve breakfast just for our group. We enjoy good coffee and Norwegian waffles and strawberry jam.

During breakfast our excellent guide entertains us with more history and humorous stories.



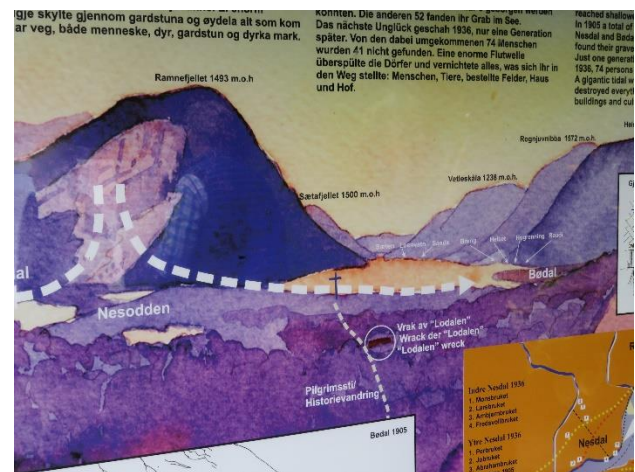


After breakfast we re-board our motor coach, which has followed our boat down the lake. We drive for about 15 minutes towards the glacier. We next walk for 10 minutes on a narrow trail. We view more waterfalls.

At the end of the trail, we are just able to get a glimpse of Briksdal tongue of the 54-mile-wide Jostedalsglacier, mainland Europe's largest. Our guide tells us the glacier used to come right to where we are standing. Now, it has retreated miles and we can barely see it in the distance (above right). We walk back to our motor coach,

past the very blue glacier-fed lake that feeds into Lake Leon.

We drive back towards our ship, on a busy Sunday, on a narrow one lane road built into the cliffs above the lake. We stop near the narrows at an old abandoned town, first built in 1832, which we had seen from our boat. We enjoy walking around the buildings. Our guide assembles us at a memorial to the deadly rockslides and gives us more information.



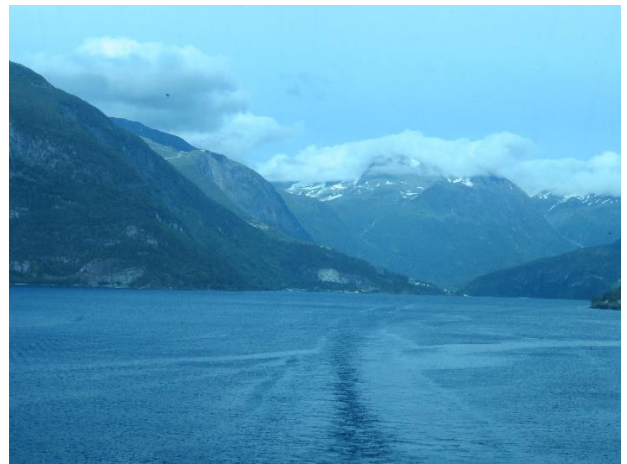
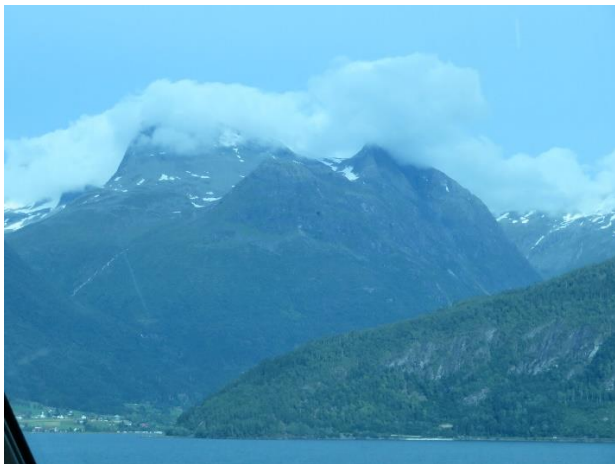
We return to the Azamara at 1 PM. This has been a most enjoyable morning tour.



When we enter our cabin, we are surprised to see that it has been decorated for my birthday! Most probably by folks in the crew that probably learned that today is my birthday from the documents we filed when we signed up for this cruise.

After lunch Marcia and I do some souvenir shopping at two excellent shops near where we are docked. I then watch most of the men's finals from the US Open Tennis Tournament.

At 6 PM the Azamara departs Olden for tomorrow's destination, Bergen. Great views as we cruise out of the fiord.



The four of us have made reservation for tonight's dinner at the small "Prime" restaurant, located at the stern of our ship. It specializes in steak. The steak is great, but our waiter honors my request for some of the ship's excellent French Fries!



They even have a Birthday Cake for us. After dinner we enjoy the show in the Cabaret Lounge, "Just Dance". A great day and a great 70th Birthday!



Monday July 15th – Bergen, Norway



Another smooth night of cruising down the west coast of Norway, traveling from Olden to Bergen.

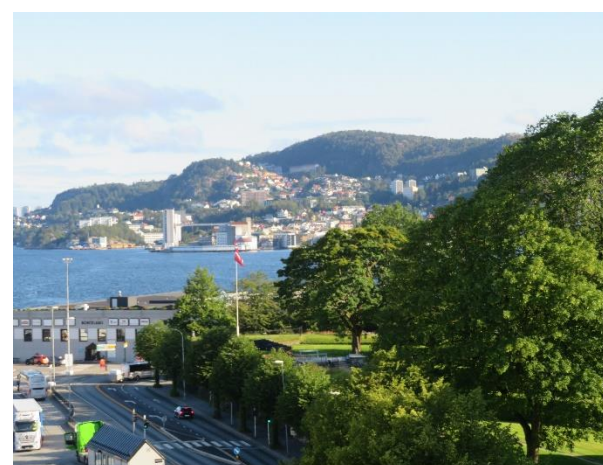
We dock in Bergen at 7:30 AM. This is Captain Johannes' hometown.

We have learned that Bergen is Norway's second largest city with about 260,000 inhabitants. It is a very old and historic town with most of its older structures still existing and they can be visited.

Marcia, our Daughter, and I visited Bergen when we were on a cruise in 1999 and are very much looking forward to seeing it 20 years later.

Bergen is famous for frequent rains, but today's forecast is great; warm with sunny skies.

We have nice views of Bergen Fiord and the city as we enter and prepare to dock. We are delighted to see that we dock right in the city. Views from our balcony are great.



One Bergen highlight we wanted to make sure we could enjoy is the view of Bergen from Mt. Floien, 1800 feet above the city. We know that this excursion can be iffy, as the frequent cloud cover prevents good views. Based on the weather forecast, we have signed up and paid for the ship's sponsored tour "Bergen Panorama with Mt. Floien" and we made the right call; today's weather will be perfect. We have signed up for the 9 AM departure as we know there will be four cruise ships in port today and the funicular only runs every 15 minutes, so the lines for the trip can get very long.



We board the motor coach at 9 AM and first drive thru a few historic areas of the city, with good commentary from our Tour Guide.

The first rides up the mountain start at 9 AM and when we arrive, we are in a special line with pre-bought tickets, so we do not wait for long to board.

The ride up the mountain is exhilarating. We are told that we will have 1-1/4 hours to explore up top.

The views from the top are outstanding. It is warm and the wind is very light. We can see our docked ship.



There are numerous walking trails around the top of the mountain, and we enjoy strolling around and seeing the views from the other sides.



After our 1-1/4 hours up top, we quickly re-board the funicular for the ride down. When we exit, we see that the lines to go up are now “massive” and we are glad that we got an early start. Our motor coach drives thru parts of the city we have not seen, again with good commentary from our Guide.



We return to our ship a little before noon.

We have great views of the central city from our ship. To the left is Bryggen, or old wharf district, originally the homes, stores and warehouses of the old Hanseatic League of Northern European traders and merchants.

After lunch Marcia and I walk down to the wharf area and view the old houses and visit the shops that they now house. This area is now quite busy with other tourists from the four cruise ships in port. The weather is great!



We return to the Azamara and read. I also catch some sun on the pool deck.

Today is Marie and Kal's 18 Wedding Anniversary! The four of us have booked a reservation in the small Aqualina Italian restaurant.



Our views from our window table in the stern are great, as is the meal and the company. After dinner we take in the show by Assistant Cruise Director Ned Hanlon.



Tuesday July 16th – At Sea



Today will be our last full day on the Azamara and it will be a full day at sea traveling from Bergen Norway to Leith Scotland, the port that services Edinburgh.

We left Bergen last night and will dock in Scotland early tomorrow morning. Our journey across the North Sea has been very smooth so far.

It is about 69 degrees and cloudy this morning. Soon a heavy fog moves in and the Azamara slows down and blows its foghorn every minute or so.

We continue packing for tomorrow mornings' departure.

The fog clears up and we pass by several British oil platforms.



The four of us have lunch in the main restaurant where they had set up food stations and drinks for a traditional "German Fruhschoppen". The Journey band is set up, members all dressed in German outfits, and playing German songs.

I attend an interesting lecture by Dr. Short at 2 PM on North Sea Oil and how Norway and Great Britain are handling this resource.

We participate in three rounds of trivia competition.

The skies have cleared, and the sun has come out.

We enjoy a great final dinner tonight in the main restaurant and say goodbye to our favorite waiters, Edward and Borys.

We have learned that the Azamara has traveled 3223 nautical miles (10% longer than a regular mile) on this voyage. Also, that we have consumed 9,280 bottles of beer, 5,568 bottles of wine, and 25,000 pounds of meat, chicken and fish (not the four of us...the whole ship)!

We place our large packed bags outside our stateroom doors at 11 PM. Tomorrow, we head to Edinburgh.