

Southern Norway



Norway's southern coastline has always drawn Norwegian tourists in summer droves. It's not difficult to see why, with coastal villages all dressed in white looking out across an island-studded sea.

Many of the villages are quite beautiful, especially Grimstad, Risør, Kragerø and Flekkefjord, and can make for picturesque stepping stones en route from Oslo to Stavanger. The region also offers a chance to see a different kind of Norway from fjords and high plateaus – not to mention the fact that you're more likely to meet Norwegians on holiday than just about anywhere else in the country. Kristiansand, Larvik and especially Arendal are also agreeable larger towns. Apart from everything else, the kids will never forgive you if you don't take them to Kristiansand Dyrepark, one of Norway's best children's theme parks. However, unless you're planning to be in the country for a long visit, think carefully about whether this is really the Norway you came to see, especially given the price hikes that most towns along the coast insist on in summer.

Venture inland and you'll begin to experience increasingly dramatic landscapes but without the masses of tourists that gravitate towards the west and north in summer. The quiet valley of Setesdalen is rich in forested hillsides, traditional culture and high-energy thrills such as white-water rafting. Kongsberg promises a journey deep into the earth at its legendary silver mines, while nearby Notodden has Norway's largest stave church. Telemark, especially at Dalen and troll-haunted Seljord, is also beautiful. But the place we love above all others in the region's interior is Rjukan, in part for its epic historical stories, but more as the gateway to some of Norway's most scenic high country – the Hardangervidda National Park and the spectacularly formed mountain of Gausta.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stroll through the narrow streets of the 'white town' of **Grimstad** (p138)
- Take the quiet but beautiful **coastal road** (p147) between Flekkefjord and Egersund
- Climb to the summit of **Gausta** (see the boxed text, p157), Norway's most beautiful mountain
- Admire the exquisite roof lines and paintings in the stave church at **Heddal** (p152)
- Scour the surface of **Seljordvatn** (p158) in search of Selma the Serpent



■ POPULATION: 652,000

■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: GAUSTA 1881M

THE COAST

You probably didn't come to Norway for the beaches, but if you did, expect to be accompanied by masses of local tourists drawn by reasonable beaches and picturesque islands. The towns along the coast are pretty, if way overpriced in summer.

TØNSBERG

pop 37,493

Tønsberg is the oldest town in Norway, although so distant are its origins that few interesting remnants remain in what is now a largely modern town. There are nonetheless a few Viking-era ruins and a decrepit castle that together make Tønsberg worth a brief detour as you head along the coast.

The **tourist office** (☎ 33 35 45 20; www.visittonsborg.com; Nedre Langgatte 36; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun mid-Jun-early Aug, 9.30am-3.30pm rest-of-year), at Tønsberg Brygge waterfront, produces the excellent *Tønsberg Guide*.

History

In the *Saga of Harald Hårfagre* (p30), Snorre Sturluson mentions that Tønsberg existed prior to the Battle of Hafsrfjord, which took place in 872. Tønsberg celebrated its 1100-year anniversary in 1971. When King Harald Hårfagre divided the kingdom in the 9th century, he appointed his son, Bjørn Farmann, to rule over Vestfold and the court at Tønsberg became the seat of royal power. In the late medieval period it served as one of three Hanseatic trading posts in Norway, with ties to northern Germany. The town was destroyed by fire in 1535, after which it fell into decline. By the 17th century the town had recovered and by 1850 Tønsberg had the largest merchant fleet in Norway.

Sights

TØNSBERG CASTLE

The remains of **Tønsberg Castle** (Castrum Tunsbergis; ☎ 33 31 18 72; admission free, tower adult/child Nkr20/10; ☹ tower noon-5pm late Jun-mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year), spread across the 63m-high hill behind the town, was the largest fortress in Norway in the 13th century. In 1503, the Swedes destroyed the fortress and little remains of the castle itself. Nonetheless, the modern (1888), 17m-high **Slottsfjellstårnet tower** provides a good viewpoint over the ruins. In front of

the tower there's a bronze model of how the castle looked in 1500. Parts of the 600m-long outer wall remain intact, while the extant medieval stone foundations include **King Magnus Lagabøte's Keep**, the 1191 **Church of St Michael**, the **hall of King Håkon Håkonsson** and various **guard towers**. The park is always open.

RUINS

Atop the hill in the Haugar district are the **Viking-era grave mounds** of kings Olav and Sigrød. In the park off Kongsgaten lie the ruins of **Kongsgården**, the old royal court of King Håkon Håkonsson where the kings of Vestfold were elected; while at Storgaten 17 are the ruins of the medieval **Church of St Olav**, which dates from 1207, as well as St Olav's monastery and several Viking-age graves. You'll need a lot of imagination to make sense of it all.

VESTFOLD COUNTY MUSEUM

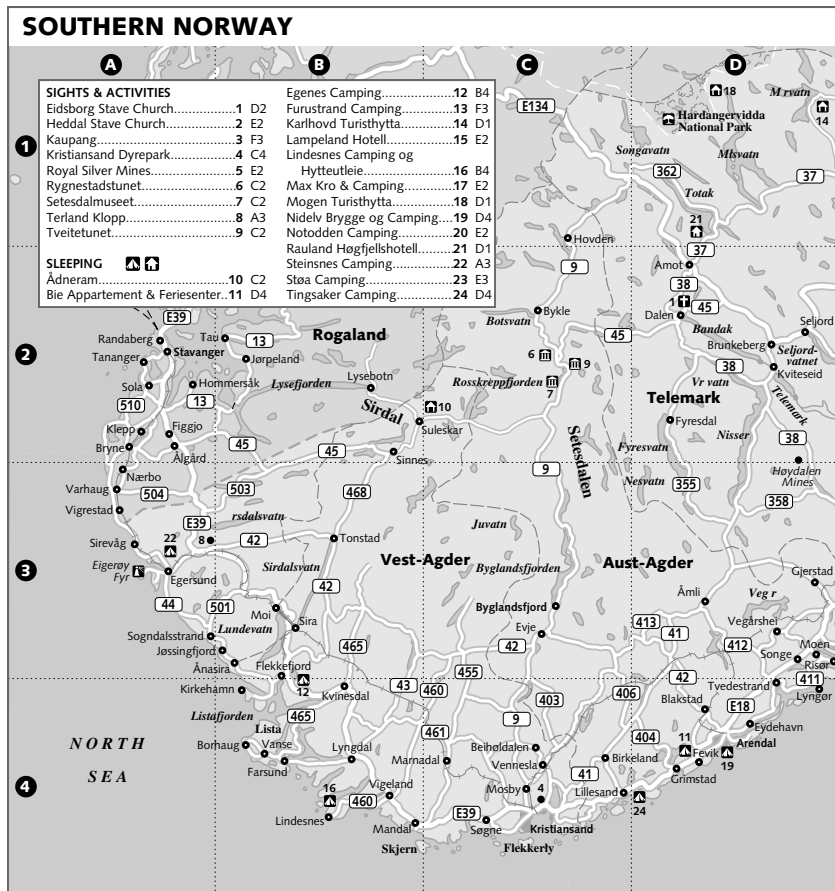
At the foot of Slottsfjellet (Castle Rock) at the northern end of town is **Vestfold County Museum** (Vestfold fylkesmuseum; ☎ 33 31 29 19; www.vfm.no; Farmannsveien 30; adult/child Nkr50/10; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun mid-May-mid-Sep), a five-minute walk northwest of the train station. Highlights include displays on the excavation of the impressive **Oseberg Viking ship** (now shown in Oslo's Viking Ship Museum, p102), a collection of historic period-furnished farm buildings, and a section on Tønsberg's whaling history, including skeletons of both a sperm whale and a blue whale. The latter, measuring 23m long, is the largest whale skeleton on display in the world.

Sleeping

Furustrand Camping (☎ 33 32 44 03; fax 33 32 74 03; Tareveien 11, Tolvsrød; tent sites Nkr110 plus per car/person Nkr40/30, cabins from Nkr500) Campers should head 5.5km east of the centre; take bus 111 or 116 to Tolvsrød (Nkr20). It has a beachfront location and reasonable facilities.

Tønsberg Vandrerhjem (☎ 33 31 21 75; tonsborg.hostel@vandrerhjem.no; Dronning Blancagata 22; dm Nkr195-220, s/d with shared bathroom Nkr375/525, s/d with bathroom Nkr475/625; (P) (Q)) This exceptionally well-run and friendly hostel is well equipped, clean and tidy and just a five-minute walk from the train station. Prices include a good breakfast.

Thon Hotel Brygge (☎ 33 34 49 00; www.thonhotels.no; Nedre Langgatte 40; s/d from Nkr770/970; (Q)) This modern waterfront hotel has pleasant (if



smallish) rooms and great breakfasts, and is popular with families.

Quality Hotel Tønsberg (☎ 33 00 41 00; www.choice.no; s/d from Nkr750/950; ♿ ♿) Another excellent option, this branch of the Quality Hotel chain has stylish (in a Nordic minimalist kind of way) rooms by the waterfront.

Eating

Tønsberg has dozens of decent restaurants, with the best atmosphere along the water.

Himmel & Hav (☎ 33 00 49 80; Nedre Langgate 32; tapas buffet Nkr215, mains Nkr135-264; ☎ 11am-3am) This place is recommended for its excellent fish and seafood dishes. Great live music can also be heard at night on summer weekends.

Brygga (☎ 33 31 12 70; Nedre Langgate 35; mains Nkr179-245; ☎ 11am-3am) A step upmarket from the neighbouring Himmel & Hav, this is Norwegian and international cuisine at its most pleasant, particularly on the outdoor terrace.

Esmeralda (☎ 33 31 91 91; Nedre Langgate 26C; salads Nkr75-100, mains Nkr175-229; ☎ 10.30am-3am) This long-standing local favourite is brisk, bright and breezy with economical light meals on the terrace.

Getting There & Away

The **Tønsberg Rutebilstasjon** (☎ 33 30 01 00; Jernbanegaten) is a block south of the train station. Nor-Way Bussekspress buses run to/from Kristiansand (Nkr330, 4½ hours, one



to two daily) via most coastal towns en route, including Larvik (Nkr81, one hour, two daily), and also run to Oslo (Nkr149, 1¾ hours).

Intercity trains run hourly between Tønsberg and Oslo (Nkr184, 1½ hours) or south to Larvik (Nkr84, 34 minutes).

SANDEFJORD

pop 41,897

This former whaling capital is worth a detour to one of only a couple of museums dedicated to whaling in the world.

The Sandefjord **tourist office** (☎ 33 46 05 90; www.visitsandefjord.com; Thor Dahls gate 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat, 12.30-4.30pm Sun mid-Jun-early Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) is just back from the waterfront.

The impressive **Whaling Museum** (Hvalfangst-museet; ☎ 33 48 46 50; www.hvalfangstmuseet.no; Museumsgaten 39; adult/child Nkr50/25; ☎ 10am-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year) charts the history of Norwegian whaling, with photos, equipment and information on marine life. The museum's exhibits are complemented by the 1950s whaleboat **Southern Actor** (☎ 9.30am-5pm late Jun-mid-Aug), which is moored at the harbour; entry is by the same ticket. There's also the striking sculpture **monument to whalers** by the water.

Most buses running between Oslo and Kristiansand stop in Sandefjord.

LARVIK

pop 41,364

Larvik is one of the largest towns along Norway's south coast. Although it has some good museums, its main attractions are Norway's most accessible excavations from the Viking era. The town's main historical claim to fame is as the home town of Thor Heyerdahl (see the boxed text, p132), one of Norway's premier explorers.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 33 13 91 11; www.visitlarvik.no; Storgata 48; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun mid-Jun-early Aug, 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) is opposite the ferry dock and also offers internet access (Nkr20 per 10 minutes)

Bibliotek (☎ 33 17 10 50; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon, 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) offers free, time-limited internet access.

Sights & Activities

LARVIK MUSEUM

This four-part **museum** (☎ 33 17 12 90; adult/child combined ticket Nkr40/10) is spread across the town.

The classic baroque timber **Herregården manor house** (Herregårdsletta 6; ☎ noon-4pm Wed, Sat & Sun, guided tours 12.30pm, 1.30pm & 2.30pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, Sun only Jun-mid-Sep) was constructed in 1677 as the home of the Norwegian Governor General, Ulrik Frederik Gyldenløve, the Duke of Larvik; as the illegitimate son of King Fredrik IV of Denmark, Gyldenløve was given a dukedom and packed off to Norwegian obscurity. It's furnished in 17th- and 18th-century style.

Larvik Maritime Museum (Kirkestredet 5; ☎ noon-4pm Tue-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug & Sun Jun-mid-Sep), in a 1730 brick structure immediately east of the harbour, is home to maritime art and a number of impressive model ships. There's

THOR HEYERDAHL

Larvik's favourite son was the intrepid and controversial Thor Heyerdahl (1914–2002), the quirky scientist, anthropologist and explorer who spent a lifetime trying to prove that the world's oceans were vast highways that were essential to understanding ancient civilisations, a novel idea in the hallowed halls of scientific research.

In 1947 he sailed 6000km in a balsawood raft, the *Kon-Tiki*, from Peru to Polynesia to prove that the South Pacific may have been settled by migrants from South America rather than Asia. His theories were supported by discoveries of similar fauna and cultural artefacts in Polynesia and South America and by the fact that Pacific Ocean currents run east–west. The film of his journey won an Oscar in 1951 for best documentary and his medal-winning bravery in resisting the Nazis only added to his legend. His book describing the expedition sold an astonishing 60 million copies worldwide. The actual *Kon-Tiki* ship is on display at the Kon-Tiki Museum in Oslo (p103).

After being one of the first Europeans to excavate on the Galapagos and Easter Islands, Heyerdahl again grabbed international attention in 1970 when he crossed the Atlantic in a papyrus raft. His purpose was to prove that Columbus may not have been the first successful transatlantic navigator and that the ancient Egyptians may have made the crossing millennia before. His first raft, *Ra*, sank soon after setting out, but the dogged Heyerdahl successfully completed the crossing in *Ra II*.

In 1978, at the age of 64, the indefatigable Heyerdahl sailed the *Tigris* from the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, down the Persian Gulf and across the Indian Ocean to Djibouti to prove how the ancient Sumerians travelled widely. When he was prevented from entering the Red Sea due to local conflicts, Heyerdahl set fire to his ship in a spectacular anti-war protest. Heyerdahl was also a fervent internationalist; his crew was always multinational and his boats flew the UN flag.

On Heyerdahl's 75th birthday in 1989, a statue in his honour was unveiled at Tollerodden, east of Larvik's harbour. It's sculpted in Larvik's own blue larvikite. Heyerdahl died of cancer in northern Italy on 18 April 2002.

also a small exhibition on the nearby Viking town of Kaupang (see below).

Verkensgarorden (Nedre Fritzoegate 2; ☎ noon–4pm Tue–Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug, noon–4pm Sun rest-of-year) has tools and implements from a local 17th-century sawmill and ironworks. There's also a permanent geological exhibition documenting the evolution of blue larvikite, a beautiful, locally quarried 500-million-year-old type of granite.

Kaupang (admission free; ☎ noon–5pm Tue–Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug), 5km east of Larvik, was a former Viking town built around AD 800 and occupied until 960. It is believed that up to 1000 people lived here in its heyday. For us, this is the most interesting of Larvik's sights. Although most of the original artefacts are now in Oslo, the custodians of the site make the most of what they have with a small exhibition, four Viking tents and knowledgeable guides in Viking dress on hand to show you to nearby Viking graves and to explain Kaupang's past. On Wednesday (family day) and weekends, they cook Viking soup and bread. The guides can also tell you where to find other Viking cemeteries in the Larvik area.

CYCLING

Bike trails have been meticulously laid out from one end of Vestfold to the other. The tourist office hires bicycles for Nkr150/600 per day/week and sells the indispensable three-part map *Sykkelkart Vestfold* for Nkr100.

Sleeping & Eating

our pick **Lysko Gjestegaard** (☎ 33 18 77 79; www.lysko-it.no; Kirkestredet 10; s/d from Nkr550/750; ☎) This quiet guesthouse occupies possibly Larvik's most charming location, with a lovely old timbered house opposite the Maritime Museum at the eastern end of the harbour. Prices don't include breakfast.

Greven Hotell (☎ 33 18 25 26; www.hotel-greven.no; Storgata 26; s/d from Nkr640/810) With considerable charm, this renovated 1903 hotel represents a good choice right on the waterfront.

Quality Hotel Grand Farris (☎ 33 18 78 00; www.choice.no; Storgata 38; s/d from Nkr750/1040; ☎) Also overlooking the water, this is Larvik's finest; its supremely comfortable rooms may help you forgive the fact that it's an architectural eyesore.

Both the Greven Hotell and Quality Hotel have good restaurants; the former mainly does Italian dishes. Otherwise, try **Ferdinands Lillekjøkken** (☎ 33 13 05 44; Storgata 32; mains from Nkr139; ☎ dinner) for steak and seafood, or **Bøkekroa Restaurant** (☎ 33 18 10 53; Bøkeskogen; ☎ lunch & dinner May–Aug) which has live jazz on Friday nights.

Getting There & Away

Nor-Way Bussekspressen buses pass through Larvik en route between Seljord (Nkr199, 2¼ hours, up to three times daily) and Tønsberg (Nkr81, one hour). For other destinations along the coast, you may need to change at Tønsberg or Arendal. Local trains run hourly between Oslo S (Central Station) and Larvik (Nkr253, two hours). The train and bus stations are side by side on Storgata.

Color Line operates ferries to Fredrikshavn in Denmark (see p408).

AROUND LARVIK

The low-lying Brunlanes Peninsula southwest of Larvik has a few moderately interesting towns, though they are packed in summer with Norwegian holiday-makers, who flood the coastal camp sites.

Stavern

pop 5643

The pleasant little town of Stavern, just south of Larvik, has pedestrian streets lined with cafés and small private galleries, making for a pleasant stroll. Highlights include the mid-18th-century fort, **Fredriksvern Verft**, surrounded by block houses that once formed part of the fortress defences. Also worth visiting is the colourful 1756 church (☎ 33 19 99 75; Kommandør Herbsgata 1; admission free; ☎ 11am–1pm Tue–Fri), Norway's first naval house of worship.

Stavern is the start of the popular and attractive 33km-long Kyststien coastal walk to Ødegården on the western coast of Brunlanes. The Stavern tourist office (☎ 33 19 73 00; Havnegata 3; ☎ 10am–4pm Wed–Sat, 1–4pm Sun mid-Jun–early Aug) provides the route map *Kyststien i Larvik* for Nkr85.

For accommodation, try the very pleasant **Hotell Wassilioff** (☎ 33 11 36 00; www.wassilioff.no; Havnegata 1; s Nkr900–1150, d Nkr1100–1300), which offers considerable comfort just across the park from the water; at the latter, you pay an additional (and extremely steep) Nkr200 for sea views.

To get to and from Larvik (Nkr26, 15 minutes, hourly), use bus 1.

Mølen

The Mølen Promontory is something of a geological oddity. It forms the end of the ice age **Ra moraine** (rock and silt pushed ahead of the glacier and deposited as a new landform) which extends from the lake Farrisvatn (which the moraine dammed) to the southwestern end of Brunlanes. The 230 stone cairns and heaps of boulders, which are laid out in parallel rows, are Iron Age burial mounds.

DAMVANN

Some 20km north of Larvik is the beautiful, haunting lake of Damvann surrounded by forests. Popular legend claims it to be the home a witch called Huldra, a woman of such exquisite beauty that it is said that any man who looked upon her was doomed. On Sunday in July, a modern-day version of **Huldra** (Ellen Dalen; ☎ 33 11 25 17) serves meals here from noon to 4pm. Access is difficult without a car; the nearest bus stop is at Kvelde (6km from the lake) on Numendalslågen Rd.

KRAGERØ

pop 10,481

One of the favourite summer retreats for Norwegians, Kragerø has narrow streets and whitewashed houses climbing up from the water's edge. Kragerø has also long served as a retreat for Norwegian artists, and Edvard Munch (see the boxed text, p51) spent a few restorative fishing holidays here and called Kragerø 'the pearl of the coastal spots'. A statue of Munch stands on the spot where he painted a winter sun over the sea.

Information

The modest **tourist office** (☎ 35 98 23 88; www.visitkragero.no; Tovgaten 1; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–6pm Sat, 10am–5pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year) is at the bus station. The **public library** (Bibliotek; off Tovgaten; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon & Thu, 10am–2pm Tue, Wed & Fri mid-Jun–mid-Aug, longer hrs rest-of-year) offers free, time-limited internet access; it's between the tourist office and the pretty main square.

Sights & Activities

There's not much to see here; the offshore island of Jomfruland (p134) is Kragerø's most popular attraction. For a great view

over the town and its skerries, climb from Kragerø Stadium to the lookout point on **Steinmann Hill**.

The **Berg-Kragerø Museum** (☎ 35 98 14 53; Lovisenbergveien 45; adult/child Nkr50/free; ☞ noon-6pm Jun-mid-Aug) on the shore of Hellefjord, 3km from the centre, is a 120-hectare estate with a country residence dating from 1803. There are gardens, walking tracks and a gallery for visiting art and history exhibits.

You can also take a **rail-bicycle ride** along the 13km railway between Sannidal and Merkebekk. Rail-bikes (*dressin*, or bicycles on bogies) cost Nkr75/225 per hour/day. Book through Støa Camping (below) or ask at the tourist office.

Sleeping & Eating

Kragerø Vandrerhjem (☎ 35 98 57 00; kragero.hotel@vandrerhjem.no; Lovisenbergveien 20; dm/s/d Nkr325/550/650; ☞ mid-Jun-mid-Aug) Prices at this fine HI hostel, about 2km north of town, include breakfast, and it serves dinner for Nkr100.

Støa Camping (☎ 35 99 02 61; spar.kivle@ngbutikkk.net; Sannidal; tent sites from Nkr130, cabins from Nkr275) Støa Camping is uninspiring but more than adequate, and conveniently connected to the town by bus 607 (Nkr26, 12 minutes).

Victoria Hotel (☎ 35 98 75 25; victoria@aco.no; PA Heuchtskata 31; s/d mid-Jun-mid-Aug Nkr1165/1365, rest-of-year Nkr965/1165; P) An example of the overpriced summer hotels along the southern coast, the Victoria nonetheless has the best rooms in town. Some rooms have balconies overlooking the wharf and the whole place was tastefully renovated in 2007. But unless you're earning a Norwegian salary, you may feel a little bit cheated for what you're paying.

El Paso Western Saloon (☎ 35 98 15 32; PA Heuchtskata 31; pizzas from Nkr189, mains Nkr129-239) An incongruous fusion of the Norwegian seaside with the badlands of west Texas, this place serves steaks, burgers, pizzas and OK Mexican fare.

Getting There & Away

Trains from Oslo or Kristiansand stop at Neslandsvatn, where most are met by a bus to Kragerø. Buses run up to five times daily to Oslo (Nkr250, 3½ hours) and Kristiansand (Nkr200, 2½ hours), although you may have to change in Tangen on the E18.

AROUND KRAGERØ Jomfruland

Norwegian tourists love the island of Jomfruland, just off the coast from Kragerø. Measuring around 10km long and up to 600m wide, the island is covered by forest and encircled by mostly sandy beaches. The landmark old (1869) and new (1937) **lighthouses** (☎ 35 99 11 79; adult/child Nkr20/10; ☞ noon-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug) can be visited.

The appealing **Jomfruland Camping** (☎ 35 99 12 75; www.jomfrulandcamping.no in Norwegian; Åsvik brygge; tent sites from Nkr120, caravan sites with electricity Nkr190, 4-bed cabins from Nkr450) is near the Åsvik brygge ferry terminal.

Kragerø Fjordbåtselskap (☎ 35 98 58 58) ferries between Kragerø and Jomfruland (Nkr54, 50 minutes) run up to four times daily in summer.

RISØR pop 6873

Risør, the 'White Town on the Skagerrak', is one of southern Norway's prettiest. Centred on a U-shaped harbour with colourful fishing boats and private yachts, and surrounded by historic white houses (dating from 1650 to 1890), this is a great place to wander and soak up the rustic charm for a few days. If you get bored by long, lazy days by the water, you probably shouldn't be here.

The town **library** (Kragsgate 48A; ☞ 11am-3pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug; longer hrs rest-of-year) offers free internet access. The **tourist office** (☎ 37 15 22 70; www.risor.no; Kragsgata 3; ☞ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug) is 50m west of the harbour.

Sights & Activities

RISØR SALTWATER AQUARIUM

The interesting **Risør Saltwater Aquarium** (Saltvannskvariet; ☎ 37 15 32 82; Dampskipsbrygge; adult/child Nkr50/30 mid-Jun-mid-Aug, Nkr30/20 rest-of-year; ☞ 11am-6pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year), on the quay in front of the Risør Hotel, is a small showcase of saltwater fish, crustaceans and shellfish common to Norway's south coast. Highlights include baby lobsters and the colourful cuckoo wrasse.

RISØR MUSEUM & RISØR KUNSTPARK GALLERY

For the lowdown on local geology, fishing and the 275-year history of Risør, check out the **Risør Museum** (☎ 37 15 30 85; Prestegata 9; adult/family

Nkr30/50; ☞ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug). Ask for a loan of the explanatory booklet in English. Adjacent to the museum is the **Risør Kunstpark Gallery** (☞ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug), which displays works by artists inspired by Risør's charm.

RISØR ART CENTRE

This innovative **art centre** (Risør Kunstforum; ☎ 37 15 63 83; www.kunstforum.no in Norwegian; Tjennegata 76; ☞ mid-Jun-mid-Aug) runs a range of courses ranging from making handmade paper to watercolour painting. Courses start from Nkr1500 for three days, up to Nkr3500 for seven days; accommodation/course packages are also available.

BOAT HIRE

To explore the offshore islands under your own steam (or horsepower), **Risør Båtfremidling** (☎ 37 15 25 50) rents out small motorboats, while **Sørlandet Feriesenter** (☎ 37 15 40 80) also rents larger motorboats and canoes.

Festivals

To get summer rolling, the town hosts the **Risør Chamber Music Festival** in the last week of June, with a growing cast of local and international performers in attendance. On the first weekend in August Risør hosts the **Risør Wooden Boat Festival** (Trebåttfestival), which encompasses boat races, concerts and kids' activities; getting accommodation at this time can be difficult.

Sleeping

Moen Camping (☎ 37 15 50 91; fax 37 15 17 63; Moen; tent sites Nkr100, cabins Nkr300-550) This well-run and well-equipped place is Risør's closest camp site, 11km west of town off the E18. Regular buses (Risør to/from Arendal, Kristiansand and Oslo) run past the entrance.

Risør Kunstforum (☎ 37 15 63 83; www.kunstforum.no in Norwegian; Tjennegata 76; s/d/tr Nkr450/600/700) This appealing place, 1km west of the harbour, offers simple but adequate rooms with do-it-yourself breakfast, but the real attractions include art and sculpture classes (above).

Risør Hotel (☎ 37 14 80 00; www.risorhotel.no; Tangengata 16; s/d from Nkr895/1195 mid-Jun-mid-Aug, Nkr600/900 rest-of-year) Although probably the pick of a very limited choice, the Risør Hotel lacks the attention to detail you'd expect for this price. The waterfront location is, however, a winner.

Det Lille Hotell (☎ 37 15 14 95; www.detlillehotell.no; s/d per night from Nkr1240/1565, per week from Nkr8840/9800) This interesting choice offers self-catering suites and apartments dotted around town. Most are in delightfully restored homes with period furnishings and ideal if you plan to spend a week here; daily rates are cheaper outside the peak summer season and always cost less the longer you stay. Highly recommended for a splurge.

Eating

Around, or just back from the harbour, you'll find several moderately priced cafés and restaurants.

Brasserie Krag (☎ 37 15 04 50; Kragsgata 12; mains Nkr79-215; ☞ lunch & dinner) This recommended restaurant has a fairly diverse selection on the menu and a laid-back ambience.

Brygge Pizza (☎ 37 15 00 99; Strandgata 2; pizzas from Nkr129; ☞ lunch & dinner) One of the few places with tables out on the water and reasonable prices makes this a good option for those counting their kroner.

Risør Hotel (☎ 37 14 80 00; Tangengata 16; mains Nkr75-189; ☞ lunch & dinner) This restaurant has a lovely elevated terrace overlooking the water and good snacks and meals, as well as a more expensive à la carte menu.

Getting There & Away

Local buses link Risør with the rail line at Gjerstad (Nkr60, 45 minutes) several times daily. Nor-Way Bussekspress buses between Kristiansand (Nkr150, three hours) and Oslo (Nkr315, 3¾ hours) connect at Vinterkjær with local buses to/from Risør (Nkr29, 20 minutes).

AROUND RISØR

The Skerries just offshore are a popular excursion from Risør. The southernmost island of **Stangholmen**, with a pretty lighthouse dating from 1855, is the most popular; this may be due in part to the fact that it's the only one of the islands with a restaurant, **Stangholmen Fyr Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 37 15 24 50; mains from Nkr215), which is in the lighthouse.

Any of the islands can be reached by ferries and water taxis. In summer, **ferries** (☎ 37 15 24 50) leave Tollbubrygga for Stangholmen (Nkr40 return, twice hourly) from 10am to at least midnight.

LYNGØR

pop 120

Tiny Lyngør, consisting of several offshore islets near the village of Gjeving, isn't shy about the fact that it won the 1991 European competition for the tidiest town on the continent. Even if it weren't for that distinction, this picturesque little settlement would be worth a visit. Part of its charm lies in the fact that visitors can't bring their vehicles across on the ferry.

If you want to enjoy Lyngør after the day-trippers have returned to the mainland, **Knatten Pensjonat** (☎ 37 16 10 19; Odden; s/d from Nkr575/775) is a simple *pension*. It's a touch overpriced, but you're not exactly spoiled for choice. It's 300m from Holmen Quay.

Seilmakerfruens Kro (☎ 37 16 60 00; Ytre Lyngør; pizzas around Nkr150; ☎ lunch & dinner) offers the most reasonably priced eating choice on the island, with decent pizzas and a few à la carte specialties.

The **Lyngør Båtselskap ferry** (☎ 41 45 41 45; adult/child Nkr28/17) between Gjeving, Holmen and Lyngør leaves up to seven times daily on weekdays, four times on Saturday and at least once on Sunday. For further information on ferries to Arendal, see opposite.

ARENDALE

pop 40,057

Arendal's main appeal lies in its undeniable buzz throughout summer around the harbour (known as Pollen), with outdoor restaurants and bars next to the water and a fairly full calendar of festivals. Large enough to have an array of amenities but not too big to overwhelm, it's a nice place to spend a few days. The old district of Tyholmen, which features many timbered houses, adds considerable charm, while those seeking greater communion with the sea than a harbour-side café can offer will find the offshore islands of Merdø, Tromøy and Hisøy to be worthwhile excursions.

Information

Library (☎ 37 01 39 13; Torvet 6; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Free, time-limited internet access.

Planet X-Pec (Ostregata 9; internet per hr Nkr35;

☎ noon-2am Mon-Thu, noon-midnight Fri-Sun) Internet access opposite the Ting Hai Hotel.

Tourist office (☎ 37 00 55 44; www.arendal.com; Sam Eydes plass; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri & 11am-2pm Sat Aug-Jun, 9am-7pm Mon-Fri & 11am-6pm Sat & Sun Jul)

Sights**TYHOLMEN**

Rising up behind the Guest Harbour (Gjestehavn) is the old harbour-side Tyholmen district, home to beautiful 17th- to 19th-century timber buildings featuring neoclassical, rococo and baroque influences. In 1992 it was deservedly awarded the prestigious Europa Nostra prize for its expert restoration. Tyholmen was once separated from the mainland by a canal, which was filled in after the great sailing era.

One Tyholmen highlight, by the water's edge, is the striking **town hall** (Rådhus; ☎ 37 00 55 44; Rådhusgata 10; ☎ by appointment), Norway's tallest wooden building. Originally a ship-owner's home dating from 1815, it became the town hall in 1844. The interior is accessible for groups, but the façade is elegant for those who can't get inside.

MUSEUMS

The **Aust-Agder Museum** (☎ 37 07 35 00; www.aaks.no in Norwegian; Parkveien 16; adult/child Nkr30/15; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year) was first conceived in 1832, when the town authorities asked their globetrotting sailors to be on the lookout for items that may be of interest back home. The results are housed in the county museum, along with relics of Arendal's shipbuilding, timber and import-export trades. The most interesting exhibits are those covering the ill-fated final journey of the slave ship *Fredensborg*, which went down off Tromøy in 1768; sadly those African slaves who survived were rewarded by being sold in the Caribbean.

Also well worth a visit is **Arendal Town Museum** (☎ 37 02 59 25; Nedre Tyholmsvei 14; adult/child Nkr30/10; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Aug-May), largely because it is a rare opportunity to see inside one of Arendal's charming old burghers' houses (Klöckers Hus).

Festivals & Events

There's always something going on in Arendal, with open-air concerts by the water quite common on weekends. Other summer highlights include:

Sørlandet Boat Show (www.baatmesse.com in Norwegian; late May)

Hove Festival (www.hovefestivalen.no; late Jun) Rock festival drawing international acts to the island of Tromøy.

Summer Market (www.arendal-sentrum.no, in Norwegian; mid-Jul)

Canal Street Jazz & Blues Festival (www.canalstreet.no; late Jul) World-class jazz.

Sleeping

Arendal has a good sprinkling of midrange hotels, but those on a tight budget will need to head out of town.

Nidelv Brygge og Camping (☎ 37 01 14 25; home.no.net/svs012 in Norwegian; Vesterveien 251, Hisøy; tent sites Nkr110 plus per adult/child Nkr20/10, caravan sites Nkr120, cabins Nkr300-750) On the Nidelv River at Hisøy, 6km west of Arendal, this reasonable camp site can be reached on any bus (Nkr28, every half-hour) bound for Kristiansand or Grimstad. If you're driving, take the Rv420. Some cabins have river views and there's a restaurant and grocery store on site.

Ting Hai Hotel (☎ 37 02 22 01; ting@online.no; Østregate 5; s/d Nkr695/995) Simple, spacious and reasonably priced rooms with little character are what you'll find at this place a few blocks up from the harbour. The corner rooms are the best. There's a Chinese restaurant downstairs and you get the impression that's its primary focus.

Thon Hotel Arendal (☎ 37 05 21 50; www.thonhotels.no; Friergangen 1; s Nkr775-1375, d Nkr995-1575; ☎) It might not have the waterfront views, but this outpost of Thon Hotels is just 50m from the water's edge. Typical of the Thon chain, the rooms are modern, large and comfortable.

Clarion Tyholmen Hotel (☎ 37 07 68 00; www.choice.no; Teaterplassen 2; s/d from Nkr990/1190) Undoubtedly Arendal's best hotel, the Clarion combines a prime waterfront position with attractive, semiluxurious rooms in a restored old building that seeks to emulate Tyholmen's old-world ambience.

Eating & Drinking

There's no need to stray too far from the harbour and indeed you may find yourself spending much of your day and evening by the water.

our pick **Café Det Lindvedske Hus** (☎ 37 02 18 38; Nedre Tyholmsvei 7b; snacks & light meals Nkr40-105; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Thu, 11am-1am Fri & Sat, noon-11pm Sun) With its mellow atmosphere and 200-year-old décor, this lovely place does light meals (grilled sandwiches and pasta), great coffee and has the ambience of a sophisticated but casual art café. The kitchen closes at 9pm, whereafter music of the Stan Getz kind takes over. A terrific place.

Café Victor (☎ 37 02 18 38; Nedre Tyholmsvei 7b; light meals Nkr49-99; ☎ 10am-midnight Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-May) In a prime waterfront position, Café Victor is another cool choice. Apart from the antique ceiling, the décor is sleek and modern, the service friendly and the food (sandwiches and pasta) and coffee excellent.

Castelle Bar & Restaurant (☎ 37 00 14 14; Langbrygge 5; mains Nkr89-129; ☎ noon-11pm Sun-Thu, noon-3.30am Fri & Sat) Perhaps the classiest bar/restaurant by the Pollen harbour, Castelle is a chic place and a cut above the beer-and-yobbo culture that sometimes afflicts other water-side bars in Arendal. Meals are light (sandwiches, good burgers and pasta) and most drinks are possible, from 0.5L beer (Nkr64) to cocktails (Nkr99).

Madam Reiersen (☎ 37 02 19 00; Nedre Tyholmsvei 3; starters Nkr79-125, lunch mains Nkr115-125, dinner mains Nkr219-235) One of the better restaurants ringing the Pollen harbour, Madam Reiersen is good value for lunch, especially its seafood platter (Nkr145). Then again, we did enjoy the crisp-fried Norwegian Arctic char (Nkr225) for dinner.

No.9 Kaffe & Platebar (☎ 37 02 77 92; Langbrygge 9; coffee Nkr19-34; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun, until 7pm Jul) Another classy little café, No.9 is the work of Espen Larsen, a local jazz musician who sells a range of (mostly jazz) CDs and plays them while you sip your coffee or snack on a pastry – the perfect accompaniment to a lazy Arendal afternoon.

For an outdoor drink in summer, **Fiskebrygge** (☎ 37 02 31 13; Nedre Tyholmsvei 1; ☎ 9am-2am Wed-Sun Apr-Sep) has a fine location on the waterfront and serves a range of beer (from Nkr50) and cocktails (from Nkr89).

Getting There & Away

M/S Merdø (☎ 90 97 43 61; www.skilsferga.no, in Norwegian) sails from Arendal (Pollen) to Lyngør (Nkr250 return) and Hisøy (Nkr120 return) regularly in July, with fewer departures for the rest of summer. It also sails to Merdø (adult/child Nkr25/15) several times daily in July.

Nor-Way Bussekspress buses between Kristiansand (Nkr115, 1½ hours, up to nine daily) and Oslo (from Nkr225, four hours) call in at the Arendal Rutebilstasjon, a block west of Pollen harbour. Local Timekspressen buses connect Arendal with Grimstad (Nkr42, 30 minutes, hourly) and Risør (Nkr83, 1¼ hours).

Getting Around

Sykkelsport (☎ 37 02 39 60; cnr Nygaten & Vestre gates) rents bicycles for Nkr100 to Nkr150 per day – a great way to explore the islands and reach the bathing beaches on Hisøy and Tromøy.

AROUND ARENDAL

The 260-hectare island of **Merdø**, just off Arendal, has been inhabited since the 16th century. One peculiarity is that the island bears the remnants of vegetable species introduced in the ballast of early sailing vessels. The **Merdøgård Museum** (☎ 37 07 35 00; adult/child Nkr25/10; ☎ noon-4.30pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug), housed in a historic 1736 sea captain's residence, is decked out in period furnishings.

The favoured bathing sites are on Tromøy, Spornes, Hisøy and Hove. The nearest access to Spornes is on the bus marked 'Tromøy Vest/Øst', but you'll still have a 15-minute walk. Alternatively, take a bike on the **M/S Skilsøy ferry** (☎ 37 00 55 44), which sails frequently between Arendal and the western end of Tromøy (Nkr17, 10 minutes).

On the islets of **Store** and **Lille Torungene** rise two grand lighthouses that have guided ships into Arendal since 1844. They're visible from the coasts of both Hisøy and Tromøy.

GRIMSTAD

pop 19,536

Unusually for a town along the coast, Grimstad is at its most beautiful in the pedestrianised streets that lie inland from the waterfront; these streets are some of the loveliest on the Skagerrak coast. Grimstad has a number of interesting calling cards: it was the home of playwright Henrik Ibsen and has a good museum; it is the sunniest spot in Norway, with an average of 266 hours of sunshine per month in June and July; and Grimstad also has an unmistakably young vibe, thanks to its large student population.

History

Grimstad's low-key atmosphere, peacefulness and charm belie its past importance: between 1865 and 1885 it was one of the greatest shipbuilding centres in the world. The oak forests that grew on the surrounding hillsides were chopped down and sawn into timbers to supply the booming industry; at one point the town had 40 shipyards and 90 ships were under construction simultaneously.

During the same period, a land shortage caused local farmers to turn to fishing and many an inland farm homestead doubled as a shipbuilding workshop. By 1875 Grimstad had a home fleet of 193 boats.

Information

Guest harbour (Gjestehavn; ☎ 37 04 05 93; www.grimstadjestehavn.no) Public toilets, showers and a laundry (all open to land-lubbers).

Library (☎ 37 29 67 90; Storgata 44; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat) Free, time-limited internet.

Tourist office (☎ 37 25 01 68; www.grimstad.net; Sorenskrivergården, Storgata 1A; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat Jun & Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Jul, 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May)

Sights

IBSENHUSET MUSEUM

Norway's favourite playwright, Henrik Ibsen (see p50), arrived here in January 1844. The house where he worked as a pharmacist's apprentice, and where he lived and first cultivated his interest in writing, has been converted into the **Ibsenhuset Museum** (Grimstad By Museum; ☎ 37 04 04 90; www.gbm.no in Norwegian; Henrik Ibsens gate 14; combined ticket with Arendal Maritime Museum adult/child/student/senior Nkr50/20/35/35; ☎ 11am-5pm mid-May–Aug). It contains a re-created pharmacy and many of the writer's belongings and is one of southern Norway's more interesting museums, with everything you needed to know from Ibsen's life and work. There's also a library with the writer's complete works. His 1861 poem *Terje Vigen* and his 1877 drama *Pillars of Society* take place in the Skerries offshore from Grimstad.

The eager young custodians of the museum, who can be found in the museum shop and ticket office across the street, can arrange **tours** (☎ 37 04 04 90; without/with museum entry Nkr50/75) of the town's other Ibsen landmarks, as well as sights associated with well-known Norwegian author Knut Hamsun (p48), who lived at nearby Norholm from 1918 to 1952.

GRIMSTAD MARITIME MUSEUM

This important **museum** (Sjøfartsmuseet; ☎ 37 04 04 90; Hasseldalen; adult/child/student/senior combined ticket with Ibsenhuset Museum, Nkr50/20/35/35; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun May–mid-Sep), in the office of the 1842 Hasseldalen shipyard, provides a glimpse into Grimstad's history during 'the days of the white sails'. While you're there

it's worth climbing the short track from the end of Batteriveien up the Binabben hill for a view over Grimstad. Make sure you visit the Ibsenhuset Museum first or the combined ticket won't work.

QUARRY THEATRE

One of the more unusual cultural experiences in Grimstad is run by Kristiansand-based **Agder Theater** (☎ 38 07 70 50; www.agderteater.no in Norwegian; tickets Nkr300), which performs in an old quarry up to six days a week in summer. After a hiatus in 2007 the troupe was due to return to performing in 2008; the tourist office has a programme of upcoming performances. The quarry, 4km north of town, became infamous during WWII when red granite blocks for Hitler's 'Victory Monument' were taken from here; the monument was, of course, never built.

Sleeping

For camping, there are at least six nearby camp sites that are listed on the tourist office's **website** (www.grimstad.net), while **Grimstad Hytteutleie** (☎ 37 25 10 65; www.grimstad-hytteutleie.no; Grooseveien 103) can book holiday cabins in the area for one night (from Nkr375) or for longer stays.

Bie Appartement- & Feriesenter (☎ 37 04 03 96; www.bieapart.no; off Arendalsveien; tent sites Nkr200, cabins Nkr500-1200; ☎) The nearest camping option is friendly, well equipped and 800m northeast of the centre along Arendalsveien.

Grimstad Vertshus & Kro (☎ 37 04 25 00; www.grimstad-vertshus.no in Norwegian; Grimstadtunet; s/d from Nkr595/750) This friendly, cosy place is a fair hike into town. Given the shortage of other midrange places nearby, it's reasonable value although the rooms are quite simple.

Norlandia Sørlandet Hotel (☎ 37 09 05 00; www.norlandia.no/sorlandet; Televeien 21; s/d from Nkr790/990; ☎) This modern hotel, around 3km west of the harbour, has fine rooms in a quiet woodland setting. Some of the upper rooms have views of the ocean.

our pick Grimstad Hotell (☎ 37 25 25 25; www.grimstadhotell.no; Kirkegata 3; s/d mid-Jun–mid-Aug Nkr775/1250, rest-of-year Mon-Thu Nkr1295/1545, Fri-Sun Nkr850/1100; ☎) The stylish and very comfortable Grimstad Hotell is the only in-town hotel and comes with loads of charm that spans a number of converted and conjoined timber houses. It's the sort of quiet place where you wonder if anyone else is staying

here, only to discover there's no table free at breakfast.

Eating & Drinking

our pick Apotekergården (☎ 37 04 50 25; Skolegata 3; mains from Nkr215; ☎ noon-midnight) The highly recommended Apotekergården is an excellent gourmet restaurant with a breezy outdoor terrace and a cast of regulars who wouldn't eat anywhere else. It can be difficult to get a table here in summer.

Have Brasserie (☎ 37 04 90 22; Storgata 4; pastas, pizzas & starters Nkr82-198, meat & fish mains Nkr168-295; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat, 1pm-midnight Sun) One of the few restaurants in town that allows you to sit at a table by the water, this appealing place serves Italian-inspired dishes as well as seafood like tiger prawns, monkfish and grilled salmon.

Platebaren (☎ 37 04 21 88; Storgata 15; baguettes Nkr27-35, salads Nkr49; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat Jun-Aug; shorter hrs rest-of-year) This highly recommended coffee bar spills out into the street in summer and is a terrific place to tuck into decent-sized snacks (baguettes, bacon and eggs etc). Even better are the milk shakes (Nkr30), while coffee lovers swear by the iced coffee with ice cream (Nkr35).

Bryggerhuset (☎ 37 09 18 60; Storgata 32; lunch specials Nkr60; ☎ 10am-5pm Jun-Aug; shorter hrs rest-of-year) This engaging little café-cum-crafts shop serves terrific coffee, bakes its own bread and offers home-made food like crepes and waffles.

Viet Thai (☎ 37 04 15 80; Storgata 36; starters from Nkr35, mains Nkr75-120; ☎ 11am-11pm) If you're craving something a little more international, Viet Thai is cheap, extremely popular and servings are large. It also does cheaper lunch specials.

Café Ibsen (Henrik Ibsens gate 12; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) Come here for delicious pastries. It's opposite the Ibsenhuset Museum.

Café Galleri (☎ 37 32 06 30; Storgata 28; ☎ 5pm-3am Sun-Thu, 3pm-3am Fri & Sat) The centre of Grimstad's nightlife has DJs, jam sessions and a crowd that seems to spring from Grimstad's woodwork on the most unlikely of nights.

Getting There & Around

The Grimstad **Rutebilstasjon** (☎ 37 04 05 18) is on Storgata at the harbour. Nor-Way Bussekspress buses between Oslo (Nkr300, five hours) and Kristiansand (Nkr85, one hour) call at Grimstad three to five times

daily. Nettbuss buses to/from Arendal run once or twice hourly (Nkr45, 30 minutes).

You can hire bicycles from the tourist office for Nkr30/100 per hour/day; the daily rate drops to Nkr80 for more than one day. Child seats cost Nkr20 and those with boats moored in Gjestehavn pay just Nkr25 a day.

LILLESAND

pop 9109

Lillesand, between Kristiansand and Arendal, has a whitewashed village centre of old houses, and although nothing much happens here, that can be charming in itself. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 37 40 19 10; Rådhuset; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug) in the town hall in summer. For summer boat tours through the offshore islands, contact **Brekkesto** (☎ 37 27 14 33; www.brekkesto.com).

Sleeping & Eating

Tingsaker Camping (☎ 37 27 04 21, fax 37 27 01 47; tent & caravan sites with car Nkr150, cabins Nkr750-950) This crowded camp site, on the shore 1km east of the centre, is a typical seaside holiday resort with camping, caravans and a range of over-priced cabins. It's nothing special but it's the cheapest place in town.

Lillesand Hotel Norge (☎ 37 27 01 44; www.hotel.norge.no; Strandgata 3; s Nkr990-1090, d Nkr1390-1590, starters Nkr95-115, mains Nkr165-255; 🍷) This boutique hotel has been thoughtfully renovated to reflect the original 1837 splendour and overflows with period touches, particularly in the public areas. There are rooms dedicated to King Alfonso XIII of Spain and author Knut Hamsun, both of whom stayed here, and there's an antiquarian library and good restaurant.

Getting There & Away

The most pleasant way to reach Lillesand in summer is by boat from Kristiansand (see p145). There's also an hourly Nettbuss to Kristiansand (Nkr55), Grimstad (Nkr45) and Arendal (Nkr70).

KRISTIANSAND

pop 77,840

Kristiansand, Norway's fifth-largest city, calls itself 'Norway's No.1 Holiday Resort'. That can be a bit misleading: sun-starved Norwegians do flock here in the summer, but for everyone else it serves more as a gateway to the charming seaside villages of

Norway's southern coast and the inland region of Setesdalen (p159). The claim also reflects a newfound confidence that has seen the city clean up its environmental act (it was until a decade ago infamous for its pollution). Kristiansand does have an interesting small harbour, an attractive old town, some good museums and an outstanding children's park.

Orientation

Central Kristiansand's *kvadraturen*, the square grid pattern measuring six long blocks by nine shorter blocks, was conceived by King Christian IV who founded the city in 1641. As a result of this planning, this is one of the easiest Norwegian cities to find your way around. The rail, bus and ferry terminals form a cluster west of the city centre. Pedestrianised Markens gate serves as a focus for the central shopping and restaurant district, while the fish market is at the southern tip of the town centre.

Information

You can change money at the **post office** (nr Rådhus & Markens gates) or at all the major banks (there are several on Markens gate), one of which is **Nordea** (Markens gate 16).

Gjestehavn (Guest Harbour; ☎ 38 02 07 15; per wash/dry Nkr40/40) Has laundry facilities.

International Internet Café (nr Rådhuset & Vestre Strandgate; per hr Nkr30; ☎ noon-10pm Mon-Sat, 2-10pm Sun) Skype-enabled internet access.

Kristiansand Library (☎ 38 12 49 10; Rådhus gate 11; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-5pm Fri, shorter hrs mid-Jun-Aug) Free, time-limited internet access.

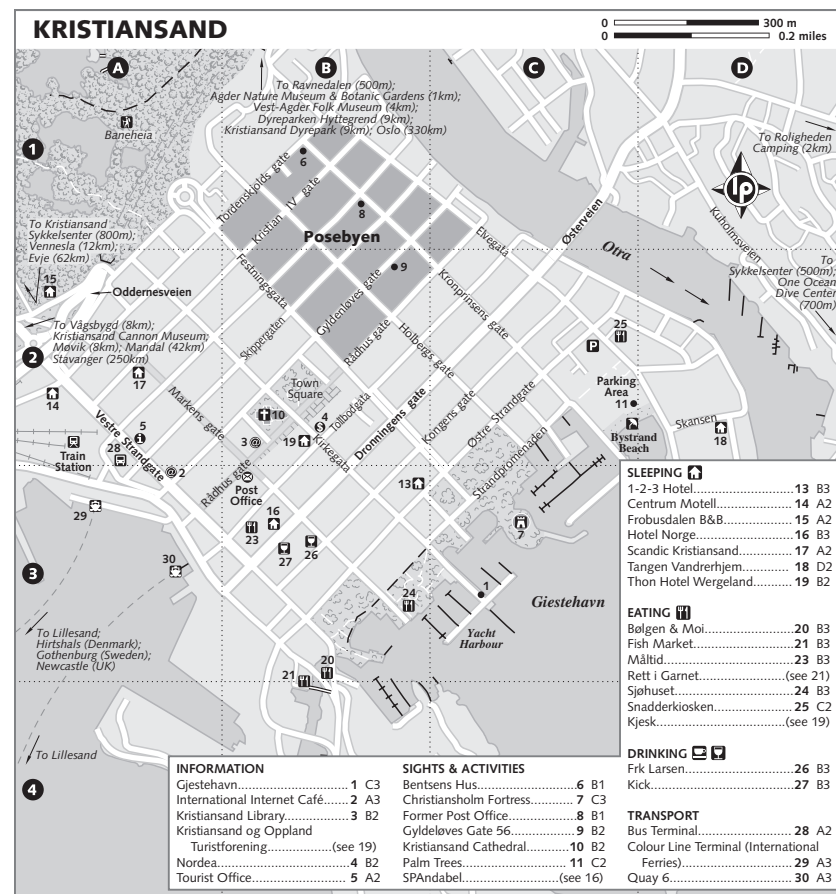
Kristiansand og Oppland Turistforening (☎ 38 02 52 63; www.kot.no in Norwegian; Kirkegata 15; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9am-5pm Thu) Maps and information on hiking, huts and organised mountain tours in southern Norway.

Tourist office (☎ 38 12 13 14; www.sorlandet.com; Vestre Strandgate 32; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug; 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year)

Sights

CHRISTIANSOLM FORTRESS

The most prominent feature that sits along the Strandpromenaden is the distinctive **Christiansholm Fortress** (Kristiansand Festning; ☎ 38 07 51 50; admission free; ☎ grounds 9am-9pm mid-May-mid-Sep). Built by royal decree between 1662 and 1672 to keep watch over the strategic Skagerrak Straits and protect the city from



pirates and rambunctious Swedes, the construction featured walls up to 5m thick and an armoury buried within a concentric inner wall, all of which came at a price: 1550 local citizens were taxed to fund the project and coerced into labour. It was connected to the mainland by a bridge over a moat (filled in during the 19th century) deep enough to accommodate tall ships. The fortress served its purpose – it was never taken by enemy forces. The original roof was destroyed by fire in 1872 and a new roof with glass clerestory windows was built. A ring of eight bronze cannons, cast between 1666 and 1788, still menaces the offshore skerries. Free guided tours run on Sundays from mid-June to mid-August.

KRISTIANSAND CATHEDRAL

Built in 1884 in late gothic style, the **Kristiansand Cathedral** (Domkirke; ☎ 38 10 77 50; Kirkegata; admission free, tower Nkr20; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug), with seating for 1800 people, is Norway's third-largest church. Guided tours (adult/child Nkr20/10) of the cathedral, including the tower, run at 11am and 2pm Monday to Saturday in summer, and there are organ recitals at 1pm Tuesday to Saturday during the same period.

AGDER NATURE MUSEUM & BOTANIC GARDEN

The winding paths through the established 50-hectare park at **Gimle Estate** (☎ 38 09 23 88; Gimleveien 23; adult/child Nkr50/15; ☎ 11am-5pm

mid-Jun–mid-Aug; 10am–3pm Tue–Fri, noon–4pm Sat rest-of-year) lead through a botanic garden that also contains rocks, minerals and stuffed animals. The estate house has 19th-century period interiors and extraordinary teath-like columns at the front, and there's also a historic rose garden dating from 1850. It's just over 1km from the centre, across the Oddernes bridge.

POSEBYEN

The Kristiansand Posebyen (Old Town) takes in most of the 14 blocks at the northern end of the town's characteristic *kvadraturen*. It's worth taking a slow stroll around this pretty quarter, whose name was given by French soldiers who came to *reposer* (French for relax). A scale model (with buildings around 1m high) of the city as it appeared when designed by Christian IV is on view at Vest-Agder Folk Museum. The annual *Kristiansand* guide, published by the tourist office, includes a good section 'A Stroll through Posebyen' to guide your wandering. The most well-preserved buildings include **Bentsens Hus** (Kronprinsengs gate 59), which dates to 1855, the **former post office** (Kronprinsengs gate 45) dating to 1695 and **Gyldenløves gate 56** (1802).

KRISTIANSAND DYREPARK

The former **Kristiansand zoo** (☎ 38 04 97 00; www.dyreparken.com; admission incl all activities adult Nkr110-290, child Nkr90-230, depending on season; ☺ 10am–7pm mid-Jun–Aug; shorter hrs rest-of-year), off the E18 10km east of Kristiansand, has gradually expanded into what is probably *the* favourite holiday destination for children in Norway.

The funfair portion includes rides, pirate ship cruises, Captain Sabretooth's Treasure Trove and enchanted houses, while the zoo portion offers a surprising variety of specimens, including the near-extinct golden lion tamarin and a new African lion enclosure. If you want to enjoy the water park, be sure to bring a swimming costume.

The real highlights, however, are the **Northern Wilderness** (Nordisk Vilmark), where visitors are transported over the habitat of moose, wolves, lynx and wolverines on elevated boardwalks; and **Cardamom Town** (Kardamomme By), named for a key ingredient in Scandinavian waffles, a fantasy village based on the popular children's stories of Thorbjørn Egner. The town has been carefully laid out exactly as it appeared in

TROPICAL NORWAY?

Kristiansand's claims to be a beach resort are aided by the fact that it has what locals claim to be Norway's only palm trees, five of them along the town beach (Bystrand). OK, so they're potted and rather small and, no, there's not a coconut anywhere in sight. But they are palm trees nonetheless and that alone makes them special in Norway. In fact, so valuable are they that the city authorities take no chances. At the first hint of summer's end, the trees are whisked off to the town hall where a glass house protects these most cosseted of palm trees in conditions more suited to their species.

the illustrated book. It's also possible to stay in the park (see opposite).

To get there, take bus M1 (adult/child Nkr25/13, every 15 minutes Monday to Friday mid-June to mid-August, less often weekends & rest-of-year), which leaves from the bus station and takes 25 minutes.

VEST-AGDER FOLK MUSEUM

Located 4km east of town on the E18, the open-air **Vest-Agder Folk Museum** (Vest-Agder Fylkesmuseum; ☎ 38 10 26 80; www.vestagdermuseum.no in Norwegian; Vigeveien 22B; adult/child Nkr40/15; ☺ 10am–6pm Tue–Fri, noon–6pm Sat–Mon mid-Jun–mid-Aug, noon–5pm Sun May–mid-Jun & mid-Aug–Oct) houses a collection of 40 farmsteads and hamlets from the Setesdalen region and Kristiansand itself. It also includes displays of traditional costumes, art and children's toys. Folk dancing performances are sometimes held in summer at 5pm on Wednesdays. There's also a scale model of Kristiansand Old Town.

SETESDALSBANEN

The 78km-long narrow-gauge railway between Kristiansand and Byglandsfjord was opened in 1896 to link Setesdalen with the coast. It was used to transport nickel from the Evje mines, and local timber and barrel staves that were used in the salting and export of herring. Although competition from the normal-gauge state railway forced its closure in 1962, the **Setesdalsbanen Railway** (☎ 38 15 64 82; www.setesdalsbanen.no; adult/child return Nkr100/50; ☺ departures 11.30am, 1.15pm & 3.10pm Sun mid-Jun–August, 6.05pm Thu & Fri Jul) still runs steam- or diesel-powered locomotives along

the last 6km between Grovane (2km north of Vennessla) and Beiholdalen; the journey takes 25 minutes one way. NSB trains run up to four times daily from Kristiansand to Vennessla (Nkr31, 12 minutes), while bus 30 does the same trip (Nkr35).

KRISTIANSAND KANONMUSEUM

The **Kristiansand Cannon Museum** (☎ 38 08 50 90; www.kanonmuseet.no; Møvik; adult/child Nkr60/30; ☺ 11am–6pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year), 8km south of town, preserves the Germans' heavy Vara Battery, which, along with an emplacement at Hanstholm in Denmark, ensured German control of the strategic Skagerrak Straits during WWII. At each end, four 337-tonne, 38cm cannons, reportedly the second-heaviest guns in the world and with a range of 55km controlled traffic along either end of the strait, while the unprotected middle zone was heavily mined. In the autumn of 1941, over 1400 workers and 600 soldiers occupied this site. Visitors to the museum can see the big guns as well as bunkers, barracks and munitions storage (including some daunting 800kg shells).

BANEHEIA & RAVNEDELEN PARKS

Baneheia and Ravnedalen, both north of the city centre, offer greenery and a network of lakeside **hiking** and **skiing tracks** for those keen to escape the city for a while. Both parks were created between 1870 and 1880 by Kristiansand's city chairman, General Oscar Wergeland. Over a 30-year period, he oversaw the planting of 150,000 coniferous trees and transformed the area into a recreational green belt.

Activities

One Ocean Dive Center (☎ 91 62 85 25; www.oneocean.no; Strandåsen 22; one/two dives Nkr500/850, equipment rental per day Nkr500-750) is a professional centre that runs dives to wrecks, which include a downed plane and even a minesweeper. It's to be found just across the water east of the town centre.

Opened in 2007, **SPAndabel** (☎ 38 17 41 74; www.spandabel.no in Norwegian; Tollbodgata 6; ☺ 10am–6pm Mon, Tue & Sat, 10am–8pm Wed–Fri) in the Hotel Norge (see following) is a luxurious spa centre that offers a range of pampering from Nkr495 up to Nkr1250.

Sleeping

Kristiansand can be expensive for what you get, which may be nothing unless you book

early for summer, especially during the July school-holiday period when prices soar. One unwelcome Kristiansand quirk is the 10am check-out time in some places.

Roligheden Camping (☎ 38 09 67 22; www.roligheden.no in Norwegian; Framnesveien; tent sites Nkr130 plus per person Nkr30, 4-person cabins from Nkr750; ☺ Jun–Aug) Tent campers are in luck at this well-run camp site at a popular beach site 3km east of the centre. Take bus 15 from the centre.

Tangen Vandrerhjem (☎ 38 02 83 10; www.kristiansand-vandrerhjem.no; Skansen 8; dm incl breakfast Nkr230, s Nkr350-495, d Nkr450-550; ☺ Jan–Nov; ☑ ☒) The huge Kristiansand HI hostel lives in a rather bland warehouse (10-minutes' walk northeast of the fortress) and is home to simple, tidy rooms and friendly staff.

Centrum Motell (☎ 38 70 15 65; www.motell.no; Vestre Strandgate 49; s Nkr420-520, d Nkr520-695; ☑) We wouldn't normally recommend a place nestled in a car park between an overpass and the train station, but Kristiansand's pricey accommodation scene makes this good budget value, especially if you throw in free wireless access. Rooms are simple with bunk beds.

Frobudalen B&B (☎ 91 12 99 06; www.gjestehus.no; Frobudalen 2; s/d Nkr500/700) Probably the most personal place to stay in Kristiansand, this small B&B in an old timber home a 10-minute walk northwest of the centre is rustic, cosy and friendly.

1-2-3 Hotel (☎ 38 70 15 66; www.123-hotel.no; Østre Strandgate 25; s/d mid-Jun–mid-Aug Nkr695/895, rest-of-year Nkr530/695; ☑) It's hard to know what to make of this place, which styles itself as a self-service hotel. With its electronic check-in (there's no reception except to pay), meagre breakfast and 10am check-out, we wonder if this hotel exists more for the convenience of its owners than guests. Then again, the price is good for Kristiansand and the rooms are light, airy and comfortable.

Thon Hotel Wergeland (☎ 38 17 20 40; www.thonhotels.no; Kirkegata 15; s Nkr1095-1295, d Nkr1295-1495; ☑ ☒) It doesn't get any more central than this attractive, modern hotel right next to the cathedral. The high-standard rooms with hardwood floors have a touch more charm than some others in the Thon Hotels chain.

Hotel Norge (☎ 38 17 40 00; www.hotel-norge.no; Dronningens gate 5; s/d Nkr1295/1495 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr725/925 Fri–Sun, Nkr1375/1575 Mon–Thu rest-of-year; ☑ ☒) It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish many of Norway's chain hotels so we welcome the effort taken here. The all-

important mattresses are extremely comfortable, and there's a rooftop sun lounge, private bakery and a spa centre (p143).

Scandic Kristiansand (☎ 21 61 42 00; www.scandic-hotels.com; Markens gate 39; s Nkr880-1485, d Nkr1080-1685; (P) (Q)) If you value style as well as substance, the Scandic Kristiansand has both. The rooms and public areas are stylish, rooms have all the requisite bells and whistles, and the hotel adheres to the strictest environmental standards. A good package.

Dyreparken Hyttegrend (☎ 38 04 98 00; booking@dyreparken.no; fantasy house Nkr630-2500) One of Norway's more unusual sleeping options are the self-catering fantasy houses, that sleep up to five, in the Dyrepark (see p142). These charming products of a child-like imagination are fantastic for kids, but very often booked out in summer. Prices include admission to the park.

Eating

Snadderkiosken (☎ 38 02 90 29; Østre Strandgate 78a; dishes Nkr18-88; ☎ 8.30am-11.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-11.30pm Sat & Sun) We don't normally direct you to the fast-food kiosks that are everywhere in Norway, but Snadderkiosken is one of the best of its kind in Norway. Near the town beach, it has an extensive and great-value menu, with things such as hearty meatballs and mashed potatoes or grilled chicken with rice and salad.

In summer the most atmospheric places to eat are in the small, remodelled harbour around the **fish market** (☎ 38 12 24 50; ☎ 7am-4pm Mon-Fri, 7am-2.30pm Sat) where you'll find the freshest and best-value seafood. Two restaurants in particular stand out.

our pick **Bølgen & Moi** (☎ 38 17 83 00; Sjølystveien 1A; light meals Nkr55-169, restaurant starters Nkr75-145, mains Nkr220-279; ☎ 3pm-midnight Mon-Sat) The best restaurant around the fish market harbour, the supercool Bølgen & Moi does a sublime fish and shellfish soup (Nkr145) and a tasty range of fish and seafood dishes as well as set menus (from Nkr385). In summer the outdoor tables are packed and it's a good place for a drink after the kitchen closes.

Retti i Garnet (☎ 38 12 24 03; Fiskebrygga; lunch mains & snacks Nkr59-139, mains Nkr129-239; ☎ 11am-late Mon-Sat, noon-late Sun) Not quite as classy as Bølgen & Moi but with good food, this place next to the fish market entrance is also all about seafood, serving trout, mackerel, salmon and monkfish. It also does a terrific seafood platter (minimum two persons) for Nkr265 per person.

Sjøhuset (☎ 38 02 62 60; Markens gate; light meals & snacks Nkr75-169, starters Nkr85-115, mains Nkr179-269; ☎ 11am-11pm) Along the waterfront next to the yacht harbour, this long-standing restaurant of quality is another fine choice for lovers of the fruits of the sea.

Måltid (☎ 47 83 30 00; Tollbodgata 2B; lunch dishes Nkr69, tapas Nkr30; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Thu, 11am-11pm Fri & Sat) Part delicatessen, part restaurant and part wine bar, this outpost of casual sophistication is terrific. The tapas idea may come from Spain, but the food is Norwegian with so many tempting plates on offer and the waiters more than happy to help choose your tapas platter. For a light lunch the pasta salad or sandwiches are good options.

Kjesk (☎ 38 10 86 10; Kirkegata 15; light meals Nkr45-145; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Also recommended, Kjesk is a very cool coffee bar with great food.

Drinking & Entertainment

Apart from the places around the fish market where the outdoor tables are difficult to snaffle on a summer's evening, there are a couple of decent places for a drink.

our pick **Frk Larsen** (Markens gate 5; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Wed, 11am-3am Thu-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) Our favourite drinking hole in Kristiansand, this trendy place has retro-chic fusion décor, a mellow ambience by day and late-night music for an 'in' crowd on weekend nights. The cocktail bar opens at 8pm.

Kick (☎ 38 02 62 44; Dronningens gate 8; ☎ 3pm-late) This outdoor café morphs into a disco with a DJ as the night wears on. It's one of the most popular hang-outs for young people and there's occasional live music on weekends.

Getting There & Away

BOAT
For information on ferries to Denmark, Sweden and the UK, see p408.

BUS

Departures from Kristiansand are shown in the table below.

Destination	Departures	Cost	Duration
Arendal	up to 9 daily	Nkr115	1½hr
Bergen (via Haukeligrend)	one daily	Nkr450	12hr
Evje	7-8 daily	Nkr100	1hr
Flekkefjord	2-4 daily	Nkr220	2hr
Oslo	up to 9 daily	Nkr199-300	5½hr
Stavanger	2-4 daily	Nkr355	4½hr

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

With a vehicle, access to the E18, north of the centre, is via Vestre Strandgate; when arriving you'll most likely find yourself along Festningsgata. For parking in the city centre, the open-air **parking area** (nr Østre Strandgate & Elvegata; per 24 hr Nkr50), east of the centre, is easily the cheapest.

TRAIN

There are up to four trains daily to Oslo (Nkr580, 4½ hours) and up to five to Stavanger (Nkr390, 3¼ hours).

Getting Around

Unlike many Norwegian towns, Kristiansand is mercifully flat and the downtown area is easily negotiable on foot. Alternatively, for bicycle rental, **Sykkelsenter** (☎ 38 02 68 35; Grim Torv 3; per day/week Nkr150/500) has a range of bikes on offer.

AROUND KRISTIANSAND

The Skerries

In summer, Kristiansand's archipelago of offshore skerries turns into one of the country's greatest sun-and-sea destinations for Norwegian holiday-makers. The most popular island, **Bragdøy**, lies close to the mainland and boasts a preservation workshop for wooden ships, nice walks and several bathing sites. In the distance, you'll see the classic lighthouse **Gronningen Fyr**.

Ferries (Nkr17) to the island run from Vågsbygd, around 8km south of central Kristiansand, three times daily Monday to Friday, with an additional sailing on Saturday, and three on Sunday.

M/S Øya (☎ 95 93 58 55; www.lillesand.net) sails from/to Lillesand (Nkr215/110 per adult/child one way, Nkr360/180 return, three hours) once daily except Sunday from late June to early August. The departure point was uncertain at the time of research (either south of the fish market or from Quay 6) – check at the tourist office.

MANDAL

pop 14,200
Norway's southernmost town, Mandal is famous for its 800m-long beach, Sjøsand. About 1km from the centre and backed by forests, the Copacabana it ain't, but it is Norway's finest stretch of sand, just crying out for a sunny Mediterranean climate.

The **tourist office** (☎ 38 27 83 00; www.regionmandal.com; Bryggegaten 10; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) is along the waterfront.

Sights

The moderately interesting town **Bymuseum** (☎ 38 27 30 00; Store Elvegata 5/6; adult/child Nkr20/free; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun late Jun-mid-Aug), which displays a host of historical maritime and fishing artefacts and works by local artists, is elevated above the mundane by impressive exhibits of works by Mandal's favourite son, Gustav Vigeland (see the boxed text, p101).

The family home of Norway's finest sculptor has been converted into a small museum and exhibition space, **Vigeland Hus** (☎ 38 27 83 00; adult/child Nkr30/free; ☎ noon-4pm Tue-Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug). The house has been decorated in a style approximating that of the sculptor's early days and his workshop has been transformed into a gallery.

Festivals

The second week in August, when Mandal hosts the **Shellfish Festival** (www.skalldyrfestivalen.no), is a great time to be in town: there's fresh seafood everywhere and a range of musical performances.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation in Mandal tends to be rather expensive.

Sjøanden Feriesenter (☎ 38 26 14 19; www.sjosanden-feriesenter.no; Sjøandveien 1; tent sites without/with car Nkr130/150, d Nkr350-650, 2-6-person self-catering apt Nkr500-800) Being just a few metres away from the beach, Sjøanden distinguishes this well-run place from the other camp sites in the vicinity. It even has its own water slide.

First Hotel Solborg (☎ 38 27 21 00; www.firsthotels.no/solborg; Neseveien 1; s/d from Nkr795/975, main courses Nkr165-279; (P) (Q)) This flash hotel, only a 10-minute walk west of the beach, boasts an indoor pool, the best restaurant in town and a bar and Saturday disco called Soldekket. Oh yes, and the rooms at this place aren't at all bad either.

Dr Nielsen's (☎ 38 26 61 00; Store Elvegata 47a; mains from Nkr79) Any cravings for Greek salads and grilled meats will be satisfied at this place, which also does pasta, chicken and some fish dishes. Every other restaurant in Mandal does seafood and not much else.

Getting There & Away

The Mandal Rutebilstasjon lies north of the river, just a short walk from the historic district. The Nor-Way Bussekspress coastal route between Stavanger (Nkr335, 3½ hours) and Kristiansand (Nkr88, 45 minutes) passes through Mandal two to four times daily.

LINDESNES

As the southernmost point in Norway (latitude 57° 58' 95" N), Lindesnes (literally 'arching land peninsula') provides an occasional glimpse of the power nature can unleash between the Skagerrak and the North Sea. Even better, as the brochures point out, 'the camera angles are better than at Nordkapp' (2518km away).

Rising above the cape is the evocative **Lindesnes Fyr** (☎ 38 25 77 35; www.lindesnesfyr.no; adult/child Nkr50/free; ☞ 11am-5pm May-mid-Oct, shorter hrs rest-of-year), a classic lighthouse. In two of the buildings you'll pass as you climb to the cape there are exhibitions on the history of the lighthouse, while the visitors centre next to the gate has more plus an informative video about the site. The first lighthouse on the site (and the first in Norway) was fired up in 1655 using coal and tallow candles to warn ships off the rocks. The current electrical version, built in 1915, is visible up to 19½ nautical miles out to sea. Be wary of strong winds: one Lonely Planet author lost his sunglasses in a sudden gust.

Sleeping

Lindesnes Camping og Hytteutleie (☎ 38 25 88 74; www.lindesnescamping.no; Lillehavn; tent sites Nkr135, cabins

Nkr210-790) You'll find excellent modern facilities at this place, on the shore 3.5km northeast of Lindesnes Fyr. There's a small kiosk and kitchen facilities and it also organises boat hire.

Lindesnes Gjestehus (☎ 38 25 97 00; liveueland@hotmail.com; Spangereid; B&B per person from Nkr350) About 11km north of the cape lies this simple but cosy guesthouse.

Getting There & Away

Buses from Mandal (Nkr58, one hour) travel to the lighthouse via Spangereid on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

FLEKKEFJORD

pop 8860

Flekkefjord is a quiet place with a pretty old town (the town's history dates back to 1660 when it competed for power with Kristiansand). It's also famous for having virtually no tidal variation (typically less than 10cm between high and low tides). Along with Egersund (p148), it's one of the more enjoyable towns to base yourself on this stretch of coast.

The small **tourist office** (☎ 38 32 69 95; flekkefjord@regionlister.com; Elvegata 9; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) should be your first port of call.

Sights

Before setting out to explore the town, collect the pamphlet *A Tour of Flekkefjord* from the tourist office. The richest source of old architecture is the **Hollenderbyen** (Dutch Town)

district, with its narrow streets and old timber buildings. **Flekkefjord Museum** (☎ 38 32 81 40; www.flekkefjordmuseum.no in Norwegian; Dr Kraftsgata 15; adult/child Nkr20/free; ☞ noon-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-3pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug) is housed in a home from 1724, but with 19th-century interiors.

One feature that stands out is the unusual octagonal log-built **Flekkefjord church** (☎ 38 32 43 00; Kirkegaten; admission free; ☞ 11am-1pm Mon-Sat Jul), which was consecrated in 1833. Designed by architect H Linstow (he of the Royal Palace in Oslo), the octagonal theme continues throughout, with the columns, steeple and baptismal font all conforming to the eight-sided form.

In 2007 Flekkefjord trialled a system of small-town ambassadors, a loose collection of around a dozen locals who offer information and even a look inside their Flekkefjord homes. It's a novel idea that we hope catches on. Contact the tourist office if you want to find them.

Sleeping & Eating

Egenes Camping (☎ 38 32 01 48; www.egenes.no; tent sites without/with car Nkr90/110 plus per person Nkr20, caravan sites Nkr120, cabins Nkr400-900) This spectacularly located camp site is beside Lake Seluravatnet, 1km off the E39 and 5km east of Flekkefjord. There's boat and canoe hire and a good-value café (mains around Nkr75). Buses running from Flekkefjord (Nkr25, 10 minutes) towards Kristiansand pass within 1km of the site. Water-sports equipment is also available.

Maritim Fjordhotell (☎ 38 32 58 00; www.fjordhotellene.no; Sundegaten 9; s Nkr775-1095, d Nkr995-1350) Flekkefjord's largest hotel has a great waterfront position, stylish rooms and a decent restaurant (mains from Nkr125), although the architecture is a real eyesore.

Grand Hotell (☎ 38 32 53 01; www.grand-hotell.no in Norwegian; Anders Beersgt 9; s/d Nkr845/1045) For the most character and personality that you'll find in Flekkefjord, the Grand Hotell perfectly suits this old town. Housed in a delightful white timber-clad building, the hotel's rooms have a certain old-world charm.

Pizza Inn (☎ 38 32 22 22; Elvegata 22; snacks Nkr65-115, pizza/pasta from Nkr169/125, mains Nkr129-179; ☞ daily) This pleasant harbour-side restaurant has breezy outdoor tables to pass a summer's afternoon or cosy booths for a winter's evening. The service is good, as is the food. The entrecôte with salad (Nkr129) is a good deal.

Fiskebrygga (☎ 38 32 04 90; Elvegata 9; ☞ 10am-4pm Mon, Tue & Sat, 10am-6pm Wed & Fri, 10am-7pm Thu) Possibly the nicest place in Flekkefjord for a light meal, this café-style restaurant next to the tourist office does fish and chips (Nkr99), marinated spare ribs (Nkr129), delicious cakes (Nkr39) and ice cream. It has a certain urban sense of style, which is lovely in quiet little Flekkefjord.

Getting There & Away

The Nor-Way Bussekspress bus between Kristiansand (normal/express Nkr175/220, two hours) and Stavanger (Nkr220, two hours) passes through Flekkefjord. Buses run to Jøssingfjord three times daily except Sunday (Nkr61, 40 minutes).

FLEKKEFJORD TO EGRSUND

If you have your own vehicle, forsake the E39 and take the coastal Rv44 to Egersund – one of southern Norway's most beautiful drives. You'll pass through barren, bouldered hills with a few forested sections and lakes, before descending to **Jøssingfjord**, around 32km west of Flekkefjord; it's the site for breathtaking, perpendicular rock scenery, including a fine waterfall. Two 17th-century houses, known as **Helleren**, have nestled under an overhanging cliff since the 18th century and were definitely not for the claustrophobic. Despite the danger of falling rocks, the overhang did provide protection from the harsh Norwegian climate. The houses are open year-round.

Some 30km southeast of Egersund and 2.5km south of Hauge i Dalane, **Sogndalsstrand** should not be missed for its picturesque timber homes and warehouses that jut out over the river. The houses feature on the covers of tourist brochures across the region and they're well worth seeking out as it's a quiet, beautiful place. The homes date from the 17th and 18th centuries. If this small village has won your heart, consider staying at the **Sogndalsstrand Kultur Hotell** (☎ 51 47 72 55; www.sogndalstrand-kulturhotell.no; s/d Nkr820/1190, a lovely place with cosy rooms and an excellent little restaurant (meals with wine are priced from Nkr315).

For more information on scenic lighthouses and other attractions along this route and the entire coastal road from Kristiansand to Hagesund, visit the excellent www.nordsjoven.no.

HERE WERE VIKINGS

From the 8th to the 11th centuries, Norway's coastline was the domain of Vikings, but the cape at Lindesnes, where the waters of the Skagerrak and the North Sea collided, proved a challenge even to these formidable seamen. Their solution? In a spirit of creative engineering that Norway's road builders would later emulate when faced with daunting geographic forms, the Vikings carved a **canal** (www.spangereidkanalen.no, in Norwegian) across the Lindesnes Peninsula at Spangareid (once a home port of Viking chieftains) to avoid the dangerous seas of the cape. In summer 2007, a replica canal was opened to recreate the Viking detour. Close to the site, the excellent historical centre **Vikingland** (☎ 38 25 76 61; www.spangereidvikingland.no; Spangareid; adult/child Nkr70/40; ☞ 11am-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug) offers Viking exhibitions, a Viking cruise and tranquil Viking sports such as axe-throwing.

If the Vikings have caught your attention, there's another site nearby that you'll want to seek out. At Penne, west of Farsund and close to Borhaug, are some remarkable **rock paintings** dating from the Viking era, including representations, at once child-like and sophisticated, of Viking ships. For more information, contact the **Farsund tourist office** (☎ 38 39 08 39; farsundtourist@eunet.no, ahga@farsund.kommune.no (outside summer); ☞ Jun-Aug).

EGERSUND

pop 13,594

One of the prettiest towns along this stretch of coastline, Egersund is a serene place strewn with old timber houses that tell the story of its long history; intriguing rune stones found in nearby Møgedal are among the oldest written forms found in southern Norway. It's a quiet place to wander and to soak up the small-town ambience of the southern Norwegian coast.

The **tourist office** (☎ 51 46 80 00; www.eigersund.kommune.no; Jernbaneveien 2; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug) is fine for local information, but it's only open in summer.

Sights

From mid-June to mid-August, **guided walking tours** (per person Nkr20; ☎ 1pm Sat) of Egersund leave from the tourist office.

DALANE FOLK MUSEUM

The **Dalane Folkmuseum** (☎ 51 46 14 10; www.museumsnett.no/dalmus; Slettebø; adult/child Nkr20/10; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 11am-5pm Sun only rest-of-year) is divided into two parts. The more interesting main section features eight historic timber homes at Slettebø, 3.5km north of town just off the Rv42. The other section is the **Egersund Fayance Museum** (☎ same hrs), a walkable 1.5km northeast of town. It displays the history and wares of Egersund Fayance, the ceramic and porcelain firm that sustained the entire district from 1847 to 1979.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Some 92 homes, nearly two-thirds of the original town, were gutted by fire in 1843, after which Egersund was reconstructed with wide streets to thwart the spread of future fires. Most buildings in the old town date from this period. **Strandgaten**, a street of timber houses constructed after 1843, is well worth a stroll. **Skrivervgården** (Strandgaten 58) was built in 1846 as the home of the local magistrate Christian Feyer. The small town park opposite served as his private garden – half his luck. **Strandgaten 43** is arguably more beautiful and has what's known as a 'gossip mirror', which allowed the inhabitants to keep an eye on the street. The **Bilstadhuset** (Nygaten 14) still has its original timberwork and includes a sailmaker's loft upstairs. None of the houses are open to the public, but the tourist office hands out a leaf-

let, *Strolling in Egersund*, which has a map and informative commentary.

EGERSUND KIRKE

There has been a church in Egersund since at least 1292. The cute, current manifestation, **Egersund Kirke** (Torget; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sat, 12.30-3pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug) dates back to the 1620s; the carved altarpiece, a depiction of the baptism and crucifixion of Christ by Stavanger carpenter Thomas Christophersen and painted by artist Peter Reimers, dates back to 1607 and the baptismal font is from 1583. The cross-shaped design, intimate balconies and wonderfully decorated pew doors are all worth lingering over. An English-language sheet handed out at the door details the church's history.

VARBERG

Fine **views** over the town centre are to be had for those who climb to the summit of Varberg, the hill with the prominent TV mast. The path to the top takes about 20 minutes from the centre of town.

Sleeping & Eating

Steinsnes Camping (☎ 51 49 41 36; fax 51 49 40 73; Tengs; tent sites Nkr120 plus per person Nkr30, cabins Nkr250-500) Egersund's most convenient camp site is 3km north of town alongside a rushing stream; buses heading for Hellvik will get you there. In a very Norwegian touch, it sells salmon-fishing permits.

Hauen Camping (☎ 51 49 23 79; www.hauencamping.no; tent sites Nkr120 plus per person Nkr30, cabins Nkr450-550) Spotless pine-clad huts here have a wilderness feel to them and the communal facilities are well-kept. It's along the coast road, 7km west of Egersund.

Anne's B&B (☎ 51 49 37 45; www.annes-bb.no; Sjukehusveien 45; d Nkr500-600; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎) This family-run B&B 2km northeast of the town centre offers the most personal stay in town, with simple but traditionally styled rooms and the added bonus of a swimming pool. It's just off the Rv44 on the road into town and close to the Dalen Folkmuseum.

Grand Hotell (☎ 51 49 18 11; www.grand-egersund.no; Johan Feyersgate 3; s Nkr605-1190, d Nkr805-1150; ☎) The Grand Hotell is a lovely old 19th-century building with stylish, renovated rooms, although you pay more for those in the picturesque old but refurbished wing. The corner rooms (eg 307 in the old wing and 224 in the

newer section) are the best on offer. It also has a good restaurant, with lunch specials priced at Nkr59 to Nkr135 and a dinner buffet for Nkr195.

Shopping

Egersund Terracotta og Keramikk (☎ 51 49 15 96; Strandgaten 44; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9am-6pm Thu, 9am-2pm Sat) Three generations of potters have been moulding and selling ceramics here since 1946. What's on offer is authentic local ceramics, not tourist kitsch.

Getting There & Away

Trains to/from Kristiansand (Nkr274, two hours) run three times daily, with eight daily services to/from Stavanger (Nkr133, one hour). **Fjord Line** (☎ 55 54 87 00; www.fjordline.no) runs international ferries between Bergen and Hanstholm in Denmark via Egersund, but it's not available for transport between Bergen and Egersund. For details on international ferries, see p408.

AROUND EGERSUND

For details of the picturesque route between Egersund and Flekkefjord, see p147.

If you're driving along the Rv42 west of Egersund, **Terland Klopp**, 15km northeast of town, is a lovely 60m-long bridge from 1888. Constructed in 21 stone arches, it has been proposed for inclusion on Unesco's list of historical monuments.

Eigerøy Fyr (Midbrødøy; adult/child Nkr20/10; ☎ 11am-4pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug), the majestic 1855 lighthouse on Midbrødøy, is near the southwestern tip of Eigerøy island. Still one of the most powerful lighthouses in Europe, it has great views at any time, but especially on stormy days. Take the Nord Eigerøy bus from the Rutebilstasjon and get off at the sign 'Eigerøy fyr' on the Rv502 (Nkr27, 15 minutes). From there, it's a 30-minute walk down the Fyrvegen road to the lighthouse.

THE INTERIOR

Inland from Norway's southern coast, quiet mountain valleys like Setesdalen and the magnificent peak of Gausta, close to Rjukan, are wonderful places. Another highlight is the lake-studded Telemark region, connected by a canal with pretty Seljord – home to the Nessie-esque Selma the Serpent.

KONGSBERG

pop 23,644

At first glance, you might not be tempted to give Kongsberg a second look as you rush on to towns of greater renown. But Kongsberg has plenty of reasons to stop, among them the interesting Kongsgruvene (Royal Silver Mine) and one of Norway's best jazz festivals in June or July. With cascading rapids running through the heart of town, it's also one of the more agreeable towns in this part of Norway.

History

The history of Kongsberg begins and ends with silver, which was discovered by two children with an ox in 1623 in the nearby Numedal Valley. Their father attempted to sell the windfall, but the king's soldiers got wind of it and the family was arrested and forced to disclose the site of their discovery. Kongsberg was founded a year later and in the resulting silver rush it briefly became the second-largest town in Norway, with 8000 inhabitants including 4000 miners. Between 1623 and 1957, 1.35 million kilograms of pure thread-like 'wire' silver (one of the world's purest forms of silver) was produced for the royal coffers. Kongsberg is still home to the national mint, but the last mine closed in 1957.

Orientation & Information

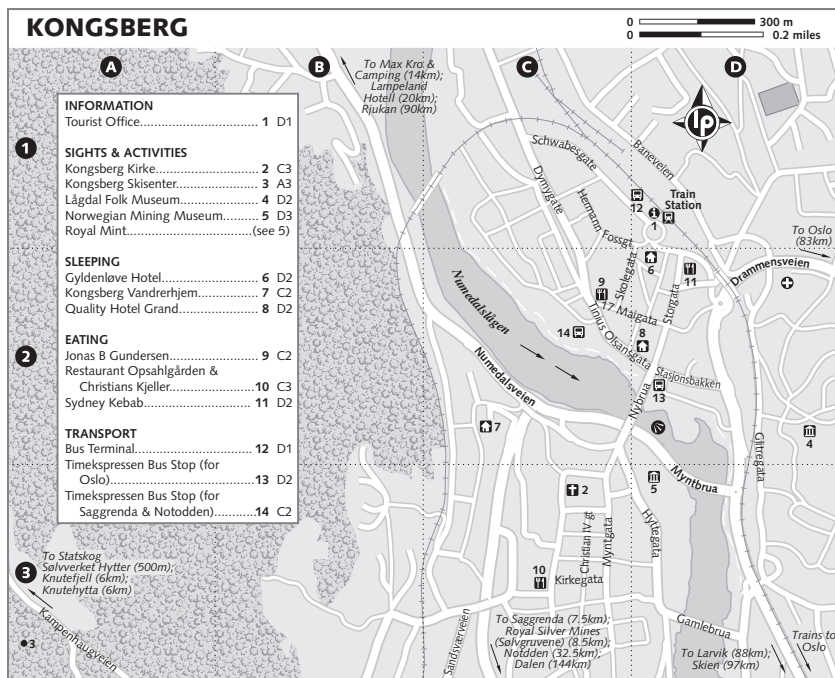
Kongsberg is neatly split into old and new sections by the falls of the river Numedalslågen. The new eastern section takes in the tourist office, transport terminals, hotels and some restaurants. In the older section west of the river lie the museum, church and HI hostel.

The **tourist office** (☎ 32 29 90 50; www.visitkongsberg.no; Schwabesgt 2; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun late-Jun-mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year) is excellent.

Sights & Activities

KONGSBERG KIRKE

Norway's largest baroque **church** (☎ 32 73 19 02; Kirketorget; adult/student/pensioner/child Nkr30/20/20/20; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, 2-4pm Sun mid-May-mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year), in the old town west of the river, officially opened in 1761. The rococo-style interior features ornate chandeliers and an unusual altar that combines the altarpiece, high pulpit and organ pipes on a single wall. From June to August there are organ recitals held here at 8pm every Wednesday.



NORWEGIAN MINING MUSEUM

This worthwhile **mining museum** (Norsk Bergverksmuseum; ☎ 32 72 32 00; www.bvm.museum.no; Hyttegata 3; adult/child Nkr50/10; ☎ 10am–5pm mid-May–Aug, noon–4pm Sep–mid-May), in an 1844 smelter, tells the story of mining in Kongsberg with relics, models and mineral displays; the old smelting furnaces still survive in the basement. In the same building, other sections include the **Royal Mint**, which was moved from Akershus Fortress in Oslo to the source of the silver in 1686, as well as a skiing museum and other local exhibitions.

LÅGDAL FOLK MUSEUM

This **folk museum** (Lågdalsmuseet; ☎ 32 73 34 68; www.laagdalsmuseet.no in Norwegian; Tillsichbakken 8–10; adult/child Nkr40/10 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, admission free rest-of-year; ☎ 11am–5pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year), a 10-minute walk southeast of the train station, houses a collection of 32 period farmhouses and miners' cottages, an indoor sampling of re-created 19th-century workshops and a local WWII resistance museum. In summer there are guided tours at 11am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm.

ROYAL SILVER MINES

The profusion of silver mines in Kongsberg's hinterland is known collectively as Solvgruvene. The main shaft of the largest mine plunges all of 1070m into the mountain, to a depth of 550m below sea level. The easiest way to visit the mine is the **mine tour** (adult/child Nkr130/60; ☎ hourly 11am–4pm Jul–mid-Aug, shorter hr mid-May–Jun, Sep & Oct) that leaves from the signposted Kongsgruvene, 700m from Saggrenda (8km south of Kongsberg along the road to Notodden). It begins with a 2.3km **rail ride** along the *stoll*, a tunnel that was painstakingly chipped through the mountain in order to drain water from the mines. Constructed without machinery or dynamite – the rock was removed by heating it with fire, then throwing water on the rock to crack it – the tunnel moved forward at 7cm per day and took 73 years (1782 to 1855) to complete! Inside, visitors are guided around equipment used in the extraction of silver, including an ingenious creaking and grinding lift and work area on 65 wet and slippery ladders.

Bring warm clothing as the underground temperatures can be a chilly 6°C. The admis-

sion price includes a bus ride from outside Kongsberg's tourist office.

Other possibilities that require advance bookings and at least 10–15 people include **two-hour guided walks** (per person Nkr250) through the 5km-long Underberg mine and the **rope-and-torch tour** (☎ 32 72 32 00; cb@bvm.museum.no; Nkr800), which begins with a 1km walk through Crown Prince Fredrik's tunnel. You must then abseil by torchlight down 112m into the mine (after a 'crash' course in abseiling).

HIKING & SKIING

Kongsberg's best hiking and cross-country skiing is found in the green, forested Knutefjell, immediately west of the town. The Kongsberg tourist office sells the map *Kultur-og Turkart Knutefjell* (Nkr80), which details the hiking and skiing tracks.

Festivals

Kongsberg's four-day **Kongsberg Jazz Festival** (☎ 32 73 31 66; www.kongsberg-jazzfestival.no in Norwegian) is Norway's second largest (after Molde; see p268) in late June or early July. It has a reputation for avant-garde performers and in 2007 drew big international names like the Joshua Redman Trio, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Wilco. In the lead up to the festival, there's a small **festival shop** (Nymoens torg 2–4; ☎ variable hrs) in the town centre.

Sleeping

Max Kro & Camping (☎ 32 76 44 05; fax 32 76 44 72; Jondalen; tent/caravan sites Nkr130/150, 4–6-bed cabins Nkr400/600) The nearest camp site to town is 14km northwest of town along the Rv37. To get there use the twice-daily Kongsberg–Rjukan bus (Nkr26, 15 minutes).

Kongsberg Vandrerhjem (☎ 32 73 20 24; www.kongsberg-vandrerhjem.no; Vinjsgata 1; dm/s/d incl breakfast from Nkr260/570/710; ☎ ☎) Kongsberg's youth hostel bridges the gap between budget and midrange with comfortable rooms in a quiet but accessible part of town.

Gyldenløve Hotel (☎ 32 86 58 00; www.gyldenlove.no; Hermann Fossgata 1; s/d mid-Jun–mid-Aug & Fri–Sun year-round Nkr825/975, Mon–Thu rest-of-year Nkr1275/1550; ☎ ☎) One of Kongsberg's best hotels, the Gyldenløve has spacious rooms with some pleasing stylistic flourishes and polished floorboards.

Quality Hotel Grand (☎ 32 77 28 00; www.choice.no; Christian Augustsgata 2; s/d from Nkr920/1060; ☎ ☎) Although a touch more expensive than

the Gyldenløve Hotel, the Quality Hotel Grand, near the river, is a comfortable establishment.

Lampeland Hotell (☎ 32 76 20 46; www.lampeland.no in Norwegian; Rv40; s Nkr890–1020, d Nkr995–1130, with Fjord Pass Nkr585/740, internet per hr/12hrs Nkr30/120) This lovely hotel, 20km north of Kongsberg on the Geilo road, has plenty of charm (apart from its roadside locale) and is super value if you book through Fjord Pass. It's also one of the more environmentally friendly hotels in the area.

Eating

Sydney Kebab (☎ 32 76 88 58; Storgata 1; kebabs Nkr49–89, falafel Nkr49; ☎ until 4am Sat & Sun) If you're saving money on food, you can still eat a hearty meal at this pleasant little kebab shop.

Jonas B Gundersen (☎ 32 72 88 00; Nymoens torg 10; pasta Nkr69–159, pizza from Nkr169) At this good restaurant the menus look like vinyl records, there's an unmistakable New Orleans jazz feel and the food includes imaginative salads and mostly Italian dishes.

Restaurant Opsahlgården & Christians Kjeller (☎ 32 76 45 00; Kirkegata 10; starters Nkr79–115, mains Nkr179–229; ☎ restaurant 3–10pm Mon–Fri, café 3–10pm Mon–Fri & 2–10pm Sat) A few doors down from Kongsberg Kirke, this fine dining restaurant is complemented by a pleasant café where lighter meals are available at the outdoor tables in summer.

Getting There & Around

Hourly trains connect Kongsberg with Oslo (Nkr153, 1½ hours). **Nettbus Telemark Timekspressen** (☎ 177) buses connect Kongsberg with Oslo (Nkr160, 1½ hours), Saggrenda (Nkr48, 10 minutes) and Notodden (Nkr82, 35 minutes) at least hourly throughout the day.

The tourist office hires out bicycles for a cost of Nkr250 for the first day, then Nkr150 per day.

THE TELEMAR CANAL

The 105km-long Telemark Canal system, a series of lakes and canals that connect Skien and Dalen (with a branch from Lunde to Notodden), lifts and lowers boats a total of 72m in 18 locks. The canal was built for the timber trade from 1887 to 1892 by up to 400 workers. For some useful tourist information, check out the website www.visittelemark.com.

A SLOW BOAT THROUGH TELEMAR

Every day from June to mid-August, the ferry *M/S Telemarken* travels along the canals of Telemark between Akkerhaugen, 24km south of Notodden, and Lunde (adult/child Nkr250/125, 3¼ hours). It leaves Akkerhaugen/Lunde around 10am/1.45pm. If you only want to sail one way from Lunde to Akkerhaugen, buses leave from Notodden for Lunde (Nkr103, one hour) late morning and from Akkerhaugen to Notodden at around 5pm (6pm on weekends).

Every day between late June and mid-August, the sightseeing boats *M/S Victoria* (built in 1882) and *M/S Henrik Ibsen* (built in 1907) make the leisurely 11-hour journey between Skien and Dalen (adult/child Nkr420/210). Round trips, including one way by boat and return by bus (three hours), cost a total of Nkr680/340. Return tickets for all boats are 50% cheaper. For most of June, there are four weekly departures while trips run weekly from mid- to late May and from mid-August to early September. Dogs receive a 50% discount.

For further information, contact **Telemarkreiser** (☎ 35 90 00 30; www.visittilemark.com).

A great way to see the canal is by canoe, kayak or bicycle, and the ferries will transport your own boat/bicycle for Nkr100/50 between Skien and Dalen.

Notodden

pop 12,221

Unless you're here for the hugely popular **Blues Festival** (☎ 35 02 76 50; www.bluesfest.no) in early August, drive straight past industrial Notodden and keep going until you reach the marvellous imposing Heddal Stave Church, about 5km west of town on the E134. Otherwise, the only reason to pause in town is the Notodden **tourist office** (☎ 35 01 50 00; www.notodden.kommune.no; Teatergate 3; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri).

SIGHTS

The fairytale **Heddal Stave Church** (☎ 35 02 00 93; www.heddal-stavkirke.no; Heddal; adult/child Nkr40/free, entry to grounds free; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, shorter hrs rest-of-year) is the largest and one of the most beautiful of Norway's 28 remaining stave churches.

The church possibly dates from 1242, but parts of the chancel date from as early as 1147. It was heavily restored in the 1950s. As with all stave churches, it's constructed around Norwegian pine support pillars – in this case, 12 large ones and six smaller ones, all topped by fearsome visages – and has four carved entrance portals. Of special interest are the lovely 1668 'rose' paintings on the walls, a runic inscription in the outer passageway and the 'Bishop's chair', which was made of an old pillar in the 17th century. Its ornate carvings relate the pagan tale of the Viking Sigurd the Dragon-slayer, which has been reworked into a Christian parable involving Jesus Christ and the devil. The altarpiece originally dates from 1667 but was

restored in 1908, and the exterior bell tower was added in 1850.

The displays downstairs in the adjacent building (where tickets are sold) describe the history of the church. For more information on stave church architecture, see the boxed text, p240.

From Notodden, bus 301 goes right by; otherwise take any bus heading for Seljord or Bondal.

The **Heddal Rural Museum** (Bygdetun; ☎ 35 02 08 40; www.museumaust.no; Heddal; adult/child Nkr20/free; ☎ 11am-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug), 300m from the stave church, includes a collection of houses from rural Telemark.

SLEEPING

Notodden Camping (☎ 35 01 33 10; www.notodden.camping.no; Reshjemveien; tent sites without/with car Nkr110/130, caravan sites Nkr150 plus per person Nkr50, cabins Nkr380-490) Notodden Camping is an acceptable site 3km west along the E134, then 200m south on Reshjemveien. You'll be lucky to find a square inch of space at festival time. Take a bus from the centre in the direction of Seljord.

Nordlandia Telemark Hotel (☎ 35 01 20 88; www.norlandia.no/telemark; Torvet 8; s Nkr735-1115, d Nkr1115-1270) If you must stay in Notodden, here you'll find a modern hotel room and a reasonable breakfast in a bland building in the town centre.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Between the towns of Kongsberg and Notodden, Timekspressen buses run once or twice an hour (Nkr82, 35 minutes).

Skien

pop 50,696

Industrial Skien has little to detain you, unless you're setting off along the Telemark Canal (see the boxed text, opposite) or you're a fan of the great Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen.

The **tourist office** (☎ 35 90 55 20; www.grenland.no; Nedre Hjellegate 18; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) is moderately useful, although it doesn't have much to work with here.

SIGHTS

Author, playwright and so-called 'Father of Modern Drama', Henrik Ibsen (see p50) was born in Skien on 20 March 1828. In 1835 the family fell on hard times and moved out to the farm Venstøp, 5km north of Skien, where they stayed for seven years. The 1815 farmhouse has now been converted into the excellent **Henrik Ibsenmuseet** (☎ 35 52 57 49; Venstøphøgda; adult/student/senior/child Nkr50/20/20/20;

☎ 10am-6pm mid-May-Aug). There are some terrific audio-visual displays in the former barn, while guides (some of whom are Ibsen actors) show you around the family home. Ask also about Ibsen theatre performances here or at the tourist office, or check out the programme at the **Theater Ibsen** (☎ 35 90 50 50; www.teateribsen.no; Hesselbergst 2), which is in the town centre, a block back from the harbour.

SLEEPING & EATING

Skien Vandrerhjem (☎ 35 50 48 70; skien.hostel@vandrerhjem.no; Moflatveien 65; dm/s/d Nkr175/425/600) This well-equipped hostel is open year-round and has tidy rooms. Breakfast costs Nkr50 extra.

Thon Hotel Høyers (☎ 35 90 58 00; www.thonhotels.no; Kongensgate 6; s/d from Nkr890/1090) Right next to the harbour, this family-run place is an excellent choice with spacious, light and airy rooms.

Clarion Hotel Bryggeparken (☎ 35 91 21 00; bryggeparken@comfort.choicehotels.no; Langbryggene 7; s/d

THE HEROES OF TELEMAR

In 1933 in the USA it was discovered that 0.02% of all water molecules are 'heavy', meaning that the hydrogen atoms are actually deuterium, an isotope that contains an extra neutron. Heavy water weighs 10% more than normal water, boils at 1.4°C higher and freezes at 4°C higher than ordinary water. Why does that matter? Because such properties are sufficient to stabilise nuclear fission reactions, making heavy water invaluable in the production of an atom bomb.

During WWII in Norway the occupying Germans began building a heavy-water production plant at Vemork, near Rjukan. In response, Allied insurgents mounted Operation Grouse in October 1942 when four Norwegians parachuted into Sognadal, west of Rjukan. They were to be joined a month later by 34 specially trained British saboteurs who would arrive in two gliders at Skoland near Lake Møsvatnet, but one tow plane and its glider crashed into a mountain, and the other glider crashed on landing. All the British survivors were shot by the Germans.

Undeterred, the Norwegian group changed its mission name to Swallow and retreated to Hardangervidda, where they subsisted through the worst of the winter. On 16 February 1943 a new British-trained group called Gunnerside landed on Hardangervidda. Unfortunately a blizzard was raging and they wound up a long 30km march from their intended drop site. By the evening of 27 February the saboteurs were holed up at Fjøsbudalen, north of Vemork, waiting to strike. After descending the steep mountainside along the now-famous Sabotørruta (Saboteurs' Route), they crossed the gorge to the heavy-water plant, wire-clipped the perimeter fence and planted the explosives, which largely destroyed the facility. Some of the saboteurs retreated on skis to Hardangervidda then fled into neutral Sweden, while the rest remained on the plateau, successfully avoiding capture.

The plant was rebuilt by the Germans, but on 16 November 1943, 140 US planes bombed Vemork, killing 20 Norwegians in the process. The Germans abandoned any hopes of producing heavy water in Norway and decided to shift their remaining stocks to Germany. On 19 February 1944, the night before the ferry carrying the supplies was due to sail ferry across the lake Tinnsjø, the saboteurs placed a timed charge on the boat. The following night, the entire project was literally blown out of the water.

In 1965 this intriguing story was made into the dramatic (albeit historically inaccurate) film *The Heroes of Telemark*, starring Kirk Douglas.

TINN MUSEUM

This quiet little **folk museum** (☎ 35 09 22 33; Sam Eydesgt 299; adult/child Nkr40/20, combined ticket with Norwegian Industrial Workers Museum Nkr85/40; 🕒 noon-6pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, noon-3pm Mon-Fri May-mid-Jun & mid-end-Aug), at the eastern end of town, traces rural Norwegian architecture from the 11th century to the early 1900s. Highlights include doorways of stave churches and old textiles.

RJUKANFOSSEN

Believed to be the highest **waterfall** in the world in the 18th century (Angel Falls in Venezuela now has that claim), the 104m-high Rjukanfossen is still a spectacular sight, even if most of the water has been diverted to drive the Vemork power station. To get the best view, take the Rv37 heading west and park just before the tunnel 9.5km west of town; a 200m walk leads to a fine viewpoint.

Activities

For more on hiking and cycling, see p157.

BUNGEE JUMPING

Described as Norway's highest land-based **bungee jump** (Nkr490; 🕒 11am-1pm Sat & Sun, 5-6pm Tue & Thu Jul-Sep, 11am-1pm Sat mid-May-Jun), this 84m leap into the canyon from the bridge leading to the Norwegian Industrial Workers' Museum is Rjukan's highest adrenaline rush. Book through the tourist office.

RAIL-BIKING

There's a high novelty value to taking a rail-tricycle (known as *dressin* or tricycles on bogies) for the 10km-long trip along the disused rail line between Lake Tinnsjø and Rjukan. Rental costs Nkr130 for the minimum two hours, including insurance. It's only possible in summer and reservations can be made on ☎ 45 48 38 99.

SKIING

The **tourist office** (☎ 35 09 14 22; www.gaustablikk.no) has a wealth of information for winter-sports enthusiasts, with its *Gaustablikk Skisenter* brochure providing the definitive guide to all things white and powdery.

Sleeping

Rjukan's town centre has a few places to stay, but there are more choices up in the Gaustablikk area.

RJUKAN & WEST

Rjukan Gjestegård (☎ 35 08 06 50; www.rgg.no in Norwegian; Birkelandsgata 2; dm Nkr195, s/d with shared bathroom Nkr305/485) This central guesthouse occupies the buildings of the old youth hostel. The rooms here are simple but fine enough, there's a guest kitchen and the location is good if you want to be in town. Breakfast costs Nkr60.

Rjukan Hytteby & Kro (☎ 35 09 01 22; www.rjukan-hytteby.no; Brogata 9; 2-/4-/6-bed cabins Nkr690/890/990, motel s/d Nkr690/790) Probably the best choice in town, Rjukan Hytteby & Kro sits in a pretty spot on the river bank and has simple, tidy huts that seek to emulate the early-20th-century hydroelectric workers' cabins. The motel rooms have less character but are fine.

Park Hotell (☎ 35 08 21 88; www.parkhotell-rjukan.no in Norwegian; Sam Eydes gate 67; s Nkr645-790, d Nkr845-940, junior ste Nkr995-1095) Obviously once a moderately grand old hotel, the Park Hotell desperately needs an overhaul. The tired rooms are a tad musty. On the plus side, you are in the town centre.

Krokan Turisthytte (☎ 35 09 51 31; fax 35 09 01 90; near Rv37; 4-bed cabins Nkr400-600) Around 10km west of Rjukan, this historic place was built in 1869 as DNT's first hut. You're housed in museum-like 16th-century log cabins and it serves traditional meals. Ring ahead as there's not always someone here.

Rauland Høgfjellshotell (☎ 35 06 31 00; www.rauland.no in Norwegian; Rv37; s Nkr750-1140, d Nkr1380-1780; 🕒 Jun-Apr; 🚗) Around 45km west of Rjukan, this excellent mountain hotel promises sweeping views, hints of traditional Telemark decoration, an indoor swimming pool and an excellent spa centre. It's booked out well in advance in winter as it opens onto hundreds of kilometres of ski runs.

GAUSTABLIKK

A couple of places at the lake Kvitåvatn, off the Fv651 and 10km from town, provide a front-row view of Gausta and easy access to the Skipsfjell/Gaustablikk ski area; you'll need a car for access. For the busy winter season, contact **Gausta Booking** (☎ 45 48 51 51; www.gaustabooking.com) which can help track down a spare hut.

Rjukan Vandrerhjem (☎ 35 09 20 40; www.kvitaa.vatn.dk; Gaustablikk; dm Nkr260, s/d with shared bathroom Nkr380/560) This youth hostel offers simple accommodation in a cosy pine lodge with six bunks per room in huts.

HIKING & CYCLING FROM RJUKAN

To get an idea of what's possible, visit the tourist office to pick up the free *Rjukan – Cycling & Hiking Guide*, which has 23 route suggestions.

Gausta

From the summit of beautiful Gausta (1881m) you can see a remarkable one-sixth of Norway on a clear day. The popular two- to three-hour, 4km hiking track leads from the trailhead of Stavros (15km southeast of Rjukan) up to DNT's **Gaustahytta** (1830m), next to the rather ugly NATO radio tower. The summit is reached by walking along the rocky ridge for a further half-hour. A 13km road link, but unfortunately no public transport, runs from the far eastern end of Rjukan to Stavros (altitude 1173m) at lake Heddersvann. **Taxis** (☎ 35 09 14 00) charge around Nkr300 one-way. Allow all day for the hike, which leaves plenty of time for exploring the summit. The tourist office distributes a map of the Fv651, but the *Turkart Gausta Området* is a better option and is available for Nkr50.

More difficult, three- to four-hour routes to the summit also run from Rjukan itself and from the Norwegian Industrial Workers' Museum (p155).

If you can't make the hike, the summer Gaustabanen service (p155) takes you almost to Gaustahytta.

Hardangervidda

From Gvepseborg, the summit of the Krossobanen cable car, good walking or cycling tracks strike out onto the Hardangervidda plateau (p188), home to Europe's largest herd of wild reindeer. The main, eight-hour route, which can also be used by cyclists, leads north nine hours to **Kalhovd Turisthytte** (☎ 35 09 05 10), where you can either catch a bus or hike nine hours down to **Mogen Turisthytte** (☎ 35 07 41 15), where you can catch the Mosvatn ferry (Nkr190) back to Skinnarbu, west of Rjukan on Rv37; ferry timetables are available from the Rjukan tourist office. For those seeking greater guidance, the tourist office organises guided expeditions for hikers and cyclists (adults Nkr700 to Nkr1300, children Nkr400 to Nkr700). Serious hikers can also strike out north from Kalhovd, deep into the high Hardangervidda.

Alternatively you can follow the marked route which begins above Rjukan Fjellstue, around 10km west of Rjukan and just north of the Rv37. This historic track follows the Sabotørruta (Saboteurs' Route), the path taken by the members of the Norwegian Resistance during WWII (see the boxed text, p153). From late June until mid-August, the tourist office can also arrange guided hikes along this route.

The best map to use for any of these hikes is Statens Kartverk's *Hardangervidda Øst*, at a scale of 1:100,000 and available from the tourist office (Nkr125).

our pick **Gaustablikk Høgfjellshotell** (☎ 35 09 14 22; www.gaustablikk.no; s/d from Nkr840/950, half-board from Nkr940/1480) With a prime location overlooking the lake and mountain, this expansive mountain lodge is one of Norway's better mountain hotels. The rooms are quite modern and many have lovely views of Gausta, while the evening buffet dinner is a lavish affair. Geared towards a winter skiing crowd (prices rise considerably in winter when advance reservations are necessary), it's also a great place in summer. Half-board rates (highly recommended) are only available for stays of two nights or more; otherwise book through Fjord Pass for a cheaper one-night rate.

Eating

Kinokafeen (☎ 40 85 60 48; Storstulgate 1; lunch specials Nkr89-120, dinner mains Nkr159-279; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Kinokafeen, at the cinema, has a pleasant ambience. The lunch dishes (pasta and steaks) are the best value.

Roberto Gatekjokken (off Sam Eydes; snacks from Nkr35; 🕒 lunch & dinner) A cut above most Norwegian roadside kiosks, this well-run little place offers fish and chips (Nkr45), hamburgers (Nkr41 to Nkr116), steak sandwiches (Nkr47) and taco wraps (Nkr35). Eat at the shady adjacent tables.

Rjukan Hytteby & Kro (☎ 35 09 01 22; Brogata 9; pizzas from Nkr130, mains Nkr59-159) Offering simple but hearty cafeteria-style food, this place

along the river does everything from pizzas to baked potatoes.

Gaustablikk Høyfjellshotell (☎ 35 09 14 22; lunch specials from Nkr69, dinner buffet Nkr335; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Even if you're not staying here, this mountain hotel's enormous buffet is worth the trip up the mountain.

Getting There & Around

A daily express bus connects Rjukan to Oslo (Nkr280, three hours) via Kongsberg (Nkr177, two hours). More regular buses head to Notodden from where there are better connections.

Rjukan's linear distances will seem intimidating, but the local Bybuss runs from Vemork to the eastern end of the valley. Bike hire at the tourist office costs Nkr50/200 per hour/day.

SELJORD

pop 2933

Lakeside Seljord is known mainly as the home of Selma the Serpent, the Nessie-type monster that inhabits the depths of the lake Seljordvatn (see the boxed text, below). Other creatures of legend call the nearby hills home and hikers can also seek out the feuding troll women, Ljose-Signe, Glima and Tårån; personally we haven't seen them but locals assured us that they're there. Seljord was also the inspiration

for some of Norway's best-known folk legends, including Asbjørnsen and Moe's *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, known the world over.

The **tourist office** (☎ 35 06 59 88; www.seljordpor.talen.no; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 8am-8.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) has lots of local information and revels in good troll stories.

Sights

The charming Romanesque stone **church** (admission free; 🕒 11am-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug) was built in the 12th century in honour of St Olav; it's at the northern end of town. In the grounds, between the church and the churchyard wall, are two impressions reputedly made by two mountain trolls who were so upset by the encroachment of Christianity that they pummelled the site with boulders.

Festivals & Events

On the second weekend of September, Seljord holds the **Dyrsku'n Festival**, which started in 1866 and is now Norway's largest traditional market and cattle show, attracting 60,000 visitors.

Sleeping & Eating

Seljord Camping og Badeplass (☎ 35 05 04 71; www.seljordcamping.no; tent sites Nkr150, cabins Nkr400-1200) This pleasant camp site beside the lake is the

dock for monster boats on Seljordvatn (fares vary with the number of passengers) and it has a telescope to help you spot Selma.

Seljord Hotel (☎ 35 06 40 00; www.seljordhotel.no in Norwegian; s/d Nkr900/1100, starters Nkr90-105, mains Nkr225-275) This lovely old wooden hotel dates back to 1858 and is one of the nicest hotels in this part of Norway. Rooms have period touches and are individually named, each with its own story. It gets points also for having the same rates all year, which is very unusual in Norway. The restaurant is Seljord's best, with gourmet local cuisines – there are five meat or fish mains to choose from and each is a work of art. It also does cheaper lunch dishes.

Sjøormkroa (☎ 35 05 05 02; mains Nkr89-149) You'll get a standard cafeteria meals (hamburgers, Wiener schnitzels and the like) in this odd serpent-shaped building, on the E134 next to the lake.

Getting There & Away

Nor-Way Bussekspress (Haukeliekspressen) buses connect Seljord with Notodden (Nkr132, 1½ hours) and Oslo (Nkr296, 3¼ hours) up to four times daily.

SETESDALEN

The forested hillsides and lake-filled mountain valleys of Setesdalen, one of Norway's most traditional and conservative regions, remain little frequented by travellers, although they are becoming increasingly popular with outdoor enthusiasts.

Evje

pop 3315

The riverside town of Evje, surrounded by forests and rolling hills, serves as the southern gateway to Setesdalen. It's famous among ge-

ologists for the variety of rocks found here – a mineral park, nickel mine and the chance to prospect for your own rocks are among Evje's primary attractions. Quiet little Evje is also a first-class base for white-water rafting and other outdoor activities.

The **information centre** (☎ 37 93 14 00; www.setesdal.com; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 10am-noon Mon-Fri rest-of-year) occupies the same old log building as the bus terminal. Ask also about permits for mineral prospecting.

SIGHTS

Budding geologists will find plenty to get excited about in Evje. First stop should be the small **Evje Og Hornnes Museum** (☎ 37 93 07 94; adult/child/student/family Nkr20/free/15/40; 🕒 11am-4pm mid-Jun-late Aug), 2km west of town and across the river in Fennefoss. Displays include more than a hundred different types of mineral found in the nearby hills, as well as exhibits on local nickel mining and rural life in Setesdalen.

For displays of local and worldwide minerals, the well-run **Setesdal Mineral Park** (☎ 37 93 13 10; www.mineralparken.no; Hornnes; adult/child Nkr85/50; 🕒 10am-4pm mid-May-Oct) is every rock collector's dream come true, with a wonderful world of colour and quartz, with many items for sale. It's about 10km south of Evje.

A summer visit to **Flåt Nikkelgruve** (Flåt Nickel Mine; ☎ 37 93 03 71; www.flaatgruve.com; adult/child/family Nkr80/50/210; 🕒 guided tours 1pm Jul-early Aug), once Europe's largest nickel mine with a shaft 440m deep, takes you deep into the earth on a fascinating underground tour that's not for the claustrophobic. Temperatures down there drop to 5°C so wear warm clothes. It's 3.3km off the Rv9; the turn-off is around 2km north of Evje.

SELMA THE SERPENT

The first evidence of Selma the Serpent's existence dates back to 1750, when Gunleik Andersson-Verpe of nearby Bø was 'attacked by a sea horse' while rowing across the lake. Nearly every summer since (Selma, like Norwegians, comes out of her shell in summer), witnesses have sighted the fins and humps of this fast-moving lake creature, which reportedly measures the size of a large log, or slightly bigger. Some have described it as eel-like, while others have likened it to a snail, a lizard or a crocodile and have reported lengths of 25m, 30m and even 50m. Amateur videos filmed in 1988 and 1993 reveal a series of humps in the water, but their grainy nature renders the evidence deliciously inconclusive. Researchers have suggested that the lake is too small to support creatures more than about 7m long.

As with Scotland's famous Nessie, Selma has fuelled local folklore and drawn tourists to search the surface of the deep, pine-rimmed lake Seljordvatn (14km long, 2km wide and 157m deep) for evidence. In 1977 and again in 1988, Swedish freelance journalist Jan-Ove Sundberg scanned the lake with sonar equipment, underwater cameras and even a mini-submarine and detected several large objects moving in unison, then separating in several directions. According to Sundberg, 'The serpent does not fit any species known to humanity. It has several qualities not seen before, such as travelling on the surface at high speed and moving vertically up and down. It shows a back or a head or a neck or all three for long periods above the surface and travels very fast, maybe up to 25 knots.'

When we asked one local whether he believed in Selma's existence, he replied, 'I have never seen her, but I believe she exists and my children won't swim in the lake.' We didn't see her either, but...

ENERGETIC IN EVJE

TrollActiv (☎ 37 93 11 77; www.troll-mountain.no; 🕒 9am-8pm Apr-Oct), around 6km north of Evje, is the centre of most of Evje's high-energy thrills. White-water rafting (per person Nkr400) is its forte, but it also organises riverboarding (Nkr400), rock-climbing courses (Nkr750), river kayaking (Nkr750), paintball (Nkr550), waterskiing (Nkr350) and more sedate pastimes that include fishing safaris (Nkr250) and nightly beaver and elk safaris (adult/child/family Nkr260/210/820). There's also a climbing wall (per hour Nkr200), family rafting trips (per person Nkr350) and kids' activities packages that include climbing, archery and canoeing (Nkr250). As if that weren't enough, it also rents out canoes (Nkr300), inline skates (Nkr150) and mountain bikes (Nkr300).

Viking Adventures Norway (☎ 37 71 00 95; www.raftingsenter.no), in town, offers most of the same activities for similar prices.

Reached via the same road as the nickel mine, **Evje Mineralsti** covers five small mines for those who aren't satisfied by rocks found by other people. Digging for your own requires a **permit** (adult/child/family Nkr40/70/140), which is available at the site or, sometimes, from the information centre in town.

SLEEPING & EATING

Odden Camping (☎ 37 93 06 03; www.odden camping .setesdal.com; tent sites without/with car Nkr70/110 plus per adult/child Nkr10/5, caravan sites Nkr120, 2-8-bed huts Nkr300-1000) This large, recommended camp site is extremely well run and can be found in a postcard setting by the water just 200m south of town. It can get crowded in summer.

Neset Camping (☎ 37 93 42 55; www.neset.no in Norwegian; tent sites from Nkr150 plus per person Nkr10, 4-8 bed cabins Nkr400-800) Also in a picturesque lakeside spot, Neset Camping is 13km north of Evje.

TrollActiv (Evje Vandrerhjem; ☎ 37 93 11 77; www.troll -mountain.no; tent sites/tepees per person Nkr60/90, caravan sites Nkr120, dm/d Nkr150/410; 📄) This energetic activities centre (p159) doubles as Evje's youth hostel, 6km north of town. It's modern and well run and the place to be if you're planning any one of the many activities on offer.

Hotel Dölen (☎ 37 93 02 00; www.hoteldolen.no; Evje; s/d from Nkr695/995, mains Nkr129-235; 📄) Last time we were here, we just couldn't bring ourselves to include this place, Setesdalen's oldest hotel, because the rooms were so run-down. Thankfully, Monika and the wonderfully named Roar took over and are slowly overhauling the hotel. The newly renovated rooms have an old-world charm, while those yet to be renovated are all about tired 1970s décor; there's free wireless throughout. The restaurant is possibly Evje's best, with dishes such as Arctic trout (Nkr147), reindeer heart (Nkr85) and 'reindeer à la Rudolph' (Nkr155); it also has a popular Sunday buffet (Nkr175) in summer. The lakeside terrace is lovely, while Roar, a former country musician, sings in the bar on some weekend nights.

Revsnes Hotell (☎ 37 93 46 50; www.revsnes hotell.no; Byglandsfjord; s/d from Nkr795/995, 3-course dinner Nkr225; 📄) Still Evje's best hotel, the Revsnes is 12km north of town by the lovely lake Byglandsfjorden. The rooms are large and modern, and most have wonderful big windows overlooking the water. It's also a family-run place and you'll be made to feel welcome.

Pernille Cafeteria (☎ 37 93 00 69; mains Nkr99-139; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4.30pm Sat, 10am-7pm Sun) Right in the heart of Evje, this upstairs place is popular with locals although the menu is not Norway's most inspirational. Expect burgers and Bolognese alongside a few Norwegian dishes.

Dragon Inn (☎ 37 93 09 19; starters from Nkr45, mains Nkr105-159; 🕒 3-9pm Tue-Thu, 3-10pm Fri & Sat, 1-9pm Sun) Just south of the centre, the Dragon Inn serves reasonable Chinese specialities.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nor-Way Bussekspress buses that travel between Kristiansand (Nkr110, one hour) and Haukeligrend (Nkr263, three hours) run via Evje at least once daily. If you're continuing on to Bergen, change at Haukeligrend. Heading north from Evje, car drivers will be stung with a Nkr30 toll that pisses us off every time we pass.

Setesdalsmuseet

This fine collection of folk **museums** (☎ 37 93 03 03; adult/child/family Nkr30/free/60; 🕒 11am-5pm mid-end Jun & Aug, 10am-6pm Jul) along Rv9 is a good way to break up your journey through Setesdalen.

Coming from the south, Rysstad's main **Setesdalsmuseet** is a fine, refurbished exhibition space displaying period interiors and cultural artefacts. Around 10km further north is **Tveitetunet** (Valle), a log farm with a storehouse dating from 1645. Best of all is **Rygnestadtunet**, 9km north of Valle, where the farm has a unique three-storey storehouse (from 1590) and an extraordinary collection of 15th-century painted textiles. Local legend has its owner as Evil Åsmund, who served as a mercenary around Europe and brought back looted weapons and artwork from his travels. Staff may be dressed in traditional costume.

Bykle pop 902

The distinctive log-built **Bykle Kirkje** (☎ 37 93 81 01; admission Nkr20; 🕒 11am-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug) is one of the smallest churches in Norway and all the more delightful because of it, with painted stalls, altar and organ. The building and altar date from 1619; roses on the front of the galleries and traditional rose paintings on the wall were added in the 1820s, although some of the paintings date back to the 15th century.

There's also a lovely signpost-guided **walk** above the Otra River, 5km south of town. The route, which takes about 30 minutes, dates from at least 1770 and was once the main route through Setesdalen.

Hovden pop 450

Watching over the northern end of Setesdalen, Hovden is a winter ski resort, although there are some activities during summer. The **Hovdenferie** (☎ 37 93 93 70; www.hovden.com; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun) provides a full run-down on what's possible, including **rafting** (from Nkr375), **canyon walks** (Nkr450), **elk safaris** (adult/child Nkr300/200) and **helicopter rides** (from Nkr450).

In summer, for fine views you can reach the summit of **Mt Nos** (1176m) by taking the **chairlift** (adult/child Nkr80/60; 🕒 10.30am-2pm Jul, 10.30am-2pm Wed & Sat Aug, 10.30am-2pm Sat Sep).

Hovdenferie's **Sentralbooking** (☎ 37 93 93 75; post@hovden.com) service can connect you with the dozens of nearby ski huts, flats, chalets and hotels that offer good-value deals. **Hovden Fjellstoge & Vandrerhjem** (☎ 37 93 95 43; www.hovdenfjellstoge.no in Norwegian; dm/s/d incl breakfast Nkr250/450/590, meals around Nkr100) is housed in a traditional-style wooden building with a grass roof, while **Quality Hovden Høyfjellshotell** (☎ 37 93 88 00; www.hovdenhotell.no, in Norwegian; s/d

from Nkr850/1050), at the top end of the town, is Hovden's finest.

In addition to the hotels, you'll find a range of meal options at the **Furumo Kafé** (☎ 37 93 97 72).

The daily Nor-Way Bussekspress bus between Kristiansand (Nkr332, 3¼ hours) and Haukeligrend passes through Hovden; from the latter there are connections to Bergen.

SIRDAL

Sirdal is the access route to the scenic descent through 27 hairpin bends to Lysebotn (p231). From the well-appointed DNT hut at **Ådneram**, at the top of Sirdal, hikers can reach Lysebotn in nine hours (follow the road for the last 4km). The road is open only from mid-June to mid-September.

For tourist information and details of wilderness tours, horse riding and dog-sledging, contact **Sirdalsferie** (☎ 38 37 78 00; www.sirdalsferie .com; Tjørhom).

Sinnes Fjellstue (☎ 38 37 11 21; www.sinnes-fjellstue .no in Norwegian; Sinnes; s/d from Nkr575/775) is a tidy mountain lodge offering accommodation in summer time.

The Nor-Way Bussekspress Suleskar-ekspressen connects Stavanger (Nkr187, two hours) and Oslo (Nkr539, 7½ hours) via Fidjeland, 7km south of Ådneram, daily from June to September.

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