

Nordland



There's a difficult choice to make as you head north. The spectacular Kystriksveien coastal route, ferry hopping and perhaps detouring to take in a glacier and offshore island or two? Or the almost-as-stunning inland Arctic Highway, more direct but still lightly trafficked?

Whichever you choose, try to build in time to take in Lofoten, a necklace of offshore islands with razor-sharp peaks and Caribbean-coloured bays. Here, cod is still king, as manifested in the small fishing museums, *rorbuer* (fishing cabins – literally 'rowers' dwellings') and rickety drying frames. Connected by bridges and with reasonable public transport, the islands are easy to hop around. Then again, you may want to linger and hire a bike or pull on your boots; the cycling can even be done by softies and the hiking is as gentle or as tough as you care to make it. Push further north to Andenes, at the northern tip of Andøya, a continuation of the Lofoten archipelago, and you'll enjoy the best whale watching in all Norway.

As you move northwards through the long, narrow Nordland region, the crossing of the Arctic Circle is almost palpable; fields give way to lakes and forests, vistas open up, summits sharpen and the tree line descends ever lower on the mountainsides. In summer, this is where northbound travellers get their first taste of the midnight sun; in winter, the northern lights slash the night sky.

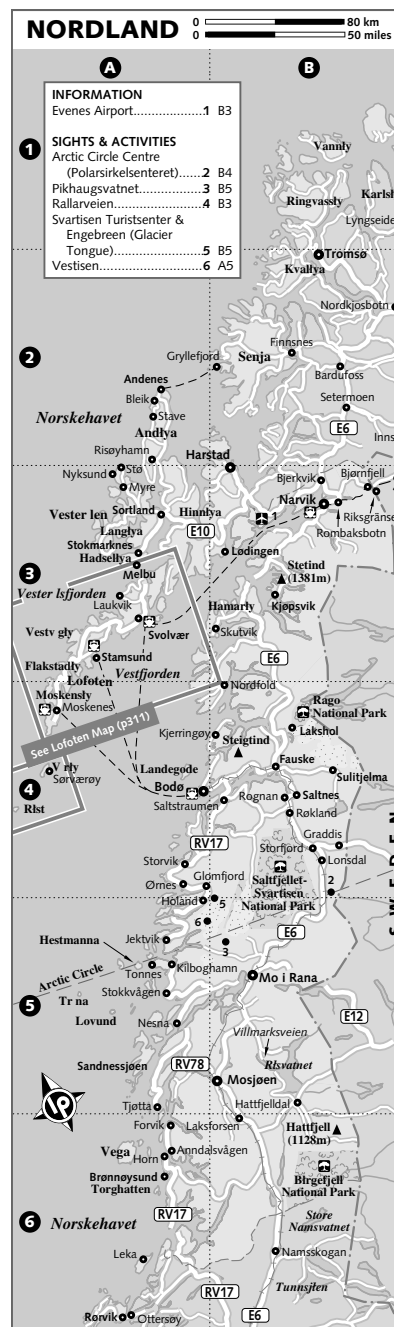
In addition to Nordland, this chapter also includes the northeastern section of Vesterålen, a continuation of the Lofoten archipelago that belongs to the county of Troms.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ferry hop and hug the splendid **Kystriksveien coastal route** (p303)
- Learn to respect eider ducks and feel their down float from your fingers at Vega's **E-Huset museum** (p304)
- Be a wide-eyed kid again at the **Norwegian Aviation Museum** (p307) in Bodø
- Linger in the tiny, preserved fishing village of **Å** (p320) in Lofoten
- Hike the coastal **Queen's Route** (p326) to Stø in Vesterålen
- Take time out to explore the historic **Sjøgata** (opposite) in Mosjøen, including its galleries, museum and cafés
- Get cold feet on one of the glaciers in **Saltfjellet-Svartisen National Park** (p296)

■ POPULATION: 235,450

■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: OKSSKOLTEN (1916M)



Getting There & Away

Although it's in Norwegian, you'll have no problem interpreting times and schedules on www.177nordland.com – a comprehensive listing, together with links, of all bus, boat, ferry, train and plane timetables throughout Nordland. Alternatively, phone ☎ 177 within Nordland or ☎ 75 77 24 10 beyond.

At Steinkjer, to the south in Trøndelag (p287), those with wheels have a binary choice: the swifter Arctic Highway to Narvik, or the slower, less-frequented, more expensive but much more beautiful E17, the 650km-long Kystriksveien (Coastal Route) with Bodø at its northern end. Go the latter if you can spare the time and cash. If you're without wheels, going along the Arctic Highway, by either bus or train, is the only practical choice.

ARCTIC HIGHWAY

MOSJØEN pop 9900

When arriving in Mosjøen (pronounced moo-she-en), along the E6, you may be put off by the industrial face of this aluminium-producing town. Don't be. About 1km south, along lake-like Vefsnfjorden, historic Sjøgata and a street or two nearby are among the most charming in northern Norway and well merit a browse.

The town has a strong historical connection with the UK; in the mid-19th century, five Englishmen imported technically advanced steam engines and sawmill machinery and established the North of Europe Land & Mining Company Ltd to provide timber for Britain's burgeoning industrial towns and cities. What was a tiny coastal settlement quickly became the region's first registered town.

Mosjøen's **tourist office** (☎ 75 11 12 40; www.visitthegeland.com; ☎ 9am-7pm Jul, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Jun & Aug, 10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) is at Sjøgata's southern end. It has internet access (per 15 minutes Nkr20).

Sights & Activities SJØGATA

A stroll around the Sjøgata area, with over 100 listed buildings, takes you past galleries, coffee shops, restaurants and private homes in attractively renovated former warehouses, workshops and boat sheds. *The History of a*

Town (Nkr20), on sale at the museum and tourist office, is an excellent small booklet that brings Mosjøen's history to life.

VEFSN MUSEUM

A combined ticket (Nkr30) gives entry to both branches of Mosjøen's **museum** (☎ 75 11 01 10).

In Sjøgata, the **Jakobsensbrygga warehouse** (Sjøgata 318; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat Jul, 10am-3pm Tue-Fri rest-of-year) is an excellent small museum that portrays, via some particularly evocative photo blow-ups, the history of Mosjøen from the early 19th century onwards. There's an English guide-pamphlet for each section.

Northeast of the centre, the **rural building collection** (Bygdesamlinga; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue-Fri & Sun Jul only) features 12 farmhouses, shops and the like from the 18th and 19th centuries, which you can view from the exterior. It too has a pamphlet in English. Adjacent is the **Dolstad Kirke** (1735), built on the site of a medieval church dedicated to St Michael. If it's closed, ask for the key at the museum.

LAKSFORSEN

About 30km south of Mosjøen and a 600m detour from the E6, the roaring 17m-high Laksforsen **waterfall** has leaping salmon in season and makes a pleasant picnic spot, although it's a bit of a struggle to reach the shore below the torrent. The café here, a churlish place with its 'no photo' and 'guests only beyond this point' notices, is one place to avoid.

Sleeping & Eating

Mosjøen Camping (☎ 75 17 79 00; www.mosjoen camping.no; Mathias Bruuns gata 24; tent/caravan sites Nkr120/170, cabins Nkr390-1090) Beside the E6 about 500m southeast of the town centre, this camp site tends to be overcrowded with travellers doing the North Cape rush. In this land of superlatives, the sole urinal in the men's toilet must rank as Norway's, if not the world's, highest.

Mosjøen Hotell (☎ 75 17 11 55; www.mosjoencamping.no; Vollarveien 35; s/d with shared bathroom Nkr380/490, with bathroom s/d Nkr650/840 mid-Jun-mid-Aug, Nkr855/960 Sun-Thu, Nkr640/810 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; 📞 📺) Under the same ownership as the camp site and about 100m north of the train station, this run-of-the-mill roadhouse offers cosy, good-value but unexceptional rooms.

our pick Fru Haugans Hotel (☎ 75 11 41 00; www.fruhaugans.no; Strandgata 39; s/d Nkr740/940 mid-Jun-mid-Aug & Fri & Sat year-round, Nkr1095/1295 Sun-Thu rest-of-year) Don't be deterred by the bland main façade that somehow slipped past the planning authorities. Frau Haugans (she was the original owner; see her stare from her portrait in the lounge beside the Ellenstuen restaurant – see below) is northern Norway's oldest hotel. Dating in part from 1794, it occupies several buildings and has grown organically over the years. Its lovely green garden gives panoramic views directly onto the fjord. The annexe has a few cheaper rooms (s/d Nkr450/650) with shared facilities and bags of character.

Café Kulturverkstedet (☎ 75 17 27 60; Sjøgata 22-24; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) Run by the local heritage society, this delightful café enjoys, appropriately, one of Sjøgata's largest and most appealing renovated buildings. There are books to leaf through and you can sip and nibble in its interconnecting art gallery.

Lille Torget (☎ 75 17 04 14; Strandgata 24; ☎ Mon-Sat) With its pub interior (admire the gorgeous Art Nouveau maiden bearing a lamp at her heart) and a terrace giving onto the main square, this one-time bank, then clothing store, now pub has seen lots of action over the years. You're guaranteed an excellent brew; one of its staff reached the 2007 finals of Norway's annual coffee-making championship (this said, the early shift staff were languid to the point of inertia the last time we blew the froth off a cappuccino here).

Fru Haugans (see above) has two magnificent restaurants. **Ellenstuen** (mains Nkr220-240), an intimate place that preserves many of the hotel's original fittings, offers a particularly creative menu (might roasted stag fillet and lightly smoked grouse breast in a raspberry sauce induce an appetite?) while **Hagestuen** (mains Nkr165-245), tapestry-bedecked and altogether larger, offers both à la carte dining and a copious evening buffet (Nkr225).

You can also eat very well indeed at **Oksen Ferdinand** (☎ 75 11 99 91; Sjøgata 23; mains Nkr220-255) steakhouse, inside or on the terrace overlooking the street. Also a historic building, it does tasty sandwiches and snacks (Nkr90 to Nkr135), too.

Getting There & Away

There are flights to Bodø, via Mo i Rana, and Trondheim.

Buses run from Mosjøen to Brønnøysund (three hours, once or twice daily except Saturday) and Sandnessjøen (1¾ hours, three to five daily) and there's at least one service daily to/from Mo i Rana (1¾ hours).

Mosjøen lies on the rail line between Trondheim (Nkr648, 5½ hours) and Fauske (Nkr445, 3½ hours).

For drivers, a lovely detour follows the wild, scenic Villmarksveien route, which runs parallel to the E6 east of Mosjøen and approaches the bizarre 1128m peak Hatten (or Hattfjell). From the end of the nearest road, the hike to the top takes about two hours. However, taking this route cuts out Mosjøen itself.

MO I RANA

pop 5800

Mo i Rana (just plain Mo to those who know her) is the third-largest city in the north and gateway to the spruce forests, caves and glaciers of the Arctic Circle region. Its friendly reputation is often attributed to its rapid expansion due to the construction of the now-closed steel plant, which in its time employed over 1000 workers; nearly everyone here knows how it once felt to be a stranger in town.

Although Mo's predominant architectural style is boxy, the town is becoming lighter in tone now that heavy industry has given way to a tech-based economy.

The staff at the **tourist office** (☎ 75 13 92 00; www.arctic-circle.no; Ole Tobias Olsens gate 3; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 1-7pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug; 9am-4pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) are exceptionally helpful. There's free internet access and they can make reservations for activities around the region, such as visits to the Svartisen glacier and nearby caves.

ARCTIC MENU

To guarantee yourself a good meal in northern Norway, visit a restaurant affiliated to the Arctic Menu scheme. Members, who range from small, family-owned concerns to the restaurants of chain hotels, undertake to use the region's natural ingredients. It may be a sauce simmered with local berries; an Arctic char pulled from the icy waters; reindeer, seal, whale or, of course, cod – every last bit of it from the rich flesh to local delicacies such as the cheek, roe, liver, stomach or tongue.

You'll find such restaurants indicated within each town's Eating section. The scheme's **website** (www.arctiskmeny.no) has a full list of its 40 or so participants and most tourist offices carry its booklet. This comes complete with a few recipes so you can try a dish or two out back home – if, that is, you can get those fresh, northern Norway ingredients...

Sights & Activities

A combined ticket (Nkr20) gives entry to Mo's two small **museums** (☎ 75 11 01 33; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug), which merit a brief glance.

The **Rana Museum of Natural History** (Moholmen) illustrates the geology, ecology, flora and wild-life of the Arctic Circle region, and features several hands-on exhibits that will engage children. Highlight of its sister museum, the **Rana Museum of Cultural History** (☎ 75 14 61 70; Fridtjof Nansengata 22), is a giant model of old Mo before the steelworks altered her complexion for ever.

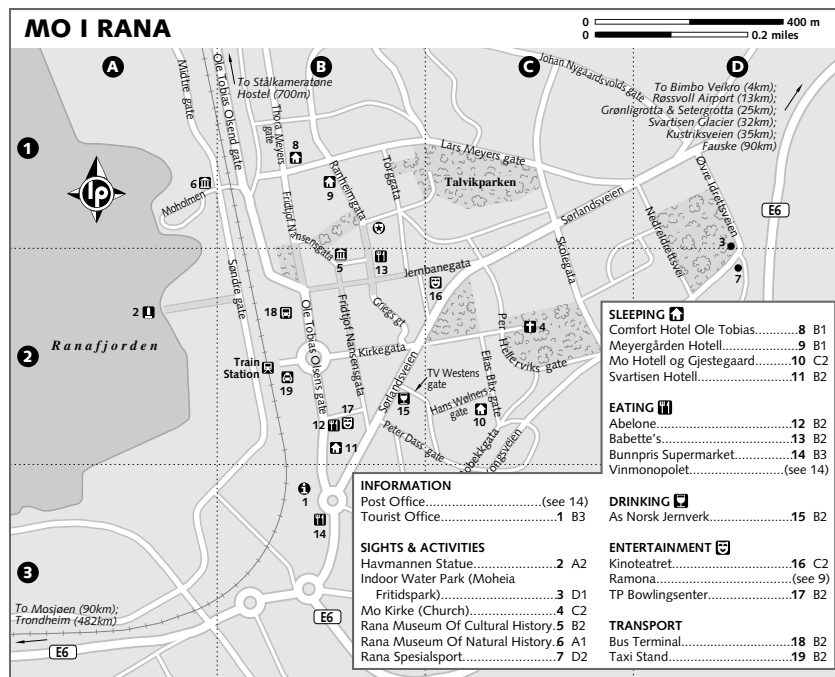
At the **indoor water park** (Moheia Fritidspar; ☎ 75 14 60 60; Øvre Idrettsveien 1; adult/child Nkr75/50; ☎ noon-8pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun), also called Badeland, you can dip into its four pools and three saunas – and zoom down its 42m-long water slide.

The oldest building in town, Mo's original **church** (Mo Kirke; ☎ free guided tours 8-10pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun-mid-Aug) was constructed in 1724. With its steeply pitched roof and onion dome, it deserves to be open to visitors during more than the current brief hours. In the graveyard is a monument to Russian prisoners who died in captivity and the gravestones of eight British soldiers, killed in commando raids in May 1940.

Havmannen (Man of the Sea), a sculpture forever up to his knees in water, turns his back on the town and gazes resolutely out over the fjord. His clean lines and rounded profile are the work of iconic British sculptor Antony Gormley.

CAVES

The limestone and marble country northwest of Mo i Rana is riddled with caves and sinkholes, formed when river water dissolved



marble between layers of mica schist. Thanks to mineral deposits, the glacial water that runs into ponds and rivers as you approach the caves can change colour from green to grey to blue.

The most accessible and most visited cave is **Grønligrotta** (☎ 75 13 25 06; Grønli; adult/child Nkr100/50; ☞ tours hourly 10am–7pm mid-Jun–Aug), 25km north of Mo. There's electric lighting (it's the only illuminated tourist cave in Scandinavia) and the 30-minute tour takes you along an underground river, through a rock maze and past a granite block torn off by a glacier and deposited in the cave by the brute force of moving water.

The two-hour trip through **Setergrotta** (☎ 75 16 23 50; Røvassdalen; adult/child Nkr265/235; ☞ tours twice daily early Jun–late Aug) is altogether less dragooned and considerably more adventurous. Highlights include a couple of extremely tight squeezes and a thrilling shuffle between rock walls while straddling a 15m gorge. The operators provide headlamps, hard hats, gumboots and overalls.

The tourist office can make reservations for both.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Local operator **Rana Spesialsport** (☎ 75 12 70 88; Øvre Idrettsveien 35) puts on a range of sporty activities, including kayaking, guided hikes and glacier trekking.

Tours

Mo i Rana is the most convenient base for exploring the **fjords** to the west (although they are still some 110km away).

For tours to the **Svartisen glacier**, see p296. There's no public transport from Mo but you can hire a bike from the tourist office and pedal the 32km each way to the ferry point beside Svartisen lake to explore Østisen (see p296).

The tourist office does a pair of evening **guided walks** (Nkr80). Choose either the one-hour town walk or, for spectacular views, the 90-minute mountain walk (don't be put off by the term; it won't overtax you). Sign up by 4pm on the day.

Sleeping

Stålkameratene (☎ 41 92 62 15; Stållbrakka, Søderlundmyra; per person Nkr200; ☞ mid-Jun–mid-Aug; ☞) Mo's biggest bargain is just off the

ARTSCAPE NORDLAND

You'll spot them on lonely promontories and windswept moorland, tucked beneath crags, in urban parks or lapped by the sea. As you travel through Nordland, follow the sign *Skulpturlandskap* to discover a work of creative modern sculpture, enhancing and in harmony with the landscape around it. In all, 33 works were commissioned from prominent sculptors in Norway, other Scandinavian countries and the wider international community. Representatives of 18 nations, including artists such as Antony Gormley, Anish Kapoor and Tony Cragg, have each left their very individual mark upon the Nordland countryside. For more on this ambitious project, see www.artscape.no.

first left bend of the E6, heading northwards. This hostel has four plainly furnished single rooms, occupied by students during the school year, and an eight-bed dorm. Facilities are in the corridor.

Mo Hotell og Gjestegaard (☎ 75 15 22 11; www.mo-gjestegaard.no in Norwegian; Elias Blix gate 5; s/d incl breakfast from Nkr550/700) Up the hill, this pleasant 15-room guesthouse is welcoming and impeccably kept. It's in a quiet location and has a small garden where you are welcome to sit and relax.

Svartisen Hotell (☎ 75 15 19 99; Ole Tobias Olsens gate 4; s/d from Nkr795/1095 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr940–1140 rest-of-year) The Comfort Hotel owners have recently taken over the Svartisen and renovated bathrooms and all public areas. Apartments are bright and have mini-kitchens. Those on the ground floor are particularly large and split-level, with the sleeping area upstairs. Choose a rear-facing room as the street can be noisy until the traffic dies down.

Meyergården Hotell (☎ 75 13 40 00; www.meyergarden.no in Norwegian; 28 Fridtjof Nansens gate; s/d Nkr835/1085 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, from Nkr1195/1445 Sun–Thu, Nkr730/980 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; ☞) An affiliate of the Rica chain, Mo's longest-established hotel is full of character, with fine rooms, the Ramona nightclub and a highly regarded Arctic Menu restaurant. If price is a factor, go for one of the six economical rooms with shared facilities (s/d Nkr665/865) in the original – and much more atmospheric – late-19th-century wing.

Comfort Hotel Ole Tobias (☎ 75 12 05 00; www.ole-tobias.no; Thora Meyersgate 2; s/d from Nkr895/1195 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, from Nkr1305/1510 Sun–Thu, Nkr695/895 Fri & Sat rest-of-year) This railway-themed hotel – the corridor carpets simulate a railway track and each room has the name of a station – commemorates the local teacher and priest who convinced the government to build the Nordlandsbanen railway connecting Trondheim with Fauske and Bodø. As well as breakfast year-round, summer tariffs include a light evening meal.

Eating

Bimbo Veikro (☎ 75 15 10 01; Saltfjellveien 34; mains Nkr75–200) Just 2km north of town, this road-house serves up the usual sandwiches, pizzas and grills and is also an Arctic Menu restaurant, offering more subtle fare. 'Bimbo' alludes to a nearby elephant-shaped rock formation, not the classy waitresses.

Babette's (☎ 75 15 44 33; Ranheimgate 2; mains Nkr174–194) Turkish-owned and set back in a pedestrianised square, Babette's has something for everyone. It's at once bar and café with a large, open terrace and a popular pizza, grills and kebab place.

Abelone (☎ 75 15 38 88; Ole Tobias Olsens gate 6; mains Nkr175–195) Abelone is your best dining option outside the hotels. It looks unprepossessing from the street but inside the cosy simulated log cabin makes for a congenial dining environment. Opt for one of its quality meat dishes.

For liquid picnics, both Bunnpris supermarket and Vinmonopolet are just south of the tourist office.

Drinking & Entertainment

As Norsk Jernverk (☎ 75 14 32 02; TV Westens gate 2; ☞ 6pm–2am daily) carries, not without irony, the name of Mo's long defunct steel-works. On the same premises as Big Horn Steakhouse, its narrow door is easy to miss. Not so for locals in the know, who congregate here to drink, chat and, if the mood takes them, dance.

Ramona (☎ 75 13 40 00; Fridtjof Nansensgate 28; ☞ Thu–Sat) Within the Meyergården Hotell, this spot – and here comes another superlative – claims to be the largest nightclub in northern Norway.

Kinoteatret (☎ 75 14 60 50; Rådhusplass 1) The cinema at Mo i Rana's is located at the top of Jernbanegata.

TP Bowlsenter (☎ 75 16 85 00; Fridtjof Nansensgata 1) You can go bowling here for Nkr50 per round at peak times.

Getting There & Away

Mo i Rana's Røssvoll airport, 14km north-east of town, has flights to/from Bodø and Trondheim, via Mosjøen. You'll enjoy an excellent panorama of the Svartisen icecaps unless it's misty down below.

By bus, options are fairly limited. There are three services daily except Saturday between Mo i Rana and Sandnessjøen (2¾ hours) and at least one daily run to/from Mosjøen (1¾ hours). For information about journeys to/from Umeå in Sweden, see p407.

Most visitors arrive at Mo i Rana's attractive octagonal **train station** (☎ 75 15 01 77) on the two to four daily trains from Trondheim (Nkr749, 6½ hours) or Fauske (Nkr298, 2¾ hours).

Getting Around

Flytaxi (☎ 90 16 21 57) does an airport run for all flights, calling by major hotels.

If you're driving, pick up a free visitors' parking permit from the tourist office, which also hires bicycles.

Call ☎ 7550 for a taxi.

SALTFJELLET-SVARTISEN NATIONAL PARK

The 2770-sq-km Saltfjellet-Svartisen National Park combines the Svartisen icecap, Norway's second-largest icefield, with its rugged peaks, a combined area of 369 sq km; and the high, rolling moorlands of the Saltfjellet massif near the Swedish border.

The best map for trekking is Statens Kartverk's *Saltfjellet* at 1:100,000.

Northbound travellers on the Hurtigruten coastal ferry can visit the Svartisen glacier as an optional add-on to their journey (Nkr870).

Svartisen

The two Svartisen icecaps, separated by the valley Vesterdalen, straddle the Arctic Circle between Mo i Rana and the Meløy peninsula. At its thickest, the ice is around 600m deep. Its average height is about 1500m but some tongues lick down into the valleys and are the lowest-lying glaciers in mainland Europe. You can experience Svartisen from either its eastern or more spectacular western side. Most visitors to either just make a

quick hop by boat, but hikers will find more joy approaching from the east.

Østisen, the eastern glacier, is more accessible from Mo. From the end of the Svartisdalen road, 20km up the valley from Mo i Rana's airport, **ferries** (☎ 75 16 23 79; adult/child return Nkr80/40; ☽ mid-Jun–Aug) cross Svartisen lake (Svartisvatnet) four times daily. From the ferry landing, it's a 3km hike to the beginning of the Austerdalsisen glacier tongue. There's a kiosk and camp site at the lake.

From the end of the road you can also trek up to the hut on the shore of the mountain lake Pikhauvatnet, which is surrounded by peaks and ice. This is an excellent base for day hikes up the Glomdal valley or to the Flatisen glacier.

For the western and more dramatic Svartisen icecap, see p305.

Saltfjellet

The broad upland plateaus of the Saltfjellet massif transcend the Arctic Circle, connecting the peaks surrounding the Svartisen icecap and the Swedish border. Within this relatively inhospitable wilderness are traces of several ancient Sami fences and sacrificial sites, some dating from as early as the 9th century.

A 15km walk to the east leads to Graddis, near the Swedish border, and the venerable **Graddis Fjellstue og Camping** (☎ 75 69 43 41; graddis@c2i.net; s Nkr450, d from 570-620; ☽ mid-Jun–mid-Aug). This cosy little guesthouse has been run by the same family since its establishment in 1867. It makes an excellent base to launch yourself into one of Norway's least tramped hiking areas. Camping is also available, and Methuseloh, a 1000-year-old pine tree, is a nearby attraction.

By car, access to Saltfjellet is either along the E6 or the Rv77, which follows the southern slope of the Junkerdalen valley. Rail travellers can disembark at Lonsdal en route between Fauske and Trondheim, but you may have to request a stop.

ARCTIC CIRCLE CENTRE

Latitude 66°33' N marks the southernmost extent of the midnight sun on the summer solstice and the ragged edge of the polar night on the winter solstice. As the Arctic Highway between Mo i Rana and Fauske cuts across this imaginary line, it should be a magical moment.

But the **Polarsirkelsenteret** (☎ 75 12 96 96; E6, Rognan; optional exhibition adult/child/family Nkr50/20/100; ☽ May–mid-Sep), beside the E6 and surrounded by the bleak moors that roll in from Saltfjellet-Svartisen National Park, is something of a tourist trap. There's an exhibition of stuffed wildlife and an audiovisual presentation on the Arctic regions, but the place exists mostly to stamp postcards with a special Arctic Circle postmark and sell certificates (Nkr50) for visitors to authenticate crossing the line. There's also boreal kitsch – miniature polar bears, trolls and other fluffy, furry things – by the basket load and, on the plus side, as its website chooses to highlight, 'very good lavatory facilities'. Altogether more sober and serious are the memorials to the Slav forced labourers who, during WWII, constructed the Arctic Highway for the occupying Nazi forces and died far from home.

Northbound travellers will feel spirits rising again as they leave these bleak uplands and descend into a relatively lush, green environment, which is much more typical of northern Norway.

FAUSKE

pop 7100

Fauske is known mainly for fine marble. Its 'Norwegian Rose' stone features in many a monumental building, including the Oslo Rådhus, the UN headquarters in New York and the Emperor's palace in Tokyo. The town is also the jumping-off point for Sulitjelma and the Rago National Park.

The seasonal **tourist office** (☎ 75 50 35 15; Sjøgata; ☽ 9am–3pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug) shares its premises with the dominant building of Salten museum.

Sights include the marble-themed **town square**, and the park-like collection of historic buildings of the Fauske branch of **Salten museum** (Sjøgata; adult/child Nkr35/free; ☽ 11am–5pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug), whose grounds are a lovely spot for a picnic.

Sleeping & Eating

Lundhøgda Camp & Café (☎ 75 64 39 66; lunghogda@c2i.net; Lundveien; camp site Nkr150, 4-bed cabin Nkr380-750; ☽ May–Sep) This complex, 3km west of town, has superb views of the fjord and surrounding peaks.

Fauske Hotell (☎ 75 60 20 00; www.fauskehotell.no in Norwegian; Storgata 82; s/d Nkr700/950 mid-Jun–Aug, Nkr970/1220 Sun–Thu, Nkr825/1075 Fri & Sat rest-of-year)

Fauske's only year-round upmarket choice has renovated, cheerful rooms although common areas feel decidedly dated. The restaurant does an Arctic Menu.

Brygga Hotell (☎ 75 60 20 00; s/d Nkr700/950; ☽ mid-Jun–Jul) This less monolithic 30-room annexe of the Fauske Hotell, right beside the fjord, is an attractive alternative should you pass through town during the brief window when it's open.

Huset (☎ 75 64 41 01; Storgata 74; mains around Nkr200) This attractive eating choice on the main street does prime cuts of meat with garnishing, sold by weight, and other meaty mains. It also has an imaginative range of snacks and salads, plus the inevitable pizza.

Getting There & Away

BUS

There are four buses each day running to/from Bodø (Nkr106, 1¾ hours). The Nord-Norgeekspresen for Narvik (Nkr407, 4¾ hours) passes through Fauske twice daily and has fat discounts for holders of Inter-Rail and Eurail passes. You can also travel directly to Lofoten on the Fauske–Lofoten Ekspresen, which crosses to Sortland (Nkr370, five hours, twice daily). One of the two buses continues to Svølver (Nkr507, nine hours). There's also a daily run to/from Harstad (Nkr343, 5½ hours).

TRAIN

Trains ply the Nordlandsbanen between Trondheim (Nkr905, nine hours) and Bodø (Nkr104, 45 minutes), via Fauske, twice daily and there are additional trains (up to five daily) between Fauske and Bodø. To continue further northwards, you've no option but to hop on a bus.

AROUND FAUSKE

Saltald & Blood Road Museums

Saltald Historical Village (☎ 75 68 22 90; adult/child Nkr30/free; ☽ 9am–3pm Mon–Fri, 1–4pm Sat, 1–6pm Sun 20 Jun–20 Aug), just off the E6 near Saltnes, is a collection of rural and fishing-related buildings. Within the grounds is the **Blood Road Museum**. In an old German barracks, it reveals conditions for Allied prisoners of war who died building the highway between Saltnes and Saksenvik. The prisoners' cemetery, with the remains of some 7000 forced labourers, is about 3km north, in Botn.

Sulitjelma

As an interpretive panel just north of Fauske will confirm, you're exactly halfway along the E6 and it's an appropriate moment to break free from the Arctic Highway for a short while.

It's a gorgeous 40km run along the Rv830, up scenic Langvassdalen to the tiny community of Sulitjelma. It wasn't always such a backwater; in 1860 a Sami herder discovered copper ore in the forested country north of Langvatnet and suddenly the Sulitjelma region was attracting all sorts of opportunists from southern Norway. Large ore deposits were discovered and the Sulitjelma Gruber mining company was founded in 1891. By 1928 the wood-fuelled smelter had taken its toll on the surrounding birch forests, as did high concentrations of CO₂, a by-product of the smelting process. Nowadays, with the furnaces long since cold, the environment is well on its way to recovery.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A one-hour guided tour of the **Sulitjelma Show Mine** (Besøksgruve; adult/child Nkr125/50; ☎ 1pm mid-May–early Aug) includes a 1.5km rail ride deep into the mountain.

Alongside the fjord, the **Sulitjelma Mining Museum** (Gruvemuseum; ☎ 75 64 06 95; adult/child/family Nkr25/10/60; ☎ 10am–6pm Sun–Fri, noon–3pm Sat mid-Jun–early Aug) records the area's 100 years of mining history and displays some awesome rusting equipment.

The country east and south of Sulitjelma enjoys especially scenic glacial surroundings and there are ample hiking opportunities.

Rago National Park

The small (167 sq km), scarcely visited Rago National Park is a rugged chunk of forested granite mountain and moorland, riven with deep glacial cracks and capped by great icefields. Rago, together with the large adjoining Swedish parks, Pakjelanta, Sarek and Stora Sjöfallet, belongs to a wider protected area of 5500 sq km. Wildlife includes not only beavers in the deep Laksåga (aka Nordfjord) river valley, but also wolverines in the higher areas. Along the relatively lush Storskogdalen valley, a series of foaming cascades and spectacular waterfalls tumble.

From the main trailhead at Lakshol, it's a three-hour, 7km walk up the valley to the free Storskogvasshytta and Ragohytta huts,

then a stiff climb up and over the ridge into Sweden to connect with the well-established trail system over the border.

Maps to use are *Sisovatnet*, at 1:50,000, or *Sørfold*, at 1:75,000. To reach Lakshol, turn east off the E6 at the Trengsel bridge and continue about 6km to the end of the road.

NARVIK

pop 18,300

Narvik was established in 1902 as an ice-free port for the rich Kiruna iron mines in Swedish Lapland. Recently it's begun to capitalise on the unique sporting and sightseeing activities available in its majestic, wild and historic surroundings, including the spectacular Ofotbanen Railway to Sweden.

History

The Narvik region was inhabited as early as the Stone Age, as evidenced by the distinct rock carving of a moose found at Vassvik, northwest of the centre.

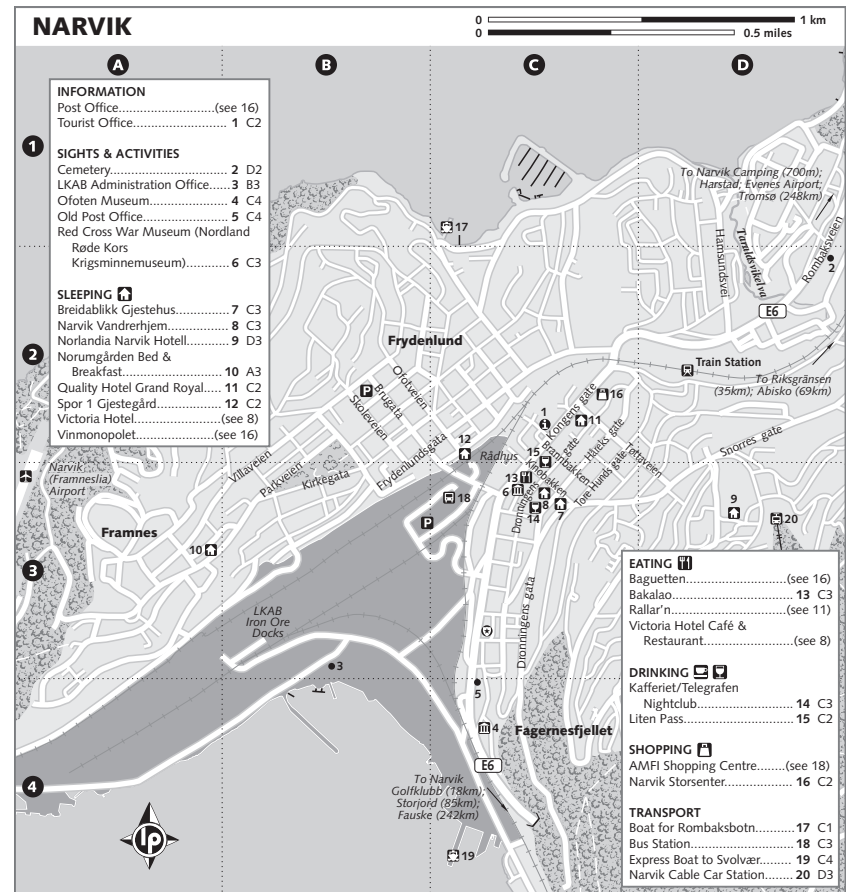
During WWII control of this strategic port was essential to the Nazi war machine, intent upon halting iron supplies to the Allies and usurping the bounty. In April 1940, 10 German destroyers ploughed through a blizzard to enter the port and sink two Norwegian battleships. Next day five British destroyers arrived and a fierce naval battle resulted in the loss of two ships on each side. In May British, Norwegian, French and Polish troops disembarked and took back the town.

But the Nazis didn't retreat and the town was decimated, as evidenced by the remains of soldiers in the cemeteries and 34 ships of five nations (Norway, Britain, France, the Netherlands and Germany) in the harbour. On 8 June 1940 the Allies surrendered Narvik, which remained under German control until 8 May 1945.

Although the town was admirably rebuilt, downtown Narvik is less than prepossessing (some would say it's ugly). Still, the surrounding fjord, forest and mountain country borders on the spectacular in all directions, and the trans-shipment facility bisecting the city still loads around 30 million tonnes of ore annually from train wagons onto ships.

Orientation & Information

Narvik is pinched by islands to the west and mountains in every other direction, while spectacular fjords stretch north and south.



The E6 (Kongens gate) slices through the heart of town. The train station is at the north end of town and the bus station is just beside the AMFI shopping centre.

The **tourist office** (☎ 76 96 56 00; www.destinationnarvik.com; Kongens gate 57; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug; 9am–4pm May–mid-Jun, 9am–4pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat mid-Aug–Sep, 9am–3.30pm Mon–Fri Oct–Apr) holds Narvik og Omegns Turistforening (NOT) cabin keys (Nkr100 deposit), has internet access (Nkr10 per 15 min) and rents bikes (Nkr200 per day).

Sights

Narvik's **Red Cross War Museum** (Nordland Røde Kors Krigsmnneumuseum; ☎ 76 94 44 26; Kongens gate; adult/child Nkr50/25; ☎ 10am–9pm Mon–Sat, noon–6pm Sun early Jun–late

Aug, 10am–4pm Mon–Sat, noon–4pm Sun May–early Jun & late Aug–mid-Sep, 11am–3pm Mon–Fri rest-of-year) illustrates the military campaigns fought hereabouts in the early years of WWII. The presentation may not be flash but it will still stun you.

The **Ofofen Museum** (☎ 76 96 00 50; Administrasjonsveien 3; adult/child/concession Nkr40/free/20; ☎ 10am–3pm Mon–Fri, noon–3pm Sat & Sun late Jun–early Aug, 10am–3pm Mon–Fri rest-of-year) tells of Narvik's farming, fishing, railway-building and ore trans-shipment heritage. There's a rolling film about the Ofotbanen Railway and children will enjoy pressing the button that activates the model train. Linger too over the display case of Sami costumes and artefacts and the collection of historic photos, contrasted with modern shots taken from the same angles. To

reach the museum, take the minor road beside the restored building that served as Narvik's post office from 1888 to 1898.

The vast **LKAB iron ore trans-shipment complex**, an impressive tangle of machinery, conveyors, ovens, railways and heaps of iron pellets says it all about Narvik's *raison d'être*. An average tanker-load of ore weighs in at 125,000 to 175,000 tonnes and takes an entire day to fill. Tours (minimum six participants) leave from the LKAB administration offices, usually at 3pm, from mid-June to mid-August (times may vary so check with the tourist office first).

Above the town, the **Narvikfjellet cable car** (☎ 76 94 16 05; Märveien; adult/child return Nkr100/80; ☎ 1-9pm early Jun & Aug, 1pm-1am mid-Jun-Jul) climbs 656m for breathtaking views over the surrounding peaks and fjords and even as far as Lofoten on a clear day. Several marked walking trails radiate from its top station or you can bounce down a signed mountain-bike route.

In the main **cemetery** on the north side of town are monuments to the French and Polish troops who fought alongside the Norwegians on land, and the graves of German defenders and British sailors who died at sea.

Activities

Narvik og Omegns Turistforening (NOT; www.narvikfjell.no) is an excellent source of information about hiking. It maintains more than 20 cabins, mostly between Narvik and the Swedish border. Collect keys from the tourist office against a deposit of Nkr100.

A popular hike that parallels the **Ofothanen railway** (see p302) follows an old navy trail, the **Rallarveien**. Few walkers attempt the entire way between Sweden's Abisko National Park and the sea, opting instead to begin at Riksgränsen, the small ski station just across the Swedish border, or Bjørnfell, the next station west. It's an undemanding descent as far as Katterat, from where you can take the evening train to Narvik. For more exertion, drop down to Rombaksbotn at the head of the fjord, the location of the main camp when the railway was being built (it's since returned to nature). From here, a **boat** (adult/child Nkr250/100) runs erratically to Narvik in summer. Check with the tourist office to avoid an unwelcome supplementary 10km at the end of the day.

From February to April, the Narvikfjellet cable car above town (see above) will whisk

you up high for trail, off-piste and cross-country skiing with outstanding views.

In winter, you can go snowshoeing with **Sipas Adventures** (☎ 90 69 09 55; www.sipasadventures.no), which also offers summertime guided walks, caving and sea kayaking. Book directly or via the Narvik tourist office.

From November to mid-January, when the orcas, or killer whales, gather to gorge themselves on the winter herring run, **Ford Cruise Narvik** (☎ 91 39 06 18; www.fc.no) does four- to six-hour trips to their feeding grounds in search of the action.

The fjord-side journey to the **Narvik Golfklubb** (☎ 76 95 12 01) at Skjomendalen is wondrous (follow the signs to Skjomdal just before the Skjomen bridge on the E6, about 18km south of town). Sheer, treacherous faces will leave you guessing how there could possibly be a golf course here. Yet nature works wonders, and there's a valley hidden amid the peaks. Find golf a bore? There's also worthwhile hiking nearby.

Festivals & Events

Each year during March, Narvik holds its **Vinterfestuka**, an action-packed winter week of events, partly in commemoration of the navies who built the railway.

On the last Saturday in June, some 2000 walkers take the train to various stops along the Rallarveien and then hike back to party at Rombaksbotn.

Sleeping

Narvik Camping (☎ 76 94 58 10; www.narvikcamping.com; Rombaksveien 75; tent/caravan sites Nkr110/150; 4-/6-bed cabins with bathroom Nkr605/770) Sound sleep's not guaranteed at what's otherwise a perfectly adequate camp site, overlooking the fjord and E6, 2km northeast of the centre and Narvik's only choice. Trucks rumble along the highway and long wagon trains clank by on the railway, just above.

Spor 1 Gjestegård (☎ 76 94 60 20, 996 31 374; www.spor1.no; Brugata 2a; dm Nkr180-200, s/d 450/550) The welcome at 'Trail 1' begins with the pots of fresh flowers flanking the entrance. In former rail cabins by the tracks, it has a sauna, kitchen and great pub with outdoor terrace, open in the evenings from Tuesday to Saturday. Hosts Brit and Bjørn Einar are themselves experienced backpackers.

Breidablikk Gjestehus (☎ 76 94 14 18; www.breidablikk.no in Norwegian; Tore Hunds gate 41; dm/s/d from

Nkr250/435/595; ☎ ☑) It's a steep but worthwhile walk from the centre to this pleasant hillside guesthouse with its sweeping views over town and fjord. There's a cosy communal lounge and it serves a delicious buffet breakfast (Nkr50). Dorms have four beds. Some rooms (around Nkr200 extra) are freshly painted with sparkling new bathrooms.

ourpick Norumgården Bed & Breakfast (☎ 76 94 48 57; http://norumgaarden.narviknett.no; Framnesveien 127; s/d Nkr350/500, d with kitchen Nkr600; ☎ late Jan-Nov) This little treasure of a place (it has only four rooms so reservations are essential) is very special and offers excellent value. Used as a German officer's mess in WWII (the owner will proudly show you a 1940 bottle of Coca Cola, made under licence in Hamburg), it nowadays brims with antiques and character. Choose the Heidi room (it's the only one without a shower but the little balcony more than compensates) and you'll be sleeping in the bed once occupied by King Olav.

Narvik Vandrerhjem (☎ 76 96 22 00; narvik.hotel@vandrerhjem.no; Dronningens gata 58; dm Nkr270, s/d Nkr460/600, all incl breakfast; ☎ ☑) Narvik's smart though by no means cheap HI hostel is a friendly place with a good café. Its 30 beds are quickly snapped up in summer so do reserve.

Victoria Hotel (☎ 76 96 28 00; www.victoria-hotel.net in Norwegian; s/d Nkr765/895 incl breakfast) This one shares premises with Narvik Vandrerhjem, and offers rooms with bathroom and more comfort.

Norlandia Narvik Hotell (☎ 76 96 48 00; www.norlandia.no; Skistuaveien 8; s/d Nkr725/970 mid-Jun-mid-Aug, Nkr850/1050 Sun-Thu, Nkr595/750 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; ☎ ☑) This 90-room tour-group favourite, stretching long and low at the base of the cable car, offers great vistas. Accommodation is in comfortable chalet-type buildings.

Quality Hotel Grand Royal (☎ 76 97 70 00; www.choice.no; Kongens gate 64; s/d mid-Jun-mid-Aug Nkr700/1010, Nkr1250/1450 Sun-Thu, Nkr790/980 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; ☎ ☑) Narvik's top-of-the-line hotel, although something of a monolith from the exterior, makes an attractive stopover. There's a beauty salon and a few disabled-equipped rooms.

Eating

Baguetten (☎ 76 95 25 00; Kongens gate 66; ☎ Mon-Sat) Opposite Vinmonopolet on the top floor of the Narvik Storsenter, the Baguette will serve you rich cakes and Narvik's best coffee.

Bakalao (☎ 76 94 36 60; Kongens gate 42; mains Nkr174-194; ☎ 10am-4.15pm Mon-Fri) This tiny offshoot of Narvik's fish market offers tasty ready-to-eat dishes, such as fish cakes, *bacalao* and whale stew, to eat in or take away.

Rallar'n (☎ 76 97 70 77; Kongens gate 64) The pub/restaurant of Quality Hotel Grand Royal is all atmospheric low ceilings, bare brick and dark woodwork. Divided into intimate compartments, it offers pizza, pasta and creative mains (Nkr145 to Nkr245).

Victoria Hotel Café and Restaurant (☎ 76 96 28 00; Dronningens gata 58) Between 11am and 5pm, Monday to Friday, this light, pleasant, self-service café serves snacks. Then, from Tuesday to Saturday, it metamorphoses into Narvik's finest dining experience with a gourmet menu (Nkr425 for three courses, Nkr575 for five) that changes weekly.

The town's Vinmonopolet is on the 3rd floor of the Narvik Storsenter.

Drinking & Entertainment

Liten Plass (Dronningens gata; mains Nkr174-194) Prices are chalked in giant letters on the blackboard at the aptly named Little Place – a squeeze-box of a bar, popular with a young crowd, where you're guaranteed human warmth on even the coldest night.

Kafferiet/Telegrafens Night Club (☎ 76 96 00 55; Dronningens gata 56) This popular hang-out, right beside the HI hostel, attracts the 20-to-35 crowd. It shows sport on wide-screen TV and has occasional live bands (with cover charge).

In winter you can tumble out of the cable car into the bar at the **Norlandia Narvik Hotell**, Narvik's leading après-ski venue.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Nearly all flights leave from Harstad/Narvik Evenes airport (p331), which is 1¼ hours away. Narvik's tiny Framneslia airport, about 3km west of the centre, serves only Bodø, Tromsø and Andenes.

BOAT

An express passenger boat runs to Svolveær on Lofoten (Nkr326, 3½ hours, daily except Saturday) from the Dampskipskaia dock on Havnegata, 1km south of the centre along Kongens gate.

SVARTABJØRN

No-one knows for sure whether there actually was a comely cook nicknamed Svartabjørn (Black Bear) who dished up meals for the navvies that built the railway of the Ofoten line. But her name certainly lives on in legend and in fiction. In his Malm trilogy, published in 1914, novelist Ernst Diding recounts some of the stories the navvies passed on to him.

It's said that this dark, beautiful girl, although still too young to be away from home, got on well with the rail workers and was a great little cook into the bargain. But she fell in love with the same man that another woman coveted and was beaten to death with a laundry paddle.

It's said that the navvies arranged for her burial at the Tornehamn cemetery. Today, the grave site bears the name of Anna Norge, but the date of death has been changed at least three times to fit different women who at different times have been assumed to be the genuine Svartabjørn.

BUS

Express buses run northwards to Tromsø (Nkr360, 4¼ hours, three daily) and also between Narvik and Bodø (Nkr497, 6½ hours, two daily) via Fauske (Nkr407, 4¾ hours). For Lofoten there are two buses daily between Narvik and Leknes (Nkr505, eight hours) via Sortland (Nkr294, four hours) and Svolvær (Nkr433, 6½ hours).

TRAIN

Heading for Sweden, there are at least two daily services between Narvik and Riksgränsen (one hour), on the border, and Kiruna (three hours). Trains continue to Lulea (7¼ hours) via Boden, from where you can pick up connections to Stockholm.

The route takes you up the spectacular Ofofbanen Railway and, in Sweden, past Abisko National Park, which offers excellent hiking and lovely Arctic scenery.

Getting Around

Narvik's Framneslia airport is 3km from the centre. Flybuss runs five to seven times daily between Narvik and Harstad/Narvik Evenes airport (Nkr180, 1¼ hours), 79km away. For a taxi, phone **Narvik Taxi** (☎ 07 550).

OFOFBANEN RAILWAY & RALLARVEIEN

The spectacular mountain-hugging **Ofofbanen railway** (☎ 76 92 31 21) trundles beside fjord-side cliffs, birch forests and rocky plateaus as it climbs to the Swedish border. Constructed by migrant labourers (navvies) at the end of the 19th century to connect Narvik with the iron ore mines at Kiruna, in Sweden's far north, it was opened in 1903. Currently it transports around 15 million tonnes of

iron ore annually and is also a major magnet for visitors.

The train route from Narvik to Riksgränsen, the ski resort just inside Sweden (one way/return Nkr80/160, including up to two children; one hour), features some 50 tunnels and snowsheds. Towards the Narvik end of the rail line, you'll be able to see the wreck of the German ship *Georg Thiele* at the edge of the fjord.

You can run the line as a day or half-day trip, leaving Narvik at 10.50am. The 12.33pm return train from Riksgränsen, just in Sweden, allows time for coffee and a quick browse or you can walk a trail in this stunning alpine country and catch the 6.05pm back to Narvik. For the best views, sit on the left side heading from Narvik.

Meteorologen Ski Lodge (☎ 46-7350 324 17 in Sweden; www.meteorologen.se; s/d Nkr900/1400; ☎ year-round; (P) (Q)) Recently opened in what was originally a weather station, this is a very attractive option should you wish to overnight up high. Rooms all have large windows giving vistas of either lake or mountains and there's a pleasant dining room and restaurant, primarily for guests. It also manages self-catering apartments year-round (three-/six-person Nkr695/965) in the vast adjacent winter hotel.

In Sweden, several long-distance trails radiate out from the railway, including the connecting route with Norway's Øvre Dividal National Park (see p343) and the world-renowned Kungleden, which heads south from Abisko into the heart of Sweden.

Between late June and mid-August, bus 91 runs twice a day up the E10 to Riksgränsen (45 minutes) and on to Abisko and Kiruna.

KYSTRIKSVEIEN – THE COASTAL ROUTE

Longer, yes, more expensive, yes (gosh, those ferry tolls mount up). But if you've even a day or two to spare, divert from the Arctic Highway lemming run and enjoy the empty roads and solitary splendours of Kystriksveien, the coastal alternative. If the whole route seems daunting, it's quite possible to cut in or out from Steinkjer, Bodø or, midway, Mosjøen and Mo i Rana. It's one to drive; don't even attempt it by bus or you'll still be waiting when the first snows fall.

Off the coast are around 14,000 islands, some little more than rocks with a few tufts of grass, others (such as Vega; see p304) supporting whole communities that for centuries have survived on coastal fishing and subsistence agriculture. The sea was the only highway and the living was harsh year-round – especially between mid-January and Easter, when the menfolk would be absent, working the fishing grounds off Lofoten for cod.

Information

The splendid free *Kystriksveien* (Coastal Route) booklet, distributed by tourist offices and many lodgings along the way, is a mini-Bible. Its website, www.rv17.no, gives even more detail. For greater depth, invest in *The Coastal Road: A Travel Guide to Kystriksveien* (Nkr298) by Olav Breen.

Click on www.rv17.no/sykkel for a recommended seven-day bike-and-ferry journey along the full length of the Kystriksveien. The free brochure *Cycling from Steinkjer to Leka* has detailed maps, and lists highlights and bicycle-friendly accommodation.

For information on the southern part of Kystriksveien, see p287.

BRØNNØYSUND

pop 5000

Brønnøysund is flanked on one side by an archipelago of islets in a tropical-looking sea and on the other by rolling farm country. Its **tourist office** (☎ 75 01 80 00; www.visithelgeland.com; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year), one block from the Hurtigruten quay, rents bicycles (per hour/day Nkr40/125). It also sells tickets for a spectacular daily minicruise (adult/child Nkr363/182) on the Hurtigruten. Leaving at 5pm, the

coastal ferry passes Torghatten (see below) on its way south to Rørvik in Trøndelag – allowing an hour to explore the town and visit its splendid Norveg Centre for Coastal Culture and Industries before hopping aboard the northbound ferry and reaching Brønnøysund again at 1am.

Sights & Activities

Around 400 types of herb, 100 varieties of rose and 1000 species of cactus flourish at **Hildurs Urterarium** (☎ 75 02 52 12; adult/child Nkr40/free; ☎ 10am-5pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug). At Tilrem, about 6km north of Brønnøysund, it also produces its own wine. There are some rustic old farm buildings, a small art gallery and the shop carries locally grown products. The garden also makes a lovely spot for a lunch stop; dishes seasoned with locally grown herbs, of course.

Located some 15km south of Brønnøysund, **Torghatten** on Torget island is a significant local landmark. The peak, pierced by a hole 160m long, 35m high and 20m wide, is accessed from its base by a good 20-minute walking track. The best perspective of the hole is from the southbound Hurtigruten coastal ferry as it rounds the island. For the lowdown on the legend of Torghatten, see the boxed text, p49.

Sleeping & Eating

The Brønnøysund tourist office can book private farm cabins and *rorbuer* (Nkr600 to Nkr900) accommodating four to eight people.

Torghatten Camping (☎ 75 02 54 95; www.visit.torghatten.no; tent/caravan sites Nkr90/130, 4-6-bed cabins with bathroom Nkr850, 6-bed apt Nkr950-1050) This lovely option with its small beach beside a man-made lake is great for children. Around 10km southwest of Brønnøysund, it's handy for an ascent of the Torghatten peak.

Galeasen Hotell (☎ 75 00 85 50; www.galeasen.com; Havnegata 32-36; s/d Nkr780/980 mid-Jun–mid-Aug & Fri & Sat year-round, Nkr1095/1295 Sun-Thu rest-of-year) The 22-room Galeasen sits right beside the quay and runs a small restaurant. It's an attractive spot even though reception is short on smiles. Ask for a room in the more recent main building, not the less attractive annex, which occupies a converted fish processing plant.

Getting There & Away

There are at least two daily flights to/from both Trondheim and Bodø; the approach

route passes right over Torghatten and the azure seas that lap around it.

Up to four buses run daily except Sunday between Brønnøysund and Sandnessjøen (Nkr180, three hours). Brønnøysund is also a port for the Hurtigruten coastal ferry.

VEGA

pop 1300

The island of Vega remains a very Norwegian destination (we were the only non-nationals on our ferry journeys to and from the island). It and the more than 6000 skerries, islets and simply large rocks that form the Vega archipelago are a Unesco World Heritage site. This distinction comes not for any grand building or monument, nor for their scenery (which is stunning, nevertheless) but for human endeavour. The evaluating committee stated that the archipelago reflects the way generations of fishermen/farmers have, over the past 1500 years, maintained a sustainable living in an inhospitable seascape. This lifestyle is based on the now unique practice of eider down harvesting, to which women make a major contribution. For more on these very special ducks and their down, visit the splendid little E-Huset (E-House) museum or click on www.verdensarvvega.no or www.lanan.no.

Vega's **tourist office** (☎ 75 03 53 88; www.visitvega.no in Norwegian; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Thu, 10am–8pm Fri, 10am–2pm Sat mid–Jun–mid–Aug, 9am–4pm rest-of-year) is in Gladstad, the island's largest hamlet.

E-Huset (☎ 95 04 44 59; admission Nkr30; ☎ noon–4pm Tue–Sun mid–Jun–mid–Aug), in the tiny fishing hamlet of Nes, is a delightful, engagingly informative small museum that celebrates the eider duck and the way the birds were nurtured as domestic pets, when they returned – each one to its very same nesting box – after their winter migration. The E-House occupies a former trading post, which still retains its original counter and row upon row of goods that your great-grandparents used to buy.

Vega Camping (☎ 94 35 00 80; <http://hjem.monet.no/camping> in Norwegian; Floa; tent/caravan site Nkr100/120 plus per person Nkr15; d/q Nkr400/650; ☎ mid–Jun–mid–Aug) The close-cropped green grass extending to the still water's edge make this simple camp site one of the prettiest in Norway. You can rent a boat or bike (Nkr250/100 per day) or go for a trot at the adjacent horse-riding school.

our pick **Vega Havhotell** (☎ 75 03 64 00; www.havho.tellene.no in Norwegian; Viksås; s/d Nkr890/990 incl break-

fast; ☎ daily Apr–Sep, Tue–Sun Nov–Mar) This isolated getaway, down a dirt track at Vega's secluded northern limit, is tranquillity itself (you won't find a radio or TV in any of its 21 rooms). It's a place to unwind, go for breezy coastal strolls or simply watch the mother eider duck and her chicks pottering in the pool below.

Even if you don't stay overnight at Vega Havhotell, call by to enjoy the fine fare, sourced locally for the most part, of its gourmet **restaurant** (1/2/3 courses Nkr225/325/425), where reservations are essential.

Express boats make the trip to/from both Brønnøysund and Sandnessjøen, while car ferries cross to Vega from the mainland at Horn and Tjøtta.

SANDNESSJØEN

pop 5750

Watching over Sandnessjøen, the main commercial centre of Nordland's southern coast, is the imposing Syv Søstre (Seven Sisters) range, just to its south. Hardy hikers can reach all seven summits (910m to 1072m) in a day and every several years there's a competition taking in all the peaks. However, don't bust a gut trying to crack the record of three hours, 54 minutes.

Central Sandnessjøen's backbone is pedestrianised Torolv Kveldulvsøns gate, one block from the harbour. The **tourist office** (☎ 75 04 45 00; www.helgelandskysten.com; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat, noon–4pm Sun mid–Jun–mid–Aug, 9am–4pm Mon–Fri rest-of-year) is by the docks. It hires bicycles (per hour/day Nkr40/125) and has internet access (per minute Nkr1).

Hiking

The tourist office can suggest walks in the Syv Søstre range, reached most conveniently via the Rv17 at Breimo or Sorra, about 4km south of town. From there it's a couple of kilometres' walk to its foot. Trails are blazed with red dots but pack *Alstahaug*, a reliable map at 1:50,000. Sign your name in the book at each summit, fill in a control card at the tourist office and be proud of the diploma it will award you.

Sleeping

Rica Hotel Sandnessjøen (☎ 75 06 50 00; www.rica.no; Torolv Kveldulvsøns gate 16; s/d Nkr795/995 mid–Jun–mid–Aug, Nkr1290/1490 Sun–Thu, Nkr860/1060 Fri & Sat rest-of-year) Sandnessjøen's top-end choice, this large hotel with its 69 recently renovated rooms offers all

the comfort you'd expect from a member of the Rica chain.

Getting There & Away

Up to four buses run daily except Sunday between Sandnessjøen and Brønnøysund (Nkr180, three hours); and there are three to five services (Saturday excepted) to/from both Mosjøen (1¼ hours) and Mo i Rana (2¼ hours). Sandnessjøen is also a stop for the Hurtigruten coastal ferry.

TRÆNA & LOVUND

Træna is an archipelago of over 1000 small, flat skerries, five of which are inhabited.

Ferries from the mainland dock on the island of Husøy, which has most of Træna's population and lodgings, but the main sights are on the adjacent island of Sanna. Sanna is just over 1km long and a miniature mountain range runs along its spine, culminating at the northern end in the 318m spire, Trænstaven.

Near Sanna's southern end, archaeologists discovered a cemetery and artefacts (now at the Tromsø Museum) a good 9000 years old inside the cathedral-like **Kirkhellereen Cave**.

The steep-sided island of Lovund, where prolific bird colonies and 240 humans roost, rises 623m above the sea. Every 14 April the island celebrates Lundkommerdag, the day 200,000 puffins return to the island to nest until mid-August.

Express boats connecting Sandnessjøen and Træna and car ferries run three times per week.

STOKKVÅGEN TO STORVIK

If you do only one segment of the coastal highway, make it the part between Stokkvågen, west of Mo i Rana, and the broad sandy beach at Storvik, 100km south of Bodø. This stretch was recently declared a National Tourist Route, a designation awarded only to the most scenic of scenic roads.

From Mo i Rana to the coast, it's a dramatic run in its own right alongside pretty Ranafjord, where you can roam around the Nazi coastal fort of **Gronsvik** (admission free), one of more than 350 built along Norway's coastline.

The vistas will drain you of superlatives as you follow the coast northwards, cross the Arctic Circle and run within sight of islands, islets and skerries too numerous to count, as sea eagles wheel and peer for prey above you. Wildflowers show off their best in the

relatively mild climate, warmed by the very last of the Gulf Stream's flow and for long stretches the highway rolls right beside the water. You catch enticing glimpses of the Svartisen glacier from the Kilboghhamn–Jektvik and Ågskardet–Forøy ferries, supplemented by magnificent views from the road alongside Holandsfjorden.

From **Holand**, a **ferry** (☎ 47 99 40 30; adult/child return Nkr90/50) makes the 10-minute trip across Holandsfjorden roughly hourly. You can hire a bike (three/six hours Nkr40/60) to travel the 3km gravel track between the jetty and the tip of the Engebreen glacial tongue.

A 15-minute walk from the ferry landing takes you to the **Svartisen Turistsenter** (☎ 75 75 11 00; www.svartisen.no; ☎ Jun–mid–Aug) with its café and shop. It does guided one- to two-hour glacier walks (Nkr400) and longer four- to five-hour treks (Nkr800) from the end of Engbrevatnet lake. Reserve in advance. You can also slog independently up the steep route along the glacier's edge to the Tåkeheimen hut (1171m), near the summit of Helgelandsbukken (1454m). Follow the "T" markers and allow eight hours out and back.

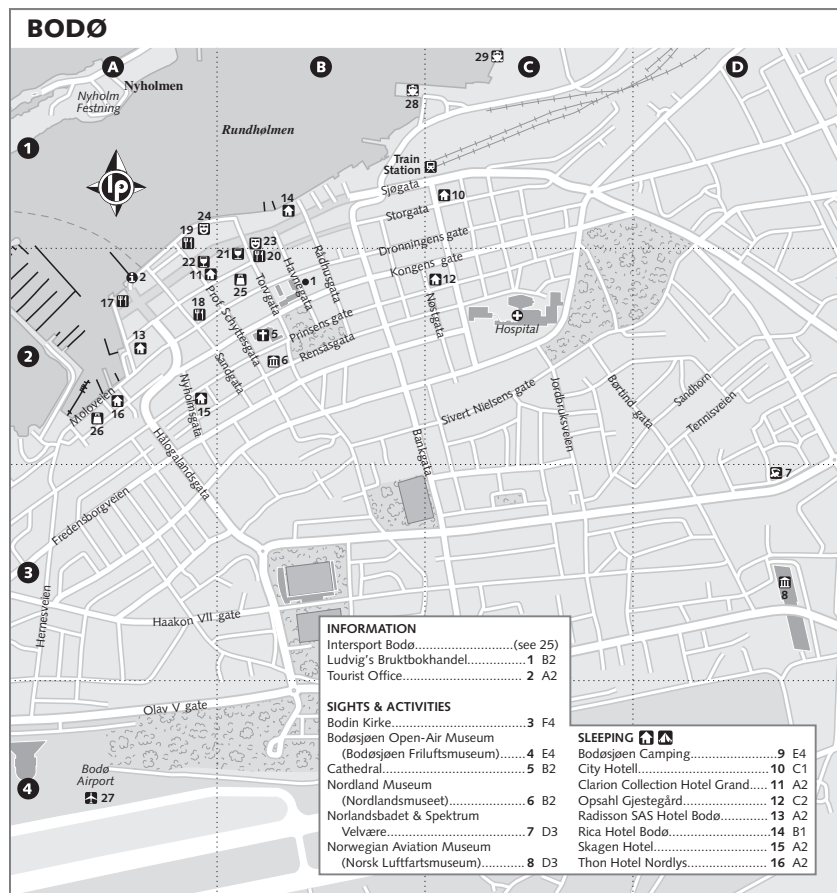
Holand Hytter (☎ 75 75 00 16, 41 57 65 28; walter.joh@combitel.no; cabins Nkr500–800) has three attractive cabins, all with bathroom and kitchen. Two are within the woods and an easy walk from the Svartisen ferry jetty while the third, accommodating up to seven, is right beside it.

Forøy Camping (☎ 75 75 05 25; fax 75 75 03 36; Forøy; tent/caravan Nkr135/175, cabins Nkr490–900) Keep the children quiet as you work your way along the Kystriksveien with the promise of the five-star playground, complete with trampoline and minicabins, at this camp site, barely 1km from the Ågskardet–Forøy ferry terminal. Adults can soak in the hot tub (Nkr100 for up to six people) and everyone can savour the magnificent views of the Svartisen glacier across the fjord. Do reserve your cabin in advance; a trail of vehicles heads from the ferry towards reception.

BODØ

pop 36,000

Bodø, Nordland's largest town, was founded in 1816 as a trade centre, then turned to fishing in 1860 during an especially lucrative herring boom. The town centre, rebuilt after being almost completely levelled by WWII



bombing, is unexciting architecturally – and in summer it can reek of the fish that sustain it – but it's open, tidy and has a pleasant marina. The city's main charm lies in its backdrop of distant rugged peaks and vast skies; while dramatic islands that support the world's densest concentration of white-tailed sea eagles – not for nothing is Bodø known as the Sea Eagle Capital – dot the seas to the north.

Many holidaymakers bypass Bodø in their rush to reach the far north or simply leap on a ferry to Lofoten. However, it's accessible and a great place to spend a day or two (it's only 63km west of Fauske on the Arctic Highway and is the northern terminus of the Nordlandsbanen railway).

Orientation & Information

Central Bodø slopes down a gradual hill towards the shoreline. The two main streets Sjøgata and largely pedestrianised Storgata run parallel, punctuated by the huge Glasshuset shopping mall. The tourist office, bus station and express boat terminal are all conveniently co-located a couple blocks west of the Glasshuset.

Intersport Bodø (☎ 75 54 98 50; 4th fl, Glasshuset) Sells walking maps and holds keys for Den Norske Turistforening (DNT) cabins.

Ludvig's Bruktbokhandel (Dronningens gate 42) Good selection of used books in English plus old LPs, comics and videos. A treasure trove for all addicted browsers.

Tourist office (☎ 75 54 80 00; www.visitbodø.com; Sjøgata 3; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat, noon–8pm Sun mid-May–Aug, 9am–4pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm



Sat rest-of-year) Publishes the excellent free *Bodø Guide* brochure, and has two internet terminals (per hr Nkr60). Beside it are left-luggage lockers (Nkr20 to Nkr50).

Sights

The Norwegian Aviation Museum (Norsk Luftfartsmuseum; ☎ 75 50 78 50; Olav V gate; adult/concession/child/family Nkr75/50/40/180; ☎ 10am–6pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 10am–4pm Mon–Fri, 11am–5pm Sat & Sun rest-of-year) is huge fun to ramble around if you have even a passing interest in flight and aviation history. Allow at least half a day to roam its 10,000 sq metres. If you're flying into Bodø for real, you'll see that, from above, the striking modern grey and smoked-glass main museum building has the shape of an aeroplane propeller.

Exhibits include a complete control tower and hands-on demonstrations. The affiliated Norwegian Air Force Museum has plenty of examples of historic military and civilian aircraft from the Tiger Moth to the U2 spy plane (the ill-fated US plane that was shot down over the Soviet Union in 1960, creating a major diplomatic incident, was en route from Peshawar in Pakistan to Bodø). Children and kids at heart will thrill and shudder at the small simulator, which, for an extra charge, takes you on some pretty harrowing virtual flights, including piloting a fighter jet.

The small **Nordland Museum** (Nordlandsmuseet; ☎ 75 52 16 40; Prinsens gate 116; adult/child Nkr35/5; free; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat & Sun May–Sep, 11am–4pm Mon–Fri rest-of-year) has a droll 20-minute film on the history of Bodø with English subtitles. Highlights of the collection are silver items from Viking times. Other exhibits cover Sami culture, the history of women in northern Norway, regional fishing culture and natural history.

The museum has an open-air component, the **Bodøsjoen Friluftsmuseum**, 3km from town near Bodøsjoen Camping. Here you'll find four hectares of historic homes, farm buildings, boat sheds, WWII German bunkers and the square-rigged sloop *Anna Karoline af Hopen*. You can wander the grounds for free but admission to the buildings is by appointment. Here too is the start of a **walking track** up the river Bodøgårdselva, which eventually leads to the wild, scenic Bodømarka woods.

Bodø's striking **cathedral** (Kongensgate; admission free; ☎ 9.30am–2.30pm mid-Jun–Aug), completed in 1956, has a soaring, freestanding tower and spire. Shaped like an inverted ship's hull, the walls of its nave are clad with tufted, multicoloured rugs and there's a fine stained-glass window.

The charming little onion-domed **Bodin Kirke** (Gamle Riksvei 68; ☎ 10am–3pm late-Jun–mid-Aug) stone church dates from around 1240. The Lutheran Reformation brought about substantial changes to the exterior, including the addition of a tower. A host of lively baroque elements – especially the elaborately carved altar – grace the interior.

Activities

Norlandsbadet & Spektrum Velvære (☎ 75 59 15 08; Plasmøyveien; adult/child/family Nkr130/90/390; ☎ core hrs 3–9pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun) Here's a very superior place to relax, tone up and warm

yourself if it's freezing outside. Exhaust yourself in its six swimming pools (you can zoom down an 85m water slide and splash into one of them) then head upstairs to unwind in its six saunas (the one with therapy music and scents perhaps? Or does eucalyptus vapour tempt?). Soak yourself to the skin in the tropical rainforest shower or shiver in the ice grotto.

From Bodø you can visit the Svartisen glacier with a stop at the fishing village of Støtt on the return journey. A Hurtigruten express boat (Nkr645) with guide leaves at 6.45am, returning to Bodø at 2.30pm.

Festivals & Events

The **Nordlands Music Festival** in the first half of August is a full 10 days of music in its widest definition, with symphony orchestras, jazz, rock and folk.

Sleeping

Bodøsjøen Camping (☎ 75 56 36 80; bodocamp@yahoo.no; Kvernhusveien 1; tent/caravan sites Nkr100/200 plus per person Nkr30, cabins Nkr250-400, with bathroom Nkr630-840) At this waterside camp site, 3km from the centre, cabins are particularly well equipped. There's an attractive grassy area with picnic tables exclusively for tent campers. Buses 12 and 23 stop 250m away.

Opsahl Gjestegård (☎ 75 52 07 04; www.opsahlgjestegar.no in Norwegian; Prinsens gate 131; s/d Nkr430/600) On a quiet residential street, this guesthouse has 18 comfortable rooms whose décor ranges from flowery to less florid, and a small bar for guests.

City Hotell (☎ 75 52 04 02; johannsst@online.no; Storgata 39; s 590Nkr d Nkr690-890 plus Nkr150 per extra person; ☑) The paint was still fresh and the pipes of the fire-hazard sprinklers exposed when we visited this newly established hotel. Most of its 19 rooms are smallish but well priced. Beneath the eaves are a couple of very large family rooms and two rooms with a kitchenette. Reception is friendliness itself, management less so...

Skagen Hotel (☎ 75 51 91 00; www.skagen-hotel.no in Norwegian; Nyholmsgata 11; s/d Nkr650/800 mid-Jun–mid-Aug & Fri & Sat year-round, Nkr1290/1490 Sun–Thu rest-of-year, all incl breakfast; ☑) The Skagen occupies two buildings (one originally a butcher's though you'd never guess it). Facing each other, they're connected by a passage that burrows beneath the street. Rooms are attractively decorated and a continent away from chain-hotel clones. There's a bar and

free afternoon waffles and coffee. Staff can also give advice on a whole raft of vigorous outdoor activities.

Clarion Collection Hotel Grand (☎ 75 54 61 00; www.choice.no; Storgata 3; s/d Nkr665/880 mid-Jun–mid-Aug & Fri & Sat year-round, Nkr1395/1620 Sun–Thu rest-of-year; ☑ ☑) With the resources of the Glasshuset shopping centre right beside it and the shortest of strolls from the quayside, the Grand is well positioned, with comfortable if smallish rooms. Room rates include both breakfast and light buffet dinner, and there's a sauna and steam bath (both free to guests).

Thon Hotel Nordlys (☎ 75 53 19 00; www.thonhotels.com; Moloveien 14; s/d Nkr755/955 mid-Jun–mid-Aug & Fri & Sat year-round, Nkr1025/1255 Sun–Thu rest-of-year) Bodø's newest and most stylish hotel, with touches of subtle Scandinavian design throughout, also overlooks the marina and runs a reasonable restaurant.

Radisson SAS Hotel Bodø (☎ 75 51 90 00; www.radissonsas.com; Storgata 2; s/d Nkr795/1090 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr1250-1450 Sun–Thu, Nkr795/995 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; ☑ ☑) This contemporary hotel has bright rooms and a top-floor bar to better view the harbour and mountains. Breakfast is served in the Sjøsiden restaurant with its picture windows, while the hotel's Pizzakjeller'n (see opposite) is one of Bodø's most popular eateries.

Rica Hotel Bodø (☎ 75 54 70 00; www.rica.no; Sjøgata 23; s/d Nkr795/1046 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr1380/1680 Sun–Thu, Nkr750/1000 Fri & Sat rest-of-year) This welcoming, well-managed recent addition to the Rica chain has especially large rooms and enjoys a prime quayside position. You needn't even leave the building to visit Blix restaurant (see opposite), Bodø's finest dining choice, with which it interconnects.

Eating

Løvolds (☎ 75 52 02 61; Tollbugata 9; dishes Nkr35-105; ☎ Mon–Sat) This popular historic quayside cafeteria, Bodø's oldest eating choice, offers sandwiches, grills and hearty Norwegian fare with quality quayside views thrown in to boot.

Kafé Kafka (☎ 75 52 35 50; Sandgata 5b; mains Nkr60-125, daily special Nkr78; ☎ core hrs 11am–midnight Mon–Sat, 3pm–midnight Sun) This stylish contemporary café does great coffee 11 different ways (you'll smell the aroma before you even enter) and fresh juices. There's wi-fi and one internet terminal, free to clients. Some Saturdays it turns into a club with DJs.

Paviljongen (☎ 75 52 01 11; Torget; mains Nkr90-135) This great outdoor spot in the main square is the place to down a coffee or one of its three choices of draught beer; and perhaps nibble on an inexpensive lunch while watching the world pass (see how people adapt their pace to the rhythm of the buskers who strum and play nearby).

Pizzakjeller'n (☎ 75 51 90 00) The Radisson SAS Hotel's popular informal basement eatery is something of a misnomer. Yes, it serves up a long list of pizzas and other snacky and more substantial items, but for something more original, go for the daily special (Nkr110), which indeed changes daily, or its weekly equivalent (Nkr170).

Da Carlo (☎ 75 50 46 05; 2nd fl, Glasshuset) This pleasant, frondy place is popular with Bodø's younger movers and shakers, both as bar and restaurant, where you can down the usual snacks, pizza and burger fare. It partly occupies the sealed bridge above the shopping mall's main alley so you can snoop upon the shoppers below.

Bryggerikaia (☎ 75 52 58 08; Sjøgata 1; snacks around Nkr160, mains Nkr165-245) Not long on the Bodø drinking and dining scene, Bryggerikaia is already a firm favourite. You can dine well, snack, enjoy its lunch buffet (Nkr125) or quaff one of its beers, brewed on the premises. Enjoy your choice in its large pub-décor interior, on the street-side terrace or, best of all should you find a seat spare, on the veranda overlooking the harbour.

Blix (☎ 75 54 70 99; Sjøgata 25; mains around Nkr200) A favourite among Bodø's discerning diners, Blix has a justified reputation for fine cuisine and keeps a select wine list. Reserve a window table for great harbour views.

At the docks you can buy inexpensive fresh shrimp; the Vinmonopolet is just a couple of blocks further to the west. Inside the Glasshuset shopping centre you'll find a supermarket and several quick-service choices.

Drinking & Entertainment

Nordlæningen (Storgata 16; ☎ noon-3.30am) This low-key basement pub beside the main square has occasional live music – see the signed posters of bands who've played here as you descend into the depths.

Public (Sjøgata 12; ☎ core hrs 8pm-3.30am) Super-sized stills from punk-rock shows line the walls of this minimalist bar with its black leather stools.

Rock Café & Nightclub (☎ 75 50 46 33; Tollbugata 13b; cover charge Nkr50; ☎ 9pm-3am Fri & Sat) This, the town's largest disco, can cram in over 500 punters. It puts on live bands about twice a month.

G (☎ 75 56 17 00; Sjøgata; ☎ 9pm-3am Fri & Sat) With its cave-like entrance on Sjøgata, below the main square, this *discoteka* packs in the over-25s.

Fram Kino (Storgata 8), near the entrance to the Glasshuset, is Bodø's cinema.

You can knock some pins down at **Royal Bowling** (☎ 75 52 28 80; Storgata 2), on the ground floor of the Radisson SAS Hotel.

Getting There & Away

AIR

From Bodø's airport, southwest of the city centre, there are up to eight daily flights to Oslo, 14 to Trondheim and 11 to Tromsø. Other destinations in northern Norway include Leknes (up to seven flights daily), Harstad (two) and Mo i Rana (four).

Norwegian has one daily flight to Oslo and two to Bergen.

BOAT

Bodø is a stop on the Hurtigruten coastal ferry. Car ferries sail five to six times daily in summer (less frequently during the rest of the year) between Bodø and Moskenes on Lofoten (adult/child/car Nkr149/74/538, 3½ hours). Most days at least one calls in at the southern Lofoten islands of Røst and Værøy. If you're taking a car in summer, it's wise to book in advance (an additional Nkr160) to avoid a long queue. There's also an express passenger ferry between Bodø and Svolvær (adult/child Nkr290/145, 3½ hours) once or twice daily.

BUS

The Nor-Way Bussekspress bus runs to/from Narvik (Nkr497, 6½ hours) via Fauske (Nkr106, 1¼ hours) twice daily.

TRAIN

From Bodø trains run to Fauske (Nkr104, 45 minutes, up to five daily), Mo i Rana (Nkr386, three hours, two to four daily) and Trondheim (Nkr937, 9¼ hours, two daily).

Getting Around

Local buses cost Nkr25 per ride. The tourist office rents bikes from Nkr100 per day.

NORDLAND BOATS

You're bound to come across the uniquely shaped, stubby Nordland boat, which has served local fishing communities from the earliest days of settlement. They're informal symbols of the tough, self-sufficient lifestyle of the hardy coastal folk here up north; and they're still in use from Namsos, in Trøndelag, right up to the Kola Peninsula in Arctic Russia, but the greatest concentrations are found in Lofoten.

The smallest versions are known as *færing*, measuring up to 5m, while larger ones are called *hundromsfæring* (6m), *seksring* (7m), *halvfjerderomning* (7.5m), *firroing* (8m), *halvfemterømning* (9m), *åttring* (10m to 11m) and *femboring* (11m to 13m).

Traditionally, the larger the boat, the greater was the status of its captain, or *hovedmann*. Whatever the size, Nordland boats are excellent for both rowing and sailing, even in rough northern seas. Until quite recently, sailing competitions, pitting fishing communities against each other, were one of the great social events of the year.

A good place to see museum-quality examples is in the harbour at Å in Lofoten.

AROUND BODØ Kjerringøy

It's easy to see why this sleepy peninsula, washed by turquoise seas and with a backdrop of soaring granite peaks, is a regular location for Norwegian film makers. Some 40km north of Bodø, its principal man-made feature is the 19th-century trading station Kjerringøy. Here, the entrepreneurial – some would say exploitative – Erasmus Zahl family established an important trading post, providing local fishing families with supplies in exchange for their catches, and after making its fortune, expanded into mining, banking and steam-transport concerns.

Most of the timber-built historic district has been preserved as an **open-air museum** (☎ 75 50 35 00; adult/child Nkr45/free; ☎ 11am–5pm late May–Aug), where the spartan quarters and kitchens of the fishing families contrast with the sumptuous décor of the merchants' housing. There's also a 20-minute slide presentation, included in the museum price. Admission to the main building (adult/child Nkr35/20) is by guided tour.

Several buses connect Bodø and Kjerringøy daily (Nkr86, 1½ hours) and in summer it's possible to fit in a return trip on the same day. Check at Bodø's tourist office (p306) for the current timetable.

Whether by bus or car, the trip involves the ferry crossing between Festvåg and Misten. Along the way, you pass the distinctive profile of **Landegode island** (see the boxed text, p49), the white sandy beaches at **Mjelle** (whose car park is some 20 minutes' walk away) and the dramatic peak **Steigtind**, which rises a few kilometres south of Festvåg.

Saltstraumen Maelstrom

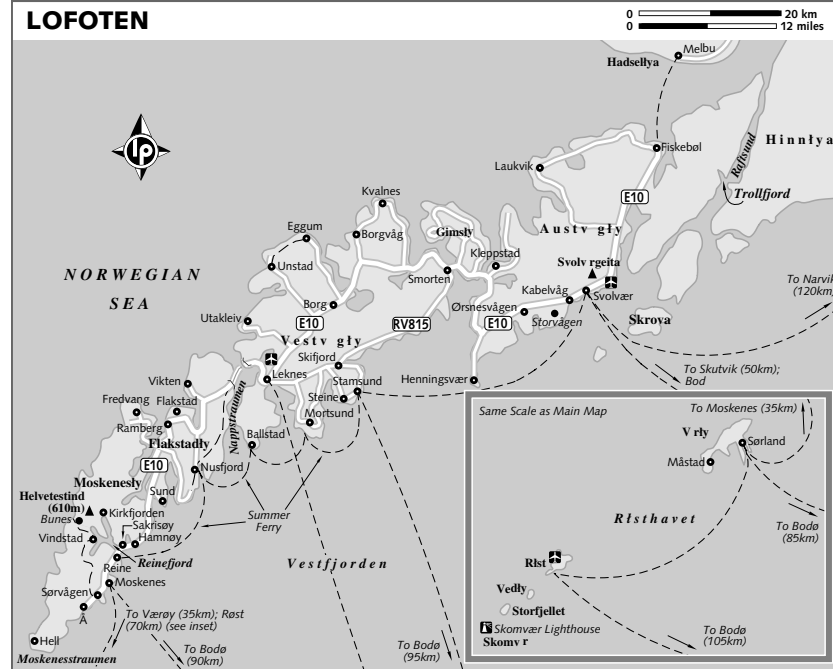
You need to plan your day to take in this natural phenomenon, guaranteed to occur four times every 24 hours. At the 3km-long, 150m-wide Saltstraumen Strait, the tides cause one fjord to drain into another, creating the equivalent of a waterfall at sea. The result is a churning, 20-knot watery chaos that shifts over 400 million cu metres of water one way, then the other, every six hours. It's an ideal environment for plankton, which in turn attracts an abundance of both fish and anglers. In spring, you can also see the squawking colonies of gulls that nest on the midstream island of Storholmen.

This maelstrom, claimed to be the world's largest, is actually a kinetic series of smaller whirlpools that form, surge, coalesce, then disperse. The experience is more immediate from the shoreline but for the best views, stand on the north side of the arching Saltstraumbua bridge over the strait at its apex and watch as the waters swirl like emerald nebulae. At its best – which is most of the time – it's an exhilarating spectacle but if you're unlucky enough to hit an off day, it may recall little more than the water swirling around your bath plug.

Tide tables can be found in the tourist office in Bodø.

LOFOTEN

The pure air in your lungs (let's except the strong reek of fish in some of the small ports), daylight around the clock and summer's infinite shades of green and yellow: Lofoten



comes as a tonic. You'll never forget your first approach by ferry, especially if you've sailed from Bodø. The islands spread their tall, craggy physique against the sky like some spiky sea dragon and you wonder how humans eeked a living in such inhospitable surroundings.

The main islands, Austvågøy, Vestvågøy, Flakstadøy and Moskenesøy, are separated from the mainland by Vestfjorden. On each are sheltered bays, sheep pastures and picturesque villages. The vistas (the whole of the E10 from tip to toe of Lofoten has recently been designated a National Tourist Route, a title bestowed only upon the best scenic roads) and the special quality of the Arctic light have long attracted artists, who are represented in galleries throughout the islands.

But Lofoten is still very much commercially alive. Each winter the meeting of the Gulf Stream and the icy Arctic Ocean draws spawning Arctic cod from the Barents Sea. For centuries, this in turn drew farmer-fishermen from the mainland's north coast. Although cod stocks have dwindled dramatically in recent years, fishing still vies with

tourism as Lofoten's largest industry, as evidenced by the wooden drying racks that lattice nearly every village on the islands.

Both www.lofoten-tourist.no and www.lofoten.info take you to the same useful website, rich in information about the whole archipelago.

History

The history of Lofoten is essentially that of its fishing industry. Numerous battles have been fought over these seas, exceptionally rich in spawning cod ever since the glaciers retreated about 10,000 years ago. In 1120, King Øystein set up the first church and built a number of *rorbuer*, basic 4m by 4m wooden cabins for the fishermen with a fireplace, earthen floor and small porch area. It wasn't entirely philanthropy: in so doing, he took control of the local economy and ensured rich tax pickings for himself.

In the 13th century traders of the German Hanseatic League moved in and usurped power. Despite an increase in exports, the fisherfolk were left in poverty. By 1750, however, the trade monopoly lost its grip and

locals, supplemented by opportunists from southern Norway, took control of their own economic ventures.

In the early 19th century power over the trade fell to local *nessekonger*, or 'merchant squires' who'd bought up property. These new landlords forced the tenants of their *rorbuer* to deliver their entire catch at a price set by the landlords themselves. The Lofoten Act of 1857 greatly diminished the power of the *nessekonger* but not until the Raw Fish Sales Act of 1936 did they lose the power to set prices.

Lofoten Lodging

King Øystein's legacy lives on today, as Lofoten's lodging of choice remains the *rorbu*, along with its cousin, the *sjøhus*. Whereas *rorbu* (plural *rorbuer*) once meant a dingy, tiny red-painted fishing hut, nowadays the name is applied increasingly loosely to just about any wooden ox-blood or ochre-coloured structure, from historic cabins to simple holiday homes to plush, two-storey, multiroom, fully equipped self-catering units.

A *sjøhus* (literally 'sea house') is normally a bunkhouse-style building on the docks where fishery workers processed the catch and, for convenience, also ate and slept. While some *sjøhus* retain this traditional feel, others have been converted into summer tourist lodges and apartments, usually of the simpler, less expensive kind.

Lofoten also has a few higher-end hotels and some wonderfully situated camp sites.

While summer prices tend to be lower in the rest of Norway, the opposite obtains in Lofoten; in hotels you can expect to pay Nkr250-plus per room above the rest-of-the-year prices, although the difference is less pronounced in *rorbuer* and *sjøhus*.

Getting Around

Getting around is easy. The four main islands are linked by bridge or tunnel, and buses run the entire E10 from the Fiskebøl-Melbu ferry in the north to Å at road's end in the southwest.

The *Sykkelguide* booklet (Nkr120), available from tourist offices, describes with full maps 10 delightful bicycle routes around Lofoten, each between 20km and 50km.

From June to August, the **Fosengutt** (☎ 93 49 74 45), with a capacity of only 12 passengers, runs a daily boat shuttle along

the stunning coastline between Reine and Stamsund.

AUSTVÅGØY

pop 9000

Many visitors make their acquaintance with Lofoten on Austvågøy, the northernmost island.

Svolvær

pop 4300

The modern port town of Svolvær is as busy as it gets on Lofoten. The town once sprawled across a series of skerries, but the in-between spaces are being filled in to create a reclaimed peninsula.

The **tourist office** (☎ 76 06 98 00; www.lofoten.info; ☎ 9am-8pm or 10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm or 10pm Sun mid-Jun-Jul, 9am-4pm or 8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat early Jun & Aug, 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year), facing the ferry quays, can provide information on the entire archipelago. It hires bikes (Nkr200 per day).

You'll find free internet access at Svolvær's **library** (Vestfjordgata; ☎ 11am-3pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Wed).

SIGHTS

Lofoten War Memorial Museum (Krigsminnemuseum; ☎ 91 73 03 28; Fiskergata 12; adult/child Nkr50/25; ☎ 10am-4pm & 6.15-10pm Jun-Sep, 6.15-10pm May & early Oct), privately and passionately run, is a fascinating place. Models in original military uniforms gaze down and there are plenty of artefacts and evocative, largely unpublished WWII-era photos.

Lofoten Nature (adult/child Nkr30/free; ☎ noon-10pm Tue-Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug) displays, on two floors above the tourist office, the striking images of Lofoten wildlife photographer John Stenersen. The thoughtful, accessible text with its powerful ecological message is a stimulating condensed introduction to the ecosystems of the islands and their land-based and offshore wildlife. Warmly recommended.

Housed, appropriately, in what was once a fish-freezing plant, **Magic Ice** (☎ 76 07 40 11; Fiskergata 36; adult/child Nkr90/60; ☎ noon-10.30pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 6-10pm rest-of-year) is the ultimate place to chill out, perhaps with something to warm the spirit from the 7.5m-long bar. The 500-sq-metre space is filled with huge ice sculptures, illustrating Lofoten life. If you can't come back to northern Norway in winter, here's a great, if brief, approximation.

The **North Norwegian Art Centre** (Nordnorsk Kunstnersenter; ☎ 76 06 67 70; Svinøya; adult/child Nkr60/free; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 10am-3pm rest-of-year) hosts changing exhibitions of paintings, sculpture, ceramics and more by artists from northern Norway. There's also a permanent exhibition of the works of the 19th-century Lofoten painter Gunnar Berg.

The **Lofoten Theme Gallery** (Lofoten Temagalleri; ☎ 76 07 03 36; Parkgata 12; adult/child Nkr50/free; ☎ 8am-10pm Jun-Aug) is very much the creation of one man, Geir Nøtnes, a keen photographer from a long fishing background. One room is devoted to cod fishing, another to whaling and there's a 20-minute DVD about Lofoten through the seasons.

ACTIVITIES

The island of **Skrova** is a fun day trip from Svolvær and offers a couple of short walks. The ferry between Svolvær and Skutvik, on the mainland, stops off twice daily in summer (Nkr31, 30 minutes from Svolvær).

XXLofoten (☎ 91 65 55 00; www.xxllofoten.no; Paulensgate 12) rents out sea kayaks (single up to three/eight hours Nkr400/500, double Nkr500/700) from late June and throughout July.

TOURS

There are several sailings daily in summer from Svolvær into the constricted confines of nearby Trollfjord, spectacularly steep and narrowing to only 100m. Take the three-hour cruise or sign on for a four-hour trip that includes the chance to dangle a line and bring home supper. Both tour options cost Nkr350/100 per adult/child and you can buy your ticket at the quayside.

Lofoten Seafari (☎ 47 90 29 40; per person Nkr350), based at the Rica Hotel, bounces over the

waves in a Zodiac inflatable raft to Skrova and around the inlets in an exhilarating two-hour outing (Nkr400).

Among the summer activities of **Lofoten Aktiv** (☎ 76 07 89 10; www.lofoten-aktiv.no) are accompanied mountain walks (per person Nkr250 to Nkr700), a five-hour hike and bike trip (Nkr470 including cycle hire), and a four-hour guided sea-kayak safari (Nkr800). It also rents surf kayaks (Nkr700 per day) and runs a sea-kayak school, based at the Sandvika Fjord og Sjøhuscamp in Kabelvåg (see p316). In winter, it arranges snowshoe, cross-country and alpine ski outings.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The town's annual **Fish Festival**, a celebration of all things piscatorial, takes place in the last week in March. For three weeks in June, usually every other year (the next one will be in 2010), Svolvær hosts the **Lofoten Arts Festival**.

SLEEPING

Svolvær Sjøhuscamp (☎ 76 07 03 36; www.svolver-sjohuscamp.no; Parkgata 12; d/q Nkr440/720, d with kitchen Nkr490) This friendly sea house straddling the water is a convivial, excellent-value place to fetch up and meet fellow travellers. There's also a gem of an apartment with balcony and full facilities (Nkr1600) that sleeps up to six.

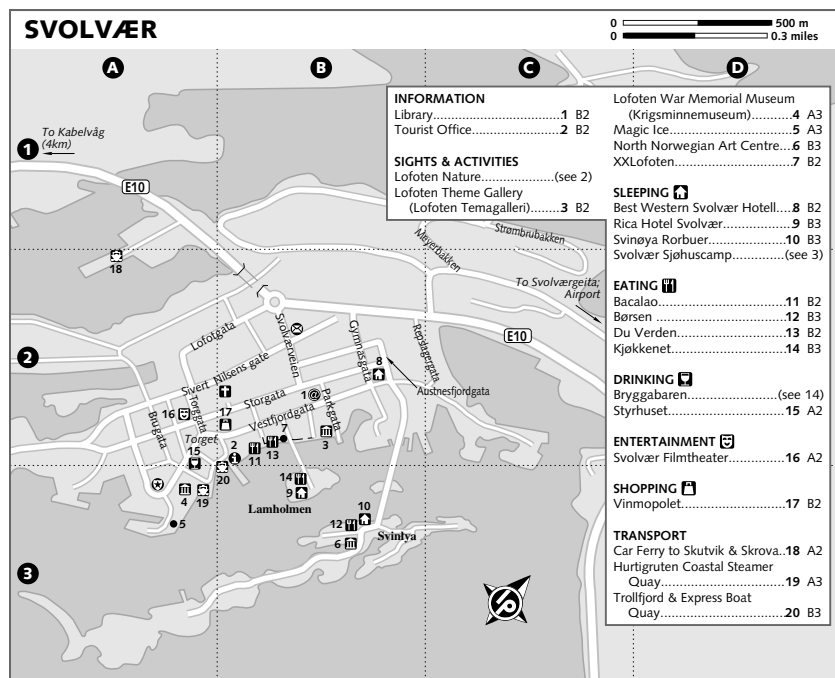
Svinøya Rorbuer (☎ 76 06 99 30; www.svinoya.no; Gunnar Bergs vei 2; 2-/4-/6-bed cabins from Nkr1000/1400/1700) Across a bridge on the islet of Svinøya, site of Svolvær's first settlement, are dozens of cabins, some historic, most contemporary, and all cosy and comfortable. Reception is a veritable museum, a restored and restocked *krambua* (general store), constructed in 1828, which was Svolvær's first shop.

Rica Hotel Svolvær (☎ 76 07 22 22; www.rica.no; Lamholmen; s/d Nkr950/1200 mid-Jun-mid-Aug, Nkr1004/1257

ONE MAN'S OBSESSION

William Hakvaag, motive force behind Svolvær's war museum, is one of those passionate obsessives who enrich the world. 'I hear you have an original of Hitler's signature,' I asked, following up a tip from a reader. 'Not only that,' he grinned, pulling out one of his desk drawers. 'This was his magnifying glass. It arrived yesterday from a contact in Russia. I have influence in high places,' he says, eyes twinkling, 'things come my way.'

Things such as a stained, torn German sailor's shirt that had lain on the sea bed for almost 30 years. On it was a name, Hans O Shultz, and pinned to it was a letter of thanks from Herr Shultz, whom Hakvaag had tracked down. Injured when his destroyer was torpedoed, he was taken prisoner and sent to Britain, then Canada, where he finally settled and lived until his death a few years ago.



Sun-Thu, Nkr1100/1350 Fri & Sat rest-of-year) The Rica too is built on a tiny island, above the water and supported by piles. Some rooms have balconies, while room 121 has a hole in the floor so guests in the adjacent room can drop a fishing line directly into the briny. The restaurant (for great harbour views reserve a table in its bow window, shaped like a boat) has attractive lightweight wooden furnishings and does a gargantuan dinner buffet (Nkr295).

Best Western Svollvær Hotell (☎ 76 07 19 99; www.bestwestern.no; Austnesfjordgata 12; s/d Nkr1050/1250 Jun-mid-Aug, Nkr970/1070 Sun-Thu, Nkr700/800 Fri & Sat rest-of-year;) Intimate (there are only 22 rooms) and in a residential neighbourhood away from the portside bustle, this is a comfortable, if unexceptional place. Some rooms have balconies, others come with kitchens. Public areas are decorated with prints of Edvard Munch – happily not at his most sombre – who was the owner's grand-uncle.

EATING

There's a pair of stylish places, near neighbours, on the quayside. Both have attractive, modern interiors and waterside terraces.

Bacalao (☎ 76 07 94 00) With its upbeat interior, Bacalao offers leafy, innovative salads (Nkr110 to Nkr130), sandwiches and some equally creative pasta dishes; the *hot rekepasta* (hot shrimp pasta; Nkr150) will set your taste buds tingling. It also expresses what must be about the best coffee anywhere in Norway, a country that so often settles for watery black brews.

Du Verden (☎ 76 07 70 99; dinner mains around Nkr275) This smaller, hip restaurant with its clean, open lines and contemporary artwork around the walls is a very congenial place for a relaxed dinner. The lunchtime dishes (Nkr45 to Nkr150) offer an excellent price-to-quality ratio.

Børsen (☎ 76 06 99 31; Svinøya; mains Nkr235-265) This Arctic Menu restaurant brims with character. A former fish house, it was called the 'stock exchange' after the harbour-front bench outside, where the older men of the town would ruminate endlessly over the state of the world. In its dining room, with its cracked and bowed flooring, you'll still catch the scent of tar and cod-liver oil.

Kjøkkenet (☎ 76 06 84 80; Lamholmen; mains around Nkr300) Kjøkkenet, originally a shack for salting fish and nowadays furnished like an old-time kitchen, is a wonderfully cosy place to dine. The cuisine is just as traditional and the recommended menu choice is of course fish – try the kitchen's signature dish, *boknafisk* (Nkr270), cured cod with salted fat and vegetables.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Styrhuset (OJ Kaarsbøs gate 5) Svollvær's oldest pub is all dark crannies that speak of sailors long gone.

Bryggabaren In the same complex as Kjøkkenet, this low-beamed, cosy watering hole is bedecked with tools of all kinds. The bar is a lifeboat from a WWII Polish troop ship that washed up in Svollvær in 1946.

Svollvær Filmtheater (Storgata 28) Screens recent films and Hollywood blockbusters.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

From Svollvær's small airport there are four flights daily to Bodø.

Three sea routes connect Svollvær to the mainland. The shortest, most popular crossing is to/from Skutvik (adult/child Nkr73/36, car and driver Nkr251, two hours, eight to 11 daily). There's a daily express passenger boat to/from Bodø (Nkr290, 3½ hours) that calls by Skutvik (one hour), where you can connect by bus with Narvik. An express passenger boat also runs directly to Narvik (Nkr326, 3½ hours, Tuesday to Friday and Sunday). Svollvær is also a stop on the Hurtigruten coastal ferry.

For Sortland on Vesterålen, bus 8 (2½ hours) runs three to five times daily via Stokmarknes (1¼ hours). Bus 9 runs to Leknes (1½ hours), with connections to Å (3½ hours) four to six times daily.

For a taxi, call ☎ 76 07 06 00.

Kabelvåg

Kabelvåg, 5km southwest of Svollvær, is an altogether more intimate and cosy place. At its heart is a small square and tiny harbour while its Storvågen district, 2km off the E10 to the south, has an enticing trio of museums and galleries.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Behind the old prison in **Storvågen**, a trail climbs to the statue honouring King Øystein.

In 1120 he ordered the first *rorbu* to be built to house fishermen, who previously had been sleeping beneath their overturned rowing boats. This wasn't just an act of kindness; His Majesty needed to keep his fisherfolk warm, dry and content since the tax on exported dried fish was the main source of his revenue.

A combination ticket (Nkr130) for three museums gives entry to Lofoten Museum, Lofoten Aquarium and Galleri Espolin, all in Storvågen. For children, it's more economical to pay at each museum.

Some of Kabelvåg's original *rorbuer* have been excavated as part of the **Lofoten Museum** (Lofotmuseet; ☎ 76 06 97 90; adult/child/concession Nkr50/15/40; 9am-6pm Jun-Aug; 9am-3pm Mon-Fri Sep-May plus 11am-3pm Sat & Sun May), on the site of what can be considered to be the first town in the polar region. The museum's main gallery was once the merchant's mansion where, typically, lived the man who hired out the *rorbuer* and sea houses to the fishermen and bought their catch. An easy, undulating and scenic 2km Heritage Path leads from the museum to the centre of Kabelvåg.

Nearby in the **Lofoten Aquarium** (Lofotakvariet; ☎ 76 07 86 65; adult/child/family Nkr80/40/220; 10am-7pm Jun-Aug, 11am-3pm Sun-Fri Feb-Apr & Sep-Nov, daily May), fish and sea animals of the cold Arctic waters swim and flap. Children will particularly enjoy the seal and sea otter feeding frenzies (noon, 3pm and 6pm) and there's a multimedia show five times daily on the hour.

Galleri Espolin (☎ 76 07 84 05; Storvågen; adult/child/concession Nkr60/25/45; 10am-6pm or 7pm Jun-mid-Aug, 11am-3pm rest-of-year) features the haunting etchings and lithographs of one of Norway's great artists, Kaare Espolin-Johnson (1907-94). Espolin – his work all the more astounding since he was nearly blind for much of his life – loved Lofoten and often featured its fisherfolk, together with other Arctic themes.

In Kabelvåg, **Vågan Church** (Vågan Kirke; admission Nkr20; 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun late Jun-mid-Aug), constructed in 1898 and Norway's second-largest wooden church, rises above the E10 north of town. Built to minister to the influx of seasonal fisherfolk, its seating capacity of 1200 far surpasses Kabelvåg's current population.

Lofotdykk (☎ 99 63 91 66; www.lofotdykk.no; Kaiveien 15), based in a *rorbu* overlooking Kabelvåg's quayside, will take you diving between May and September and offers orca-watching safaris from October to December.

GLORY BE TO COD

For centuries, catching and drying cod has been a way of life in Lofoten and by far its biggest industry.

Although cod populations have been depleted by over-fishing, the overall catch is still substantial, 50,000 tonnes annually (30,000 tonnes without the heads). The fishing season peaks from January to April when the fish come from the Barents Sea to Vestfjorden to spawn. Around the end of March each year the unofficial World Cod Fishing Championship is held in Svolvær, attracting up to 300 entrants.

There are two ways to preserve cod. For saltfish, it's filleted, salted and dried for about three weeks. For *klipfish*, the saltfish is cleaned, resalted and dried, originally on cliffs (*klip* in Norwegian) and nowadays in large heated plants.

However, Lofoten is all about stockfish. In this ancient method, 15,000 tonnes of fish are decapitated each year, paired by size, then tied together and, dangling in pairs like sleeping bats, hung to dry over the huge wooden A-frames you see everywhere on the islands. The fish lose about 80% of their weight, and most are exported to Italy, with some to Spain and Portugal.

Stockfish stays edible for years, and it's often eaten raw (a trifle chewy but goes well with beer), salted or reconstituted with water. It's concentrated goodness; with a protein content of 80%, 1kg of stockfish has the same nutritional value as 5kg of fresh fish.

Even before drying, very little of a cod goes to waste: cod tongue is a local delicacy – children extract the tongues and are paid by the piece – and the roe is salted in enormous German wine vats. The heads are sent to Nigeria to form the basis of a popular spicy dish.

Then there is the liver, which produces the vitamin D-rich oil that has long been known to prevent rickets and assuage the depression brought on by the long, dark Arctic winters. In 1854

Lofoten pharmacist Peter Møller decided to introduce this magic-in-a-bottle to the world and constructed a cauldron for steam-boiling the livers. The oil he skimmed received honours at trade fairs in Europe and abroad. Even after skimming, the livers were steamed in large oak barrels and then pressed to yield every last, profitable drop. Every summer, thousands of barrels of it were shipped to Europe, and the smell pervaded the village of Å, whose inhabitants liked to comment that it was the scent of money.

And what of cod-liver oil's notorious taste? Locals will tell you that it tastes bad only when it becomes rancid. Fresh cod-liver oil can be quite nice, like salad oil with a slightly fishy bouquet.

Modern Norwegian fishing folk are vociferously protective of this asset – in certain northern districts as many as 90% of votes were against EU membership. For if Norway joined the EU, the Spanish fishing fleet and others would have access to Norway's inshore waters – a potential modern-day Armada that Norway's fisherfolk are determined to repel. There have even been skirmishes with Icelandic trawlers over territorial fishing rights.

Fun cod fact: one in 20,000 cod is a king cod; the distinctive lump on its forehead is said to indicate intelligence and bring good luck to the fishing family that catches it. King cod are often dried and hung on a string from the ceiling; as the string expands and contracts with humidity, the fish rotates like a barometer, hence the nickname 'weather cod'.

The latest news from the world of cod involves the fishes' mating calls; it seems that the grunts they use to attract mates can be loud enough to block submarines' sonar devices, making underwater navigation almost impossible!

Mark Kurlansky's book *Cod* (1999) is an excellent, thoroughly entertaining study of this piscatorial powerhouse.

SLEEPING & EATING

A couple of inlets and 3km west of Kabelvåg, there are a couple of great camp sites, right beside each other.

Ørsvågvær Camping (☎ 76 07 81 80; www.orsvag.no in Norwegian; bike/car/caravan sites Nkr60/100/130, d Nkr550-650, 4-bed cabins Nkr650, 7-bed sea house apt Nkr950; ☞ mid-May–mid-Aug) Most *rorbu*er and the sea house are right beside the fjord and offer splendid views. There's a sauna and you can rent a motorboat (per hour/day Nkr170/500).

Sandvika Fjord og Sjøhuscamp (☎ 76 07 81 45; www.lofotferie.no; camp sites Nkr145, cabin Nkr550, with bathroom from Nkr650, sea house apt Nkr650) This shoreside camp site has its own small beach. It rents motorboats (Nkr150 per hour) and is a base for sea-kayak trips. The camping area is significantly larger than its neighbour's.

Kabelvåg Vandrerhjem & Sommerhotell (☎ 76 06 98 80; kabelvag.hostel@vandrerhjem.no; Finnesveien 24; dm/s/d incl breakfast Nkr240/460/620; ☞ Jun–mid-Aug; ☑) Less than 1km north of the centre, the Lofoten Folkehøgskole school becomes a hotel and hotel outside the teaching year. There's a kitchen for guest use. Hostel rooms have two, four and 10 beds.

One company owns Kabelvåg's two major hotels – and what a contrast they offer.

Kabelvåg Hotell (☎ 76 07 88 00; kabelvaag@dvgl.no; Kong Øysteinsgate 4; s/d Nkr840/1240; ☞ Jun-Jul) On a small rise close to the centre of Kabelvåg, this imposing seasonal hotel was tastefully rebuilt in 1995 in its original Art Deco style. Rooms overlook either the port or mountains.

Nyvågar Rorbuhotell (☎ 76 06 97 00; www.nyvaagar.no; Sturvåganveien 22; 4-bed rorbu incl breakfast from Nkr1770) At Sturvågan, below the museum complex, this snazzy, modern seaside place owes nothing to history, but its strictly contemporary *rorbu*er are attractive and fully equipped. Guests can also rent bikes (Nkr50/190 per hour/day) and motorboats (Nkr190 per hour).

Præstenbrygga (☎ 76 07 80 60; Torget) In central Kabelvåg, this friendly pub with its all-wood interior and dockside terracing, front and rear, serves sandwiches, pizzas and tasty mains (around Nkr140), including a rich combination platter of marinated salmon, smoked whale, shrimps and salad. There's often live music and for Nkr20 you can drink coffee all day with free refills. Chase one down with a shot from its selection of nearly 100 whiskies and ryes.

Two hotels have good restaurants: at Kabelvåg Hotell there's the **Krambua restaur-**

rant (mains around Nkr210), which specialises in fish; and the acclaimed **restaurant** (mains Nkr120) at Nyvågar Rorbuhotell serves primarily local specialities, including a lip-smacking reindeer stew.

Henningsvær

A delightful 8km shore-side drive southwards from the E10 brings you to the still-active fishing village of Henningsvær, perched at the end of a thin promontory. Its nickname, 'the Venice of Lofoten', may be a tad overblown but it's certainly the lightest, brightest and trendiest place in the archipelago. It's also the region's largest and most active fishing port.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Ocean Sounds (☎ 76 07 18 28; Hellandsgata 63; www.ocean-sounds.com; adult/child Nkr85/free; ☞ 10am-8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun, Sep & Oct), a not-for-profit centre, is the initiative of one hugely determined young biologist, Heike Vester. Enjoy a multimedia presentation about cod, whales and other Arctic marine mammals, supplemented by a 25-minute film about Lofoten. Or get out and about on a three-to-four-hour marine safari in the Zodiac research boat (Nkr500, departures 10am

and 5pm). From November to January, you can join a researcher on a whale-observing trip (Nkr1000).

Engelskmannsbrygga (☎ 76 07 52 85; Dreyersgate 1; admission free; ☞ 10am-8pm mid-Jun–early Aug, noon-4pm Tue-Sun rest-of-year), or 'Englishman's Wharf', is the open studio and gallery of three talented local artists: potter Cecilie Haaland, photographer John Stenersen (see p312) and glass-blower Kari Malmberg, with whom you can try a hand at blowing your own glass (Nkr150; 5pm to 7pm Monday to Thursday).

The **North Norwegian Climbing School** (Nord Norsk Klatreskole; ☎ 90 57 42 08; www.nordnorskklattreskole.no in Norwegian; Misværveien 10; ☞ Mar-Oct) offers a wide range of technical climbing and skiing courses all around northern Norway. Climbing the peaks with an experienced guide costs Nkr2000, including equipment, for up to four people. For ideas, check out the 320-page *Climbing in the Magic Islands* by Ed Webster, the last word on climbing in Lofoten and sold at the attached mountaineering shop.

Lofoten Opplevelser (☎ 90 58 14 75; www.lofoten-opplevelser.no; ☞ mid-Jun–mid-Aug), which is based in Henningsvær, offers a sea-eagle safari (Nkr350, 1½ hours) and two-hour snorkelling trips (Nkr600, equipment provided). From

November to mid-January, it organises three-hour whale safaris (Nkr850).

The **Lofoten Hus Gallery** (☎ 76 07 15 73; Hjellskjæret; adult/child/concession Nkr75/35/60; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, 10am-6pm late May & early Sep), in a former fish-processing house, displays a fine collection of paintings from what is known as the Golden Age of Norwegian painting, between 1870 and 1930, plus canvases by contemporary Norwegian artist Karl Erik Harr. Admission includes an 18-minute slide show of photos by Frank Jenssen, shown on the hour. Revealing the people and landscapes of Lofoten throughout the seasons, it's marred only by the trite, syrupy background music.

SLEEPING & EATING

The **North Norwegian Climbing School** (see p317; dm/d Nkr175/500, 4-bed apt Nkr1200) The climbing school's café and hostel (reservation recommended) face each other down a side alley. Both friendly and informal, they cross a Lofoten *rorbu* with an English pub and a Himalayan trekkers' lodge. Some doubles have bathroom.

Johs H Gjaever Sjøhus og Rorbuer (☎ 76 07 47 50; www.gjaever-rorbuer.no; Hellandsgata 790; rorbu from Nkr650, sea house r Nkr450-700) In summer, workers' accommodation in a modern sea house belonging to the local fish plant is hired out to visitors. Spruce rooms have shared facilities, including a large kitchen and dining area, and are good value. The company also has three *rorbuer* with bathroom and balcony in the heart of town.

Henningsvær Bryggehotell (☎ 76 07 47 50; www.henningsvaer.no; Hjellskjæret; s/d from Nkr1070/1400) Overlooking the harbour, this attractive hotel is Henningsvær's finest choice. It's modern, with comfortable rooms furnished in contemporary design, yet constructed in a traditional style that blends harmoniously with its neighbours.

Klatrekafeen café (dishes Nkr75-130) At the North Norwegian Climbing School, it serves up snacks and a small selection of good-value homemade dishes.

Bluefish restaurant (mains Nkr195-285) The award-winning restaurant at Henningsvær Bryggehotell is equally stylish; it serves Arctic Menu dishes and does succulent sorbets, using fresh berries in season.

Fiskekrogen (☎ 76 07 46 52; Dreyersgate 29; mains Nkr235-265) At the end of a slipway overlooking the harbour, this dockside restaurant, a favourite of the Norwegian royal family,

is Henningsvær's other culinary claim to fame. Try, in particular, the outstanding fish soup (Nkr145).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 510 shuttles between Svolvær (40 minutes), Kabelvåg (35 minutes) and Henningsvær three to five times daily.

VESTVÅGØY

pop 10,750

The E10 snakes its way through the heart of Vestvågøy island. A more attractive route follows the alternative, less travelled and only slightly longer Rv815, which runs northeastwards for 28km from Leknes amid stunning coastal and mountain scenery.

The island's **tourist office** (☎ 76 08 75 53; Storgata 31; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-early Aug, 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) is in the lacklustre town of Leknes.

Sights & Activities

LOFOTR VIKING MUSEUM

In 1981 at Borg, near the centre of Vestvågøy, a farmer's plough hit the ruins of the 83m-long dwelling of a powerful Viking chieftain, the largest building of its era ever discovered in Scandinavia.

The **Lofotr Viking Museum** (☎ 76 08 49 00; www.lofotr.no; adult/child incl guided tour Nkr100/50; ☎ 10am-7pm Jun-Aug, 11am-5pm May & Sep), 14km north of Leknes, offers a glimpse of life in Viking times. You can walk 1.5km of trails over open hilltops from the replica of the chieftain's longhouse (the main building, shaped like an upside-down boat) to the Viking-ship replica on the water. Costumed guides conduct multilingual tours and, inside the chieftain's hall, artisans explain their trades.

The Svolvær-Leknes bus passes the museum's entrance.

UNSTAD TO EGGUM HIKE

A popular hike connects these two tiny villages on the island's west coast. A 9km coastal track winds past several headlands, a solitary lighthouse, superb seascapes and the ruins of a fortress by the ocean.

Take care after rain as the trail, particularly around Unstad, can be slick with mud plus, if you're very unlucky and as one reader attests, sheep dip. Eggum and Unstad are both about 9km from the main road and are served infrequently by buses.

STAMSUND

Galleri 2 (☎ 90 95 65 46; www.galleri2.no; admission free; ☎ 12.30-4pm & 6.30-8.30pm), 175m from the Hurtigruten quay, is the gallery of Lofoten painter Scott Thoe displaying the works of a number of contemporary Norwegian artists, including his own grand-scale projects.

Located 14km northeast of Stamsund along the Rv815, **Brustranda Sjøcamping** (☎ 76 08 71 00; www.brustranda.no; Rolvsfjord; car/caravan sites Nkr120/145, 2-/4-bed cabin Nkr220/385, with bathroom Nkr660-1100) is a well-tended, beautifully situated seaside camp site, which stretches around a tiny harbour.

The island's HI-affiliated youth hostel **Justad Rorbuer og Vandrerhjem** (☎ 76 08 93 34; fax 76 08 97 39; dm/s/d Nkr120/300/400, 4-bed cabins Nkr500-800; ☎ Mar-mid-Oct) is a 1.2km walk from the Hurtigruten quay and has its regular clientele who come back year after year – one particularly loyal guest has stayed here over 50 times – so be sure to reserve. It's right beside the water in an old fishing complex. Roar Justad, the friendly owner, dispenses information about local hiking routes, rents bicycles (Nkr80 to Nkr100 per day) and lends rowing boats and fishing lines for free.

Skjeaerbygga Sjøhus (☎ 76 05 46 00; ☎ pub food from noon, dinner 5-10pm), low-beamed, large yet cosy, is right at the water's edge. Both café and restaurant, it has a limited dinner menu (three starters, three fish dishes and two meat mains) that includes all the local favourites such as roast king crab, smoked whale (both Nkr135) and tender Lofoten lamb (Nkr235).

Getting There & Away

Up to seven flights daily connect Leknes airport with Bodø. Leknes has bus connections to Å (1½ hours, four to five daily), Stamsund (25 minutes, three to seven daily) and Svolvær (1½ hours, four to six daily). Stamsund is the island's port for the Hurtigruten coastal ferry.

FLAKSTADØY

pop 1450

Most of Flakstadøy's residents live along its flat north shore, around the town of Ramberg, but the craggy south side provides the most dramatic scenery. Many visitors just zip through but it's worth stopping to sun yourself (sandy beaches are the exception in Lofoten) and perhaps to build in a detour to the arty village of Nusfjord.

The island's seasonal **tourist office** (☎ 76 09 31 10; henkirk@online.no; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Jun-late Aug) is in Ramberg's Galleri Steinbiten.

Sights NUSFJORD

A spectacular 6km diversion southwards from the E10 and beneath towering bare crags brings you to Nusfjord (www.nusfjord.no), sprawled around its tiny, tucked-away harbour. Many artists consider it to be the essence of Lofoten but be warned: so do tour operators. And the locals are smart: it costs Nkr30 just to walk around plus a further Nkr30 to see *The People & The Fish*, a 12-minute video about Nusfjord, past and present. In the country store that has just celebrated its centenary, upper shelves are crammed with vintage cans, bottles and boxes while the lower ones are stocked with contemporary fare. There's the old cod-liver oil factory, boat house, sawmill and a cluster of *rorbuer*, most of them modern. The most original feature is **Krismar** (☎ 76 09 33 99), the workshop of Italian Michele Sarno and his intricate creations in silver.

RAMBERG & FLAKSTAD

Imagine an arch of surfable tropical white sand fronting a sparkling blue-green bay with a backdrop of snowcapped Arctic peaks. That's pretty much **Ramberg** and **Flakstad** beaches, on the north coast, when the sun shines kindly on them. Should you hit such a day, no-one back home will believe that your holiday snaps of this place were taken north of the Arctic Circle, but you'll know it if you stick a toe in the water.

Set back from Flakstad beach and bypassed these days by the E10, the red onion-domed **Flakstad Kirke** (admission Nkr20; ☎ 11am-3pm late Jun-early Aug) was built in 1780 but has been extensively restored over the years. Most of the original wood was ripped out of the ground by the Arctic-bound rivers of Siberia and washed up here as driftwood.

GLASSHYTTA

You can make a 4km side trip to Vikten to visit the **gallery** (☎ 76 09 44 42; ☎ 10am-7pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug) of glassblower Åsvar Tangrand, designer of the Lofoten Rune, the region's seven-pronged logo, which evokes a longboat.

SUND FISKERIMUSEUM

This **fishery museum** (☎ 76 09 36 29; adult/child Nkr45/10; ☎ 10am-4pm or 6pm mid-May–Aug) lies 3km south of the bridge linking Flakstadøy and Moskenesøy. In one dim shack, there's an astounding clutter of boats, ropes and floats while within another is an unlabelled yet fascinating jumble of pots, pans, skis, old valve radios and the like. All this to the throb and fumes curling from the collection of permanently beached ships' diesel engines. Tor-Vegard Mørkved, the young resident blacksmith, bashes out cormorants in iron (the cheapest, around Nkr300 but Nkr1700 for something you'd be proud to have on your mantelpiece).

Sleeping & Eating

Ramberg Gjestegård (☎ 76 09 35 00; www.ramberg-gjestegard.no; E10; car/caravan site Nkr120/135, 2-/4-bed cabins Nkr800/1000) At this welcoming camp site, right on the beach, you can rent a kayak or rowing boat (per hour/day Nkr25/100), upgrade to a motorboat (Nkr100/350) or explore the island by bike (Nkr25/100). There's a justifiably popular Arctic Menu restaurant (mains Nkr180 to Nkr220) that does mainly fish dishes and its own splendid Flakstad Menu (cod, cured roast lamb and rhubarb compote for dessert). It also offers cheaper but still very tasty lunch specials (Nkr80 to Nkr170).

MOSKENESØY

pop 1150

The 34km-long island of Moskenesøy, a spiky, pinnacled igneous ridge rising directly from the sea and split by deep lakes and fjords, could almost have been conceived by Tolkien. A paradise for mountaineers, some of the tight gullies and fretted peaks of this tortured island – including its highest point, Hermannsdalstind (1029m) – are accessible to ordinary mortals as well.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The E10 runs along the island's south coast, past the communities of Hamnøy, Sakrisøy and Reine, before reaching the traditional village of Moskenes and its ferry terminal. The route ends at the museum-like village of Å. But for a few short coastal skirts, mountains occupy the rest of the island.

The island's **tourist office** (☎ 76 09 15 99; www.lofoten-info.no; ☎ 10am-7pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri May–mid-Jun & late Aug, 10am-2pm Mon-Fri rest-of-

year) is at Moskenes harbour. It publishes the free, informative *Moskenes Guide*, has an internet point (per hour Nkr60) and makes reservations for a variety of tours and activities.

ACTIVITIES

The *Moskenes Guide* has 14 suggestions for **hikes** of between one and 10 hours and the youth hostel in Å carries a free information sheet describing six walks of between two and seven hours. You'll need to supplement these with Staten Kartverk's *Lofoten* at 1:100,000.

You can **deep-sea fish** (Nkr400-500) for three to four hours using traditional long lines and hand lines. From the *Hellvåg* in Å and the *Carina* in Reine, both working cod-fishing vessels in winter, you're all but guaranteed a fat catch. Other options include fishing the Reinefjord, off Nusfjord, or near the maelstrom off Å.

At sea, there's excellent **bird-watching** and the possibility of **whale sightings** in season.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Car ferries sail five to six times daily in summer (less frequently during the rest of the year) between Moskenes and Bodø (adult/child/car Nkr149/74/538, 3½ hours). At least one calls in daily at the tiny southern Lofoten islands of Røst and Værøy.

Four to five buses connect Leknes and Å (1½ hours) daily in summer, stopping in all major villages along the E10.

Å

At the tail end of Moskenesøy, the bijou village of Å (appropriately, the last letter of the Norwegian alphabet), sometimes referred to as Å i Lofoten, is truly a living museum – a preserved fishing village with a shoreline of red *rorbuer*, cod drying racks and picture-postcard scenes at almost every turn. It's an almost feudal place, carved up between two families, now living very much from tourism but in its time a significant fishing port (upwards of 700,000 cod would be hung out to dry right up to WWII).

Do the village a favour and leave your vehicle at the car park beyond a short tunnel and walk in.

SIGHTS

Fourteen of Å's 19th-century boathouses, storehouses, fishing cottages, farmhouses and commercial buildings constitute the **Norwegian**

FISHY MEDICINE

Remember the breakfast tantrums, the spoon being forced into your mouth and that strong fishy flavour, overcoming the nutty taste of cornflakes, as your parents forced the fluid down your throat to stave off winter colds?

It wasn't always so. *Tran*, cod-liver oil, was originally used as fuel for lamps or in the tanning process for skins and nobody would have dreamed of imbibing it. But gradually its medicinal properties were understood and, in an early example of deliberate – and highly successful – marketing, cod-liver oil became the preventative of choice throughout Europe. It's a bit like olive oil; the first pressing, the virgin oil, is considered the purest while steam cooking – a technological advance that reduced production costs and enhanced yield – enables much more of the oil to be used.

Early hunch is nowadays backed up by objective medical evidence. Cod-liver oil, rich in vitamins A and D, plus omega-3 fatty acids, is good for your heart and blood circulation, eyesight, skin, bone development and brain.

So take a breath, pinch your nostrils, join one in three of all Norwegians and take your medicine like a man/woman...

Fishing Village Museum (Norsk Fiskevær's Museum; ☎ 76 09 14 88; adult/child Nkr50/25; ☎ 10am-5.30pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 11am-3.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year). Highlights (pick up a pamphlet in English at reception) are Europe's oldest cod-liver oil factory, where you'll be treated to a taste of the wares and can pick up a bottle (Nkr40) to stave off those winter sniffles; the smithy, who still makes cod-liver oil lamps; the still-functioning bakery, established in 1844; the old *rorbuer* with period furnishings; and a couple of traditional Lofoten fishing boats.

At the nearby **Lofoten Stockfish Museum** (Lofoten Torrøstfiskmuseum; ☎ 91 15 05 60; adult/child/concession Nkr40/free/25; ☎ 10am-5pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 11am-4pm early Jun & late Aug), in a former fish warehouse, you'll be bowled over by Steinar Larsen, its enthusiastic, polyglot owner, who meets and greets every visitor. This personal collection, a passionate hobby of his, illustrates well Lofoten's traditional mainstay: the catching and drying of cod for export, particularly to Italy. Displays, artefacts and a DVD programme take you through the process, from hauling the fish out of the sea through drying, grading and sorting to despatch.

Beyond the camp site just south of Å, there's an excellent hillside view of Værøy island, across the Moskenesstraumen strait. The mighty **maelstroms** created by tidal flows between the two islands were first described 2000 years ago by Pytheas and later appeared as fearsome adversaries on fanciful early sea charts. They also inspired tales of maritime peril by Jules Verne and Edgar Allan Poe, and are still said to be among the world's most

dangerous waters. This formidable expanse is exceptionally rich in fish and attracts large numbers of sea birds and marine mammals.

SLEEPING & EATING

Moskenesstraumen Camping (☎ 76 09 11 48; camping for 1/2/3 persons Nkr90/110/120, caravans Nkr140, 2-/4-bed cabins Nkr380/500, with bathroom Nkr500/700; ☎ Jun-Aug) This wonderful cliff-top camp site, just south of the village, has flat, grassy pitches between the rocks, just big enough for your bivouac. Cabins too have great views, as far as the mainland on clear days.

Å VandrerhjemogRorbuer (☎ 76 09 11 21; www.lofoten-rorbu.com; hostel dm Nkr180, d/tr in sea house per person Nkr250, rorbuer Nkr850-1550) There's accommodation for all budgets, dispersed throughout Å's historic buildings, the more expensive ones fully equipped and furnished with antiques. Very much the hub of the village, the office provides general tourist information and also hires out bikes (per day Nkr200), rowing boats (Nkr150) on Lade Åvannet, a short walk away, and motorboats (Nkr1000 plus petrol). It also rents *rorbuer* in the nearby and more tranquil hamlet of Tind, 1km to the north.

Å-Hamna Rorbuer & Hennumgården (☎ 76 09 12 11; www.lofotenferie.com; 2-4-bed r per person Nkr100, 4-8-bed rorbuer Nkr450-1000) You can stay here in restored fishing huts or the hostel-style Hennumgårdensjøhus. Prices drop significantly outside high summer.

Brygga restaurant (☎ 76 09 15 72; mains Nkr95-170; ☎ Jun-Sep) Hovering above the water, this is Å's one decent dining choice. The menu, as is

right and proper in a village with such a strong fishing tradition, is mainly of things with fins. It's also a great little spot simply for a drink as the water sloshes below your feet.

Sørvågen

Alongside the E10 in Sørvågen and south of Moskenes, the **Norwegian Telecommunications Museum** (☎ 76 09 14 88; adult/child Nkr40/20; 🕒 core hrs noon-4pm Jun-mid-Aug) presents itself as a study in 'cod and communications'. Granted, it's not an immediately winning combination but in fact this small museum commemorates a huge advance in fishing techniques. In 1906, what was Norway's second wireless telephone station was established in this tiny hamlet. From that day on, weather warnings could be speedily passed on and fishing vessels could communicate with each other, pass on news about where the shoals were moving and call up the bait boats.

our pick **Maren Anna** (☎ 76 09 20 50; mains around Nkr200) is at once a pub, restaurant and café. Serving its mainstay of fish, portions are generous and hyperfresh (our coley had been hauled out of the sea by the chef herself barely two hours earlier). For a table with views over the fishing boats below and what's claimed, tongue in cheek, to be Norway's smallest beach, reserve ahead. The menu's only in Norwegian but the staff readily translate.

Moskenes

In a bleak location yet with great waterside views, **Moskenes Camping** (☎ 99 48 94 05; kra-ri@online.no; tent/caravan sites Nkr100/140; 🕒 May-Sep) is gravel surfaced yet also has a sheltered grassy area for tent campers. Facilities have been recently upgraded and it's convenient for an early getaway from the ferry terminal, only 400m away.

Reine

Reine is a characterless place but gosh, it looks great from above, beside its placid lagoon and backed by the sheer rock face of Reinebringen. You get a great view from the road that drops to the village from the E10 but for a truly exceptional panorama, hike up the precipitous track to Reinebringen's summit (670m). It starts at the tunnel entrance about 1.2km south of the Reine turnoff from the E10, and climbs very steeply to the ridge (448m).

From Reine, you can choose among several worthwhile boat tours between June and

August. The most popular is a six-hour excursion (adult/child Nkr800/400). It takes you via the maelstrom to the cave **Refsvikhula**, a 115m-long, 50m-high natural rock cathedral. Around midsummer, the midnight sun shines directly into the mouth of the cave and illuminates a panel of Stone Age stick figures marching across the walls, thought to have been painted at least 3000 years ago.

Alternatively, you can take a three-hour bird- and marine mammal-watching **safari** (adult/child Nkr600/350) into the fish-rich Moskstraumen maelstrom.

Both tours are run by run by **Moskstraumen Adventure** (☎ 90 77 07 41).

Around Reine

In summer ferries run between Reine and Vindstad (adult/child return Nkr100/50, 15 minutes, three daily) through scenic Reinefjord. From Vindstad, it's a one-hour hike across the ridge to the abandoned beachside settlement of **Bunes**, in the shadow of the brooding 610m Helvetestind rock slab.

Sakrisøy

In Sakrisøy, Dagmar Gylseth has collected more than 2500 dolls, antique teddy bears and historic toys over 20 years for her **Museum of Dolls & Toys** (Dagmars Dukke og Leketøy Museum; ☎ 76 09 21 43; adult/child/concession Nkr50/25/40; 🕒 10am-6pm or 8pm late May-Aug). There's also an affiliated antique shop upstairs.

Reserve at the Doll Museum for **Sakrisøy Rorbuer** (☎ 76 09 21 43; www.lofoten.ws; Nkr675-1250), a relatively authentic complex of ochre-coloured cottages hovering above the water. You can also hire motorboats (Nkr400 to Nkr550 per day).

For self-catering, the fish stall **Sjømat** (Sakrisøy), across the street from the Doll Museum, is famous for its fish cakes, smoked salmon, prawns, whale steaks and – go on, be adventurous – seagulls' eggs.

Hamnøy

our pick **Hamnøy Mat og Vinbu** (☎ 76 09 21 45; Hamnøy; mains Nkr155-205; 🕒 Jun-early Sep) is a welcoming restaurant run by three generations of the same family (the teenage boys are coopted for washing-up duties). It's well regarded for local specialities, including whale, *bacalao* and cod tongues. Grandmother takes care of the traditional dishes – just try her fish cakes – while her son is the main chef. Its fish is of the

finest catch, bought daily from the harbour barely 100m away.

SOUTHERN ISLANDS

This remote pair of islands is superb for bird-watching. Værøy, mainly high and rugged, and Røst, flat as a pancake, both offer good walking and relative solitude in well-touristed Lofoten.

Værøy

pop 500

Craggy Værøy, its handful of residents hugely outnumbered by over 100,000 nesting sea birds – fulmars, gannets, Arctic terns, guillemots, gulls, sea eagles, puffins, kittiwakes, cormorants, eiders, petrels and a host of others – is a mere 8km long with white-sand beaches, soaring ridges, tiny, isolated villages, granite-gneiss bird cliffs and sparkling seas.

The **tourist office** (☎ 76 05 15 00; 🕒 10am-3pm Mon-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug) is near the ferry landing at Sorland, the main village. It's open additional hours whenever the car ferry is in port.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Walking routes approach some of the major sea-bird rookeries. The most scenic and popular trail begins at the end of the road around the north of the island, about 6km from Sorland and 300m beyond the former airstrip. It heads southward along the west coast, over the Eidet isthmus to the mostly abandoned fishing village of Måstad, on the east coast, where meat and eggs from the puffin colonies once supported 150 people.

Fit hikers who relish a challenge may also want to attempt the steep climb from Måstad to the peak of Måhornet (431m), which takes about an hour each way. Alternatively, from the quay at Sorland you can follow the road (or perhaps the more interesting ridge scramble) up to the NATO installation at Håen (438m).

SLEEPING & EATING

Gamle Prestegård (Old Vicarage; ☎ 76 09 54 11; www.prestegaarden.no in Norwegian; s/d Nkr400/600, with bath-room Nkr475/690, all incl breakfast) Værøy's smartest lodging and dining is on the island's north side. It's the large house with a flagpole in the garden beside the church, just where you'd expect the vicar to have lived.

Kornelius Kro (☎ 76 09 52 99; korn-kro@online.no; Sorland; 1-2-/4-bed cabins Nkr550/820/1500) The island's only nightlife option (there's live music most Saturdays) has a pub, restaurant (mains Nkr75 to Nkr170) and five cabins at the rear.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There's a **helicopter flight** (☎ 77 60 83 00) between Bodø and Værøy once or twice daily, February to October. The rest of us take the car ferry that runs daily except Saturday from Bodø (passenger/car Nkr139/493), directly or via Moskenes. The ferry also links Værøy with Røst (passenger/car Nkr73/251).

Røst

pop 600

The 356 islands and skerries of Røst form Lofoten's ragged southern edge. Røst stands in sharp contrast to its rugged neighbours to the north, and were it not for a small pimple in the middle, the main pond-studded island of Røstlandet would be dead flat. Thanks to its location in the heart of the Gulf Stream, this cluster of islets basks in one of the mildest climates in Norway and attracts 2.5 million nesting sea birds to some serious rookeries on the cliffs of the outer islands.

An unusual view of medieval life on the island is provided in the accounts of a shipwrecked merchant of Venice, one Pietro Querini, who washed up on Sandøy in 1432 and reputedly introduced stockfish to Italy. The **tourist office** (☎ 76 05 05 00; 🕒 mid-Jun-mid-Aug), a short walk from the ferry dock, has a sheet outlining the tale.

TOURS

From June to mid-August the MS *Inger Helen*, belonging to Kårøy Rorbucamping (see left), does five-hour boat tours (adult/child Nkr300/125) that cruise past several bird cliffs, including the Vedøy kittiwake colony. Weather permitting, the boat makes a stop for a short walk to the 1887 Skomvær lighthouse or, if you prefer, you can try a little fishing (lines provided).

SLEEPING & EATING

Kårøy Rorbucamping (☎ 76 09 62 38; www.karoy.no; per person Nkr150; 🕒 May-Aug) Rooms sleep two, four or six at this authentic *rorbu*. Bathrooms are communal and there are self-catering facilities. This great budget choice is on the

minuscule island of Kårøy; phone from the ferry and a boat will be sent to collect you.

Røst Bryggehotell (☎ 76 05 08 00; www.rostbryggehotell.no; d Nkr750 Jul–mid-Aug, Nkr900 rest-of-year) This modern development in traditional style is right on the quayside. It has 16 comfortable doubles, and hires out both bikes and fishing tackle.

Querini Pub og Restaurant (☎ 76 09 64 80) Named after the shipwrecked merchant from Venice, this is a reliable choice among Røst's few eating options.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Røst, like Værøy, is served by the car ferry (daily except Saturday) that runs between Bodø and Moskenes.

VESTERÅLEN

pop 28,300

Administratively, the islands of Vesterålen, the northern continuation of the archipelago that includes Lofoten, are divided between the counties of Nordland and Troms but, for convenience, we cover the entire area in this chapter. Although the landscapes here aren't as dramatic as those in Lofoten, they tend to be much wilder and the forested mountainous regions of the island of Hinnøya are a unique corner of Norway's largely treeless northern coast.

An Encounter with Vesterålen – Culture, Nature & History (Nkr170), sold at tourist offices, gives a good introduction to the region, its sights and walking routes.

HADSELØYA

pop 8050

Vesterålen's link to Lofoten is the southernmost island of Hadseløya, connected by ferry from the port of Melbu to Fiskebøl on Austvågøy. The other main town, Stokmarknes, is best known as the birthplace of the Hurtigruten coastal ferry.

The island's **tourist office** (☎ 76 16 46 60; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 11am–4pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug only) is on the waterfront in Stokmarknes.

Stokmarknes

The Hurtigruten coastal ferry was founded in Stokmarknes in 1893 by Richard With. Originally a single ship, the S/S *Vesterålen*, it called on nine ports between Trondheim and Hammerfest, carrying post, passengers

and vital supplies. Now the line boasts 11 ships, carries half a million passengers annually, serves 35 towns and villages and is a vital link for Norway, providing transport for locals and a scenic cruise experience for tourists.

The **Hurtigruten Museum** (Hurtigrutemuseet; ☎ 76 11 81 90; Markedsgata 1; museum admission adult/child Nkr80/30, M/S Finnmarken Nkr40/20, combined admission Nkr80/30; ☎ noon–4pm mid-May–mid-Jun & mid-Aug–mid-Sep, 10am–6pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 2–4pm Mon–Fri, noon–4pm Sat rest-of-year) portrays the history of the line in text and image. Hitched to the quayside is the retired ship M/S *Finnmarken*, claimed to be the world's largest museum piece, which plied the coastal route between 1956 and 1993.

Hurtigrutenshus (☎ 76 15 06 00; www.hurtigrutenshus.com; Markedsgata 1; s/d Nkr840/1280; ☎ Jun–mid-Aug) is a luxurious hotel, conference and arts complex, where rooms represent good value for your krone. In the same complex as the museum, it's one of the few places where it's more fun to be alone than accompanied; single rooms are furnished to resemble ships' cabins.

Hurtigrutenshus Turistsenter (☎ 76 15 29 99; s/d Nkr670/840 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr995/1280 rest-of-year) is found over the bridge and has more conventional cabins and rooms. It's a friendly extension to the Hurtigruten complex.

Just across from the Hurtigruten Museum, **Rødbrygge Pub** (☎ 76 15 26 66; Markedsgata 6a; mains Nkr60–190; ☎ 11am–3am) is an all-wood place that does good grills, seafood and pizzas at more modest prices (including a mean fish soup for Nkr75).

our pick **Isqueen** (☎ 76 15 29 99; mains Nkr235–290; ☎ 6–11pm) sits within the Turistcenter grounds. This one-time whaler, forever beached, is now an excellent Arctic Menu restaurant. You can dine within its hull, in the grafted-on restaurant with its wraparound windows or up top on the outdoor terrace with fine views over the sound.

Melbu

In an abandoned herring oil factory (romantically named Neptune despite its stark functionality), the **National Fishing Industry Museum** (Norsk Fiskerindustriuseum; ☎ 76 15 98 25; Neptunveien; adult/child Nkr50/20; ☎ 9am–3pm Mon–Fri) traces the life of a fish from the deep sea to the kitchen table. There's also a children's exhibition about the goings-on on the sea floor. Across the harbour from the ferry pier, it's 750m

from the E10 along a pocked causeway. In summer there are guided visits, included with the admission fee.

The **Sommer-Melbu festival**, held each July, is one of northern Norway's liveliest cultural festivals with seminars, lectures, music of all genres, theatre and art exhibitions.

Getting There & Around

Of course, the Hurtigruten coastal ferry still makes a detour stop in its home port of Stokmarknes...

Buses between Melbu and Stokmarknes run several times daily on weekdays and twice daily at weekends.

LANGØYA

pop 14,700

The high points, both literally and figuratively, of Langøya, Vesterålen's central island, are the historic, little-visited fishing villages at its northern tip. Should you be passing through Sortland around bedtime, you'll find some decent lodging options that also offer good dining.

The annual 170km **Arctic Sea Kayak Race** (www.askr.no), held over five days in July, is one of the ultimate challenges in competitive sea-kayaking. Lesser beings can opt for a shorter option or an introductory course in sea-kayaking. You can register online.

Sortland

pop 5000

Sortland, Vesterålen's commercial centre and transit hub, occupies a nick in the island's east coast. Its mostly chunky, rectangular buildings are painted a soothing sea-blue. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 76 11 14 80; www.visitvesteralen.com; Kjøpmannsgata 2; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat, noon–4pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 8am–4pm Mon–Fri rest-of-year) covers the whole of the Vesterålen region.

Sortland Jazz is a couple of weeks of jazz that the town hosts in September.

A family-run camp site, **Sortland Camping og Motell** (☎ 76 11 03 00; www.sortland-camping.no; Vestervegen 51; car/caravan sites Nkr200/225, cabins Nkr350–450, for 5–7 persons with bathroom Nkr1200) is the only option in town. It's 1.3km from the centre and offers home cooking, strong on northern-Norway cuisine. Occupying an extensive, semiwooded area, it produces a useful information sheet about the area.

Located precisely 1.4km north of the bridge, **SjøhusSenteret** (☎ 76 12 37 40; sjohus@online.no; Ånstdstjøen; d/tr Nkr630/785, 3-/5-bed cabin Nkr1330/1630) has both comfortable rooms and waterside cabins with views. You can fish from the end of the private jetty (you can borrow a rod) and rent a bike (Nkr30/160 per hour/day), rowing boat (Nkr75/140) or motorboat (Nkr390/1200). Its Sjøstua restaurant, where the chef produces a delightful range of à la carte dishes, is worth a visit in its own right.

Strand Hotell (☎ 76 11 00 80; www.strandhotell.no; Strandgata 34; s/d 750/900 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr970/1150 Mon–Thu, Nkr700/910 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; ☎ ☎) is a waterside, family-run hotel. It has 37 cheery, upscale rooms, each decorated with prints by local artist Tove Hov Jacobsen.

Spisestua (☎ 76 12 28 78; mains Nkr240–285) is the top-floor Arctic Menu restaurant of Strand Hotell, and equally impressive. There's freshly baked homemade bread for breakfast, and free coffee and waffles all day long.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Two to four daily buses run north from Sortland to Risøyhamn (one hour) and Andenes (two hours). Buses to/from Harstad (2¼ hours) run one to four times daily. You can also take the twice-daily express bus to Narvik (Nkr294, four hours) on the mainland or Svolvær (Nkr248, 2¼ hours), to which three to five local buses also run daily. The express bus between Fauske (Nkr370, 5¼ hours) and Svolvær stops in daily too.

Sortland is also a stop on the Hurtigruten coastal ferry.

Myre

Myre, where the roads for Nyksund and Stø split, has a seasonal **tourist office** (☎ 76 18 50 50; ☎ core hrs 10am–4pm Mon–Sat mid-Jun–mid-Aug).

Nyksund

A dramatic drive along a narrow ribbon of road that hugs the shoreline brings you to this long-abandoned fishing village that's been reborn as an artists' colony. From the crumbling old structures to the faithfully renovated commercial buildings, it's picture-perfect. It's hard to imagine that, until recently, Nyksund was a ghost town.

The bakery and post office, heart of any community, shut up shop in the 1960s and nearly everyone else left in 1975 after a storm

RECLAIMED & RECYCLED

Ssemjon Gerlitz, the sparky German owner of Holmvik Brygge, has lived year-round in Nyksund for a decade and more. Over the years, he and his team of helpers have gleaned, picked and scavenged what could be salvaged from Nyksund's crumbling buildings and incorporated them into his higgledy-piggledy Holmvik Brygge, where every room's different, each with its own personality.

Two things in particular keep him here, at the road's end. Modulating his rat-a-tat delivery for just a millisecond, he slows to speak of the lure of silence, nothing but the rhythm of wind and waves for most of the year. Then, changing a gear, of his sense of communion with long-gone fisherfolk ('Every rusty nail I pull out was hammered in by someone who lived and worked here') and, once again in overdrive, of the sheer energy of this splendid place where mountains tumble to the sea.

destroyed the mole. The last inhabitant, blacksmith Olav Larsen, packed his bags in 1977.

Sheep and vandals took over but slowly, over the decades, life has been breathed back into this charming, remote settlement. Nowadays, modern Nyksund boasts a summer population of around 60 and some half-dozen hardy souls hack it throughout the harsh winters.

our pick **Holmvik Brygge** (☎ 76 13 47 96; www.nyksund.com; r per person Nkr225; ☞ year-round) is a cosy, hugely welcoming guesthouse and café, and in itself justifies the detour. You can either cater for yourself or enjoy a snack (from Nkr55), a drink or a filling dinner (Nkr85 to Nkr150) at its Kai Café.

Stø

The small, distinctive fishing village of Stø clings to Langøya's northernmost tip. From July to September, **Arctic Whale Tours** (☎ 76 13 43 00; www.arcticwhaletours.com) mount daily seven-hour whale-watching cruises (adult/child Nkr780/500), leaving at noon. On the way to the sperm whales' feeding grounds, it pauses to view sea bird and seal colonies.

Departing from both Stø and Nyksund, **Island Adventure** (☎ 48 17 31 64; www.islandadventure.no) organises both seal- and bird-watching trips and fishing outings. You can reserve at Stø Bobilcamp.

The walk over the headland between Nyksund and Stø, waymarked with red letter T's, merits a short day of your life. Most hikers sweat a little on the outward leg of this five-hour circular trek via the 517m Sørkullen, then breathe easy, returning via the simpler sea-level route. Called the **Queen's Route**, its name derives from a hike taken by Norway's Queen Sonja in 1994. The Myre and Sortland tourist offices carry a free guide leaflet.

Small, waterside **Stø Bobilcamp** (☎ 76 13 25 30; www.stobobilcamp.com; camp site Nkr140, cabins Nkr700-850; ☞ mid-May–mid-Aug) is stark indeed and a windy spot to pitch your tent but it does run an unpretentious little restaurant, serving primarily fish.

Of the one to four daily buses between Sortland and Myre (one hour), two continue to Stø (1¼ hours) on weekdays.

ANDØYA

pop 6000

Andøya, long, narrow and flat except for the mountains on its western flank, is atypical of Vesterålen. The 1000m-deep, dark, cold waters of its northwestern shore attract abundant stocks of squid, including some very large specimens indeed, and these in turn attract the squid-loving sperm whales. The result is fairly reliable whale-watching, centred on the town of Andenes at the island's northern end. Andenes is the only place of any size but other nature safaris depart from the tiny ports of Bleik and Stave, about 10km and 25km southwest of the town.

Andenes

pop 2700

This straggling village has a rich fishing history and is northern Norway's main base for whale-watching. The harbour front is a charming jumble of wooden boat sheds and general nautical detritus.

Its **tourist office** (☎ 76 14 12 03; www.andoyturist.no; Hamnegata 1; ☞ 10am-6pm mid-Jun–Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) covers the whole island and shares premises with the Hisnakul Natural History Centre. It produces a leaflet in English, *Andanes Vær* (Nkr35), which outlines a walking tour of the old quarter. There's

internet access (Nkr60 per hour) and it rents bikes (Nkr100/175 per three-hours/day).

Yanthi (☎ 75 91 75 75; Storgata 2) has three internet terminals (Nkr25 per 30 minutes) and brews good coffee.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The tourist office sells a combined ticket (adult/child Nkr100/50) that gives access to all sights below except the Whale Centre.

The **Hisnakul Natural History Centre** (☎ 76 14 12 03; Hamnegata 1; adult/concession Nkr50/25; ☞ 10am-6pm mid-Jun–Aug, 9am-4pm rest-of-year) shares a restored wooden warehouse with the tourist office. It showcases the natural history of northern Norway, including sea birds, marine mammals, topography, farming, fisheries and local cultures.

Next door, the **Northern Lights Centre** (adult/child Nkr40/20; ☞ 10am-6pm late Jun-late Aug) is an impressive high-tech aurora borealis exhibition that first featured at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer.

The **Whale Centre** (Hvalsenter; ☎ 76 11 56 00; Havnegate 1; adult/child Nkr60/30; ☞ 8.30am-4pm or 7pm late May–mid-Sep) provides a perspective for whale-watchers, with displays on whale research, whaling and whale life cycles. Most people visit here in conjunction with a whale-watching tour (see below).

The quaint, Arctic-themed **Polar Museum** (☎ 76 11 54 32; Havnegate; adult/child Nkr30/free; ☞ 10am-6pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug) has displays on local hunting and fishing traditions. There's extensive coverage of the 38 winter hunting expeditions in Svalbard undertaken by local explorer Hilmar Nøis, who also collected most of the exhibits.

The town's landmark red **Andenes Fyr** (lighthouse), automated for many years, opened in 1859 and still shines on. **Guided visits** (adult/child Nkr35/10; ☞ late Jun–Aug), which require a climb up 40m and 148 steps, take place hourly, on the hour between noon and 4pm.

TOURS

The island's biggest outfit, **Whale Safari** (☎ 76 11 56 00; www.whalesafari.no), which operates the Whale Centre, runs popular cruises (adult/child/concession Nkr795/ 500/700) between late May and mid-September. The tour begins with a guided visit to the Centre and slide show, followed by a three- to six-hour boat trip. If you fail to sight at least one sperm whale, your next trip is free. There's also a chance of spot-

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Unless you leave Andøya by the seasonal ferry from Andenes to Gryllefjord, there's no way of avoiding the 100km drive the length of the island's slim northern finger, poking up from Sortland. To avoid repetition, but all the more so because it's a spectacular drive in its own right, take the minor, lightly trafficked west coast road from Risøyhamn as you head northwards. Designated a National Tourist Route, it offers magnificent coastal panoramas as it threads along the shoreline. Returning by the Rv83, notice the giant hillocks of peat, extracted, dried and ready to be transported to garden centres around the world.

ting minke, pilot and humpback whales and, towards the end of the season, killer whales (orcas). Trips depart at least once daily (at 11am) with up to six sailings in high summer. Your fee includes a light lunch, if you can face it – staff pass around the seasickness pills, just like airline boiled sweets before takeoff. A tip: weather and high seas only rarely prevent a sailing but try to build in an extra day on the island, just in case you're unlucky.

SLEEPING & EATING

Andenes Camping (☎ 76 11 56 00; car/caravan sites Nkr130/190; ☞ late May–mid-Sep) This basic camp site, 3.5km from town, is on a gorgeous seaside meadow, green and smooth as a golf course.

Andenes Vandrerhjem (☎ 76 14 28 50; fax 76 14 28 55; Havnegata 31; per person Nkr150; ☞ Jun-Aug) This last-resort seasonal hostel, no longer an HI-affiliate, is severely run-down. Near the harbour, it's also part of the Norlandia empire, to which it does no credit.

Hisnakul Natural History Centre (see left; dm/s/d Nkr100/225/325) has well-priced budget rooms above its gallery. The bathroom is in the corridor and there are self-catering facilities. There are only 14 beds so phone to reserve.

Den Gamle Fyrmesterbolig (☎ 76 14 10 27; Richard Withs gate 11; r Nkr400) In the shadow of Andenes' resplendent lighthouse, this charming option occupies what was once the lighthouse keepers' cottage. There are only two rooms and it doesn't take advance reservations, but if you ring up on the day it'll hold one for you.

Norlandia Andrikken Hotell (☎ 76 14 12 22; www.norlandia.no/andrikken; Storgata 53; s/dNkr790/1070

FARGEKLATTEN

Fargeklatten, meaning splashes of colour, is a very special place, the creation of Grethe Kvalvik. For years, Grethe was the receptionist at Andrikken Hotell until she lost her sight. After two long years of blindness, partial vision returned and she could again perceive shapes and, above all, colours.

Determined to live a full life anew, she rescued Fargeklatten, at the time earmarked for demolition to make way for a car park. This complex of historical buildings now houses a couple of small galleries displaying the art and crafts of northern Norway, a simple café and also a **boarding house** (r Nkr600-700), furnished in antique style. Next step, she enthused as we met, is to restore a 17th-century fisherfolk's cottage.

mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr1180/1390 Sun–Thu, Nkr850/1145 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; (P) Norlandia's house-brand lodging – dull stuff and boxy from the outside – has rooms that, once you penetrate, are comfortable and well equipped. It also runs a decent restaurant (mains Nkr170 to Nkr240).

Fargeklatten (☎ 97 76 00 20; Sjøgata 38A; ☞ 11am–2pm & 6–8pm May–Sep, 11am–2pm Mon–Fri rest-of-year) Enjoy coffee and cakes within this small, recently established art gallery (see above).

Lysthuset (☎ 76 14 14 99; Storgata 51; pizzas Nkr125–190, mains Nkr145–250) The Lysthuset is the best of Andenes' limited dining options. In front, it's your typical takeaway burgers, pizzas and other speedy stuff. Behind, the restaurant proper offers altogether more subtle fare. For dessert, indulge in a little 'Sex on the Mountain' – an orgasmic confection of ice cream, cream, blackberries and cloudberry, all doused in eggnog.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The flight between Andenes and Tromsø, via Narvik or Bodø, is a contender for the world's most scenic flight with spectacular aerial views of the landscapes, seas and agricultural patterns.

Two to four daily buses run south to Sortland (two hours) via Risøyhamn, where a bus to/from Andenes meets and greets the Hurtigruten. From late May to mid-August, a car ferry connects Andenes with the port of Gryllefjord (two hours, two to five daily

on the island of Senja (see p342), passing magnificent coastal scenery.

Around Andenes

From **Stave**, 18km southwest of Andenes, **Seal Safari** (☎ 97 68 00 18; www.sealsafari.no) leads two- to three-hour boat tours between late May and mid-August. These sail close to Norway's largest common seal colony before chugging on to the bird sanctuary on Bleiksøya, where auks, puffins, kittiwakes and other gulls teem.

Puffin Safari (☎ 76 14 57 75; www.puffinsafari.no), based in Bleik, also does daily 1½-hour bird-watching **boat trips** (adult/child Nkr300/150; ☞ 1pm & 3pm May–mid-August) off Bleiksøya and four-hour **deep-sea fishing trips** (adult/child Nkr400/200; ☞ 5pm Jun–mid-Aug).

SLEEPING

Stave Camping (☎ 76 14 65 62; stavecamping@c2i.net; car/caravan site Nkr130/140, 2-/4-bed cabins Nkr340/500, with bathroom Nkr550-660; ☞ mid-May–mid-August) Camp at the water's edge overlooking the fjord or set back and more sheltered at this friendly option with its cosy café.

Havhusene Bleik (☎ 76 14 57 40; www.norlandia.no; Fiskevearsveien, Bleik; 2-/4-/6-bed cabins Nkr1075/1270/1500) These well-equipped modern sea houses within the quiet harbour of Bleik are a very comfortable way to rough it.

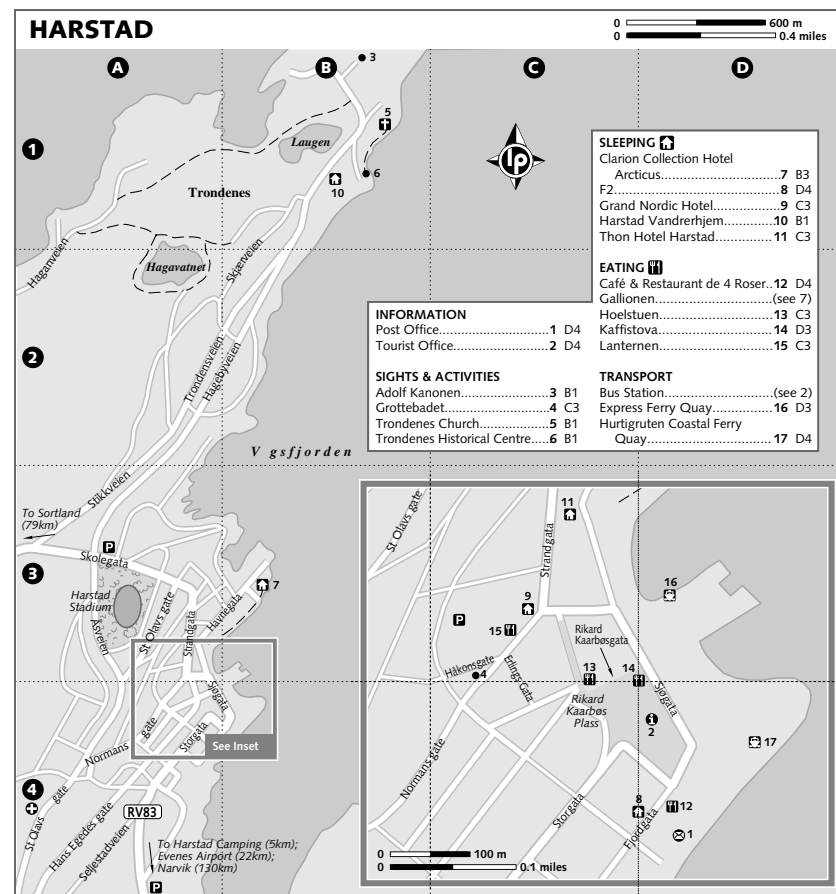
HINNØYA

Administratively, Hinnøya, the largest island off mainland Norway, splits between the two counties of Troms and Nordland. Contrasting with the islands to the south, it's mostly forested green upland punctuated by snowcaps and deeply indented by stunning fjords. Off Hinnøya's west coast, Vesterålen is divided from Lofoten by the narrow Raftsund strait and even narrower, hugely scenic Trollfjorden, whose sheer walls plunge to the water, dwarfing all below.

Harstad

pop 19,400

On a hillside close to the northern end of Hinnøya, Harstad is the Vesterålen region's largest town, even though technically it tumbles within Troms county. It's a small industrial and defence-oriented place, full of docks, tanks and warehouses. Contrasting with so many tourism-'n'-fishing towns to the south, it pulsates with a certain purposeful bustle.



The **tourist office** (☎ 77 01 89 89; www.visitharstad.com; ☞ 8am–6pm Jun–mid-Aug, 8am–3pm rest-of-year) shares premises with the bus station.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Most sights are on the **Trondenes Peninsula**, north of town.

The **Trondenes Historical Centre** (Trondenes Historiske Senter; ☎ 77 01 83 80; Trondenesveien 122; adult/child/concession Nkr70/50/25; ☞ 11am–5pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Sun only rest-of-year) has well-mounted and equally well-documented displays and artefacts illustrating the social history of the area from Viking days to the present.

Trondenes Church (Trondenes Kirke; guided tours in English adult/child Nkr40/20; ☞ tours 5pm Jun–early Aug), just north of the historical centre, was built

by King Øystein around 1150, after Viking chieftains lost the battle against the unification of Norway under a Christian regime. For ages it was the northernmost church in Christendom – and still lays claim to being Norway's northernmost *stone* church. Originally of wood, the current stone structure replaced it around 1250 and quickly came to double as a fortification against Russian aggression. Its jewels are the three finely wrought altars at the east end, all venerating Mary. Most interesting is the central one of the Virgin surrounded by her extended family with infants in arms and children tugging at skirts on all sides. Glance up too at the pair of trumpet-wielding cherubs, precariously perched atop the main pillars of the rood screen. Entry is free between

tour visits – if, that is, you can get in; absurdly for one of northern Norway's major cultural sights, it's often locked.

Here's another biggest/furthest claim for Harstad: the formidable WWII weapon known as the **Adolf Kanonen** is the world's largest land-based big gun, with a calibre of 40.6cm and a recoil force of 635 tonnes. Because it lies in a military area, you're obliged to take a **guided tour** (adult/child Nkr60/30; ☎ 11am, 1pm & 3pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug) of the site and to have your own vehicle. Just turn up 10 minutes before departure. The bunker also contains a collection of artillery, military equipment and instruments used by Nazi coastal batteries during WWII.

Grottebadet (☎ 77 04 17 70; Håkonsgate 7; adult/child/family Nkr130/95/300; ☎ noon–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat, 11am–6pm Sun), a heated indoor complex tunnelled 150m into the hillside, has pools, rapids, slides, flume rides, steam rooms and other watery activities. Huge fun for all the family – but steel yourself to resist the kids' pleas for a *grottyburger*.

SLEEPING

Harstad Camping (☎ 77 07 36 62; www.harstad-camp.no; Nesseveien 55; car/caravan sites Nkr150/175 4-bed cabin Nkr375, with bathroom Nkr700–950; ☎ year-round) Follow the Rv83 towards Narvik for 4km, then take a side road to reach this small waterside site, where you can rent rowing boats (per hour/day Nkr80/290) and motorboats (Nkr150/570).

Harstad Vandrerhjem (☎ 77 04 00 78; harstad.hotel@vandrerhjem.no; Trondenesveien 110; s/d incl breakfast Nkr365/590; ☎ Jun–mid-Aug) A school for the rest of the year, this summer hostel has captivating harbour views from most rooms. Take bus 12 from the bus station.

F2 (☎ 77 00 32 00; www.f2hotel.no in Norwegian; Fjordgata 2; s/d Nkr545/690 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, from Nkr850/1000 Sun–Thu, Nkr595/960 Fri & Sat rest-of-year, all incl breakfast) Freshly renovated, F2's smart 88 rooms all have flat-screen TV, microwave, kettle and large windows that let in plenty of light. Bathrooms, however, are a little cramped. For guests, it rents cycles (per day Nkr100) and quads too. Faces in the photos that decorate rooms and public areas may seem familiar; they feature staff in a variety of poses, from mountain summit on the top floor to feet-in-the-sea at reception.

Grand Nordic Hotel (☎ 77 00 30 00; www.nordic.no; Strandgata 9; s/d Nkr590/790 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr1345/1555

Sun–Thu, Nkr590/960 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; ☎) This is the grand dame of Harstad hotels. Request one of the larger, more pleasantly decorated rooms in the newer section.

Thon Hotel Harstad (☎ 77 00 08 00; www.thonhotels.com; Sjøgata 11; s/d Nkr700/900 incl breakfast mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr920/1120 Sun–Thu, Nkr755/955 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; ☎) All 141 rooms at this decent chain hotel have attractive parquet flooring and most have views over the fjord, albeit from one block back.

Clarion Collection Hotel Arcticus (☎ 77 04 08 00; www.choice.no; Havnegata 3; s/d Nkr710/930 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, from Nkr795/995 rest-of-year; ☎) In a harmonious modern building that it shares with Harstad's cultural centre, this hotel, a short, pleasant jetty walk from the centre, has 75 particularly large rooms. It's Nkr200 extra for a superior standard, waterside room with splendid views over the fjord to the mountains beyond.

EATING

Kaffistova (☎ 77 06 12 57; Rikard Kaarbøsgata 6; dishes Nkr40–135; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Thu, 9am–3.30pm Sat, noon–5pm Sun) This amenable spot, established in 1913, has a sandwich menu as long as your arm (Nkr62 to Nkr78), meat and fish mains and 16 kinds of cake. Split-level and smelling of coffee and cakes, it's a good, informal place for lunch or a snack despite the dull décor.

Lanternen (☎ 77 00 30 30; Hakons gate; mains around Nkr120; ☎ 2pm–midnight Mon–Thu, 1pm–2am Fri & Sat, 4–11pm Sun) The Lantern is a cheerful place, popular with locals, with a pub atmosphere. You can down a good pizza or burger with salad and select from its ample range of beers to help it down. In summer, it does a filling pizza buffet (Nkr80) until 7pm.

Café & Restaurant de 4 Roser (☎ 77 01 27 50; Torvat 7; mains Nkr160–320; ☎ café 10am–midnight, restaurant 6–11pm Mon–Sat) The Four Roses offers a great gourmet experience, whether you drop into the café for something simple or linger over a tempting item from the restaurant's creative à la carte selection.

Hoelstuen (☎ 77 06 55 00; Rikard Kaarbøs Plass 4; mains Nkr250–285; ☎ 5–11pm Mon–Sat) This trim place rivals the 4 Roser for the title of best restaurant in a town of limited eating opportunities. Its cuisine has flair. Dig your fork, for example, into the fillet of stag with chestnuts and thyme-flavoured glaze. It also does a particularly rich and creamy fish soup (Nkr100).

Gallionen (☎ 77 04 08 00; mains Nkr245–265) The restaurant of Clarion Collection Hotel Arcticus is

an Arctic Menu establishment that also does a tempting daily special (around Nkr150). Fish dishes are its forte, particularly the grilled fillet of wolf-fish (Nkr260). Views, whether through the dining room's picture windows or from the quayside deck, will have you gasping.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Harstad-Narvik airport at Evenes has direct SAS flights to Oslo, Bodø, Tromsø and Trondheim. **Norwegian** (www.norwegian.no) also flies directly to/from Oslo, Bergen and Stavanger.

If you're heading for Tromsø, the easiest and most scenic option is by boat. There are two to four express passenger ferries daily between Harstad and Tromsø (2¼ hours), via Finnsnes (1½ hours).

There's also a year-round express passenger ferry (daily except Monday and Wednesday) between Harstad and Skrolsvik (1¼ hours), at the southern end of Senja island, where you'll find bus connections to Finnsnes and then on to Tromsø. Harstad is also a stop on the Hurtigruten coastal ferry.

Buses to/from Sortland (2¼ hours) run one to four times daily. There's one weekday bus to/from Narvik (three hours) and a daily service between Harstad and Fauske (Nkr343, 5½ hours).

GETTING AROUND

Flybussen (Nkr130, 50 minutes) shuttles between the town centre and Evenes airport several times daily.

Buses (Nkr25, 10 minutes, hourly, Monday to Friday only) connect Trondenes with the central bus station.

Parking may not be easy to find but – God bless the good burghers of Harstad – it's free in public car parks for vehicles with non-Norwegian licence plates.

For a taxi, call ☎ 77 04 10 00.

Møysalen National Park

Møysalen, scarcely 50 sq km in area, was set up to preserve a stretch of pristine alpine coastal scenery. The third-smallest of Norway's national parks, it's also one of the least visited.

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