

The Western Fjords



The western fjords slit deeply into the two administrative regions of Sogn og Fjordane and, to its north, Møre og Romsdal. *National Geographic Traveler* magazine recently selected the Norwegian fjords as the world's best travel destination, ahead of other dream lands, such as the Alps, the Galapagos Islands, Australia's Great Barrier Reef and other comparable natural wonders, such as the fretted coastlines of Chile and New Zealand. It's easy to see why.

Scoured and gouged by ancient glaciers, of which a few vestigial traces still groan and creak, these formidable, deep, sea-drowned valleys are pincered by almost impossibly rugged terrain. Amazingly, this hasn't deterred Norwegians from settling and farming their slopes and heights for thousands of years. You'll find a confounding number of things to see and do, in the water, up the mountains or just on the level.

Ferries are fun. When planning your trip, bear in mind that these reliable work horses don't just lop off huge detours around a fjord; they're also an enjoyable part of the journey in their own right, offering great and otherwise inaccessible panoramas of the coastline around you.

Although you'll be hard pressed to find more than a few flat patches, the western fjords also make for great hiking country, whether in a guided group over one of the glaciers that are such a feature of the region or on one of the signed trails. And if, after so much fresh air and wide open space, you begin to crave a little small-town sophistication, drop into the charming coastal settlement of Ålesund.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cruise between Geiranger and Hellesylt past the daunting cliffs of **Geirangerfjord** (p259)
- Ride the dramatic **Flåmsbana railway** (p234) between wild Hardangervidda and Flåm by gentle Aurlandsfjorden
- Buck over the spectacular **Trollstigen route** (p256) between Åndalsnes and Valldal
- Get your boots damp on but a tiny tongue of the vast **Jostedalbreen icecap** (p244)
- Savour Art Nouveau architecture in the charming town of **Ålesund** (p262)
- Jazz it up at the **Molde Jazz Festival** (p268)



■ POPULATION: 351,600

■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: LODALSKÅPA (2083M)

SOGNEFJORDEN

Sognefjorden, the world's longest (203km) and Norway's deepest (1308m) fjord, cuts a deep slash across the map of western Norway. In places, sheer walls rise more than 1000m above the water while elsewhere a gentler shoreline supports farms, orchards and villages. The broad, main waterway is impressive but by cruising into its narrower arms, such as the deep and lovely Nærøfjord to Gudvangen, you'll see idyllic views of abrupt cliff faces and cascading waterfalls.

For a good general website, consult www.sognefjord.no. For info on the towns of Flåm, Aurland and Lærdal, www.alr.no is a well-structured website.

Getting There & Away

Fjord1 (☎ 55 90 70 70; www.fjord1.no/fylkesbaatane) operates a daily express boat between Bergen and both Flåm (Nkr605, 5½ hours) and Sogndal (Nkr525, 4¾ hours), stopping along the way at 10 small towns including Vik (Nkr410, 3½ hours) and Balestrand (Nkr440, 3¾ hours). Several local ferries also link Sognefjord towns, and there's an extensive, if infrequent, bus network.

FLÅM

pop 550

Flåm, at the head of Aurlandsfjorden, sits in a truly spectacular setting. As a stop on the popular 'Norway in a Nutshell' tour, this tiny village receives over 500,000, mainly fleeting, visitors every year. It has its charm but its tacky side too; should you so wish, you can pick up a pair of knickers decorated with the Norwegian flag or of a set of plastic elk antlers.

The **tourist office** (☎ 57 63 33 13; www.alr.no; ☎ 8.30am-4pm & 4.30-8pm Jun-Aug, 8.30am-4pm May & Sep) is within the train station, where you'll also find four internet points.

Sights & Activities

NORWAY IN A NUTSHELL

Although most visitors do 'Norway in a Nutshell' from either Oslo or Bergen (see p418), you can do a miniversion (adult/child Nkr530/265). This circular route from Flåm – boat to Gudvangen, bus to Voss, train to Myrdal, then train again down the spectacular Flåmsbana railway to Flåm – is truly the kernel within the nutshell and takes in all the most dramatic elements.

FLÅMSBANA RAILWAY

The 20km **Flåmsbana railway** (☎ 57 63 21 00; www.flaamsbana.no; adult/child one way Nkr190/95, return Nkr290/190), an engineering wonder, hauls itself up 864m of altitude gain through 20 tunnels at a gradient of 1:18 up to Myrdal, on the bleak, treeless Hardangervidda plateau, past thundering waterfalls (there's a photo stop at awesome Kjosfossen). It runs year-round with up to 10 departures daily in summer.

Preface your trip with a brief visit to the **Flåmsbana museum** (☎ 57 63 23 10; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm). It's not just about railways; it has fascinating photos of construction gangs and life in and around Flåm before the car era.

BOATING & CANOEING

To get out and about on the fjord, pass by Flåm Marina & Apartement, which hires out rowing boats and canoes (Nkr50 per hour) and motorboats (from Nkr150 per hour plus fuel).

Njord (☎ 91 32 66 28; www.fjordpaddlenorway.com) does a variety of sea-kayaking trips from Flåm, ranging from a two-hour induction (Nkr350) to a three-day hiking and kayaking sortie (Nkr2650).

HIKING & CYCLING

The tourist office produces an easy-to-interpret free sheet of local walks, varying from 45 minutes to five hours, with routes superimposed upon a couple of aerial photographs.

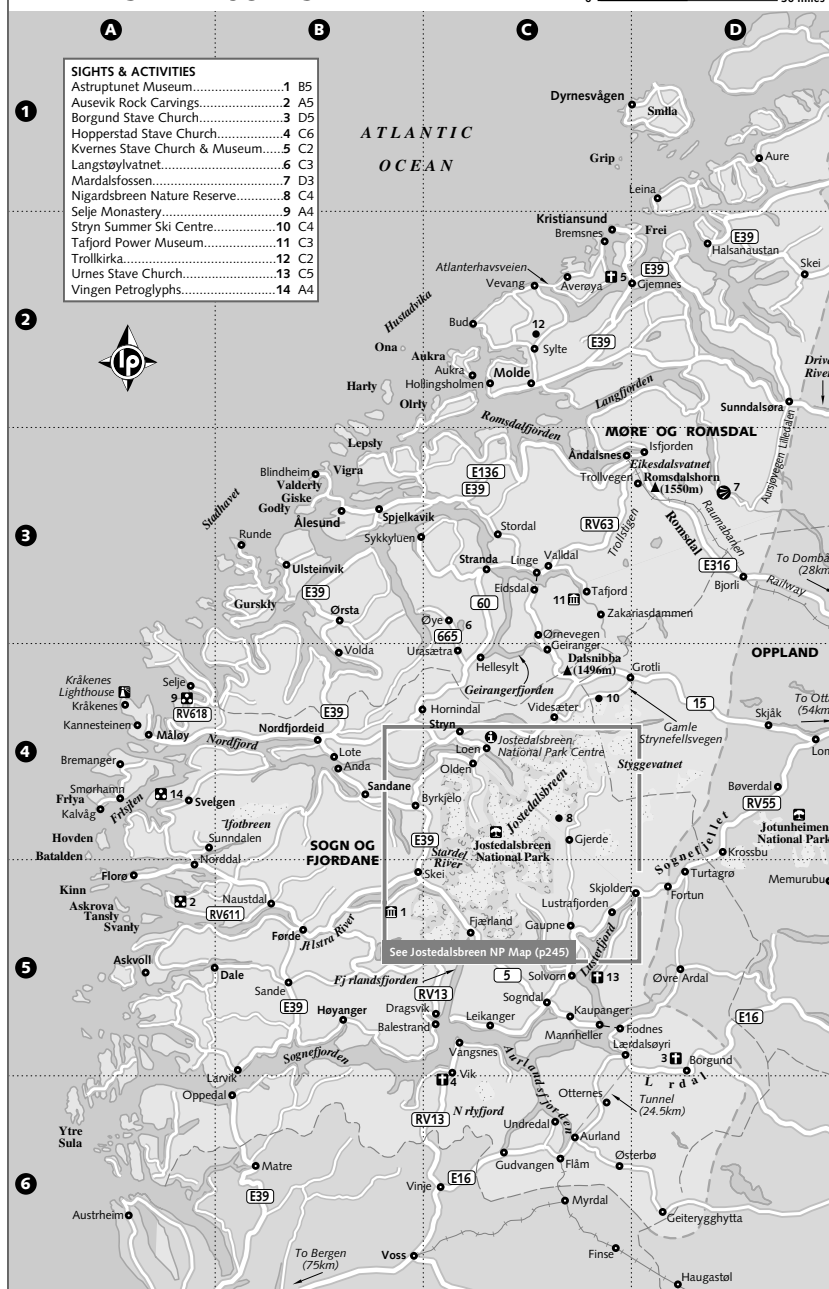
To meander along the shoreline or for something more strenuous, you can rent a bike from the tourist office (Nkr30/175 per hour/day) or Heimly Pensjonat (Nkr50/200 per hour/day).

For an exhilarating day ride, attack the **Rallarvegen**, the service road used by the navies who constructed the railway that climbs to Myrdal and beyond. Nowadays a popular 80km cycle route, it begins on the main line at Haugastøl (988m), then heads northwest following the tracks via Finse (26km), at 1222m Norway's highest station, to Myrdal (62km), from where it drops to Flåm (80km) and fjord level in tandem with the Flåmsbana line. It's usually open from mid-July to September.

Sleeping

Flåm Camping & Youth Hostel (☎ 57 63 21 21; www.flaam-camping.no; camp sites Nkr85-150, dm Nkr145, s/d from Nkr300/450, cabins Nkr525-825; ☎ May-Sep) This friendly camp site and hostel has good

THE WESTERN FJORDS



facilities and is only a few minutes' walk from the station.

Flåm Marina & Apartement (☎ 57 63 35 55, www.flammarina.no; d Nkr955) The 10 self-catering apartments of this modern block, right at the water's edge, offer magnificent views down the length of the fjord, as does the open-air terrace opening from its small bar.

Heimly Pensjonat (☎ 57 63 23 00; www.heimly.no; s/d ind breakfast from Nkr795/980) Overlooking the water on the fringe of the village and away from all the port hubbub, this place has straightforward rooms with a magnificent view along the fjord.

Fretheim Hotel (☎ 57 63 63 00; www.fretheim-hotel.no; s/d Nkr1195/1580; ☒ Feb–mid-Dec; ☑) Haunt of the English aristocracy in the 19th century (they came for the fishin'), the vast, yet at the same time intimate and welcoming Fretheim is as much sports and social centre as hotel. It has its own fishing reach (you can hire equipment during the salmon and sea trout run in July and August) and will arrange and advise on walking and bike trips. Exertions over, the 3rd-floor bar is a pleasant place to relax, while the pub sometimes has live entertainment.

Eating & Drinking

Togrestauranten (☎ 57 63 21 55; mains Nkr95–125) This novel café and restaurant, housed in a pair of old wooden railway carriages, offers a couple of traditional Norwegian dishes, snacks and leafy salads.

our pick Restaurant Arven (Fretheim Hotel; mains Nkr260–290) At the Fretheim, the chefs salt and smoke their own meat and there's an 'ecological and local' menu, sourced from the local agricultural college.

Looking for all the world like a stave church, recently established **Ægir Brewery** (Ægir Bryggeri; ☎ 57 63 20 60; ☒ core hrs noon–midnight Jun–Aug, 3pm–midnight May & Sep, Fri & Sat only rest-of-year) offers five different kinds of beer on draught, all brewed on the spot.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

From Flåm, boats head out to towns around Sognefjorden. The most scenic trip from Flåm is the passenger ferry up Nærøyfjord to Gudvangen (single/return Nkr215/294) via Aurland (Nkr68, 15 minutes), which leaves at 3.10pm year-round and up to five times daily mid-June to mid-August. At Gudvangen, a connecting bus takes you on to Voss, where

you can pick up the train for Bergen or Oslo. The tourist office sells all ferry tickets, plus the ferry-bus combination from Flåm to Voss (Nkr291).

There's at least one daily express boat between Flåm and Bergen (Nkr605, 5½ hours) via Balestrand (Nkr210, 1¼ hours).

BUS

Up to seven daily local buses connect Flåm to Gudvangen (Nkr43, 20 minutes) and Aurland (Nkr29, 15 minutes) but you won't see much of the spectacular scenery; they mostly run inside particularly long tunnels. Up to six express buses daily connect Flåm with Sogndal (Nkr120, 1¼ hours) via Lærdalsøyri (also known as Lærdal; Nkr81, 45 minutes) and with Bergen (Nkr270, three hours).

TRAIN

Flåm is the only Sognefjorden village with a rail link, via the magnificent Flåmsbana railway (p234). There are train connections to Oslo and Bergen at Myrdal.

UNDREDAL

pop human 120, goats 500

Undredal, tucked mid-way between Flåm and Gudvangen, is a truly lovely little village, its pleasures enhanced – and its traditional quality sustained – because you need to make that bit of extra effort to get there.

The tiny, barrel-vaulted **village church** (adult/child Nkr30/free; ☒ core hrs noon–5pm mid-May–mid-Sep), originally built as a stave church in 1147 and seating 40, is the smallest still-operational house of worship in mainland Scandinavia. Look up at the roof with its charmingly naive roof paintings of angels, Christ on the cross and other biblical figures, surrounded by stylised stars.

Undredal's other claim to fame is its cheeses. Well not exactly fame, as you'll only find them in a few specialised cheese shops and delicatessens within Norway. Around 500 goats freely roam the surrounding grassy slopes and between them provide the milk for around 10 tonnes of cheese per year (work it out: that's a hugely impressive yield per nipple). Farmers from the valley supply the village's two remaining dairies – once there were 10 – which still produce the firm yellow Undredal cheese and its brown, slightly sweet variant, made from the boiled and concentrated whey. You can pick up a hunk of each

at the village shop; it's the light blue building beside the shore.

Undredal is 6.5km north of the E16. The narrow road threads steeply downhill beside a hurtling torrent. If travelling by bus, get off at the eastern end of the 11km tunnel that leads to Gudvangen. By ferry, ask the captain to make the optional stop at Undredal's harbour. Best of all, take the bus out, walk down the spectacular valley along the lightly trafficked road and return by boat (press the switch beside the yellow blinking lamp on the café wall beside the jetty to alert the next passing ferry).

GUDVANGEN & NÆRØYFJORD

Nærøyfjord, its 17km length declared a Unesco world heritage site in 2006, lies west of Flåm. Beside the deep blue fjord (only 250m across at its narrowest point) are towering 1200m-high cliffs, isolated farms, and waterfalls plummeting from the heights. It can easily be visited as a day excursion from Flåm.

Kjelsfossen waterfall, one of the world's 10 longest, tumbles from the southern wall of Nærøydalen valley, above Gudvangen village. Notice too the **avalanche protection scheme** above Gudvangen. The powerful avalanches here typically provide a force of 12 tonnes per sq metre, move at 50m/second and, local legend reckons, can bowl a herd of goats right across the fjord!

A pair of camp sites flank the road, 1.3km from the ferry port: **Gudvangen Camping** (☎ 57 63 39 34; www.visitgudvangen.com; camp sites Nkr140, 2-/4-person cabins from Nkr350/400; ☒ mid-Apr–Oct) and **Vang Camping** (☎ 57 63 39 26; promo@tele2.no; per person/site Nkr15/80, cabins Nkr300–950; ☒ mid-May–mid-Sep). Each is beautifully situated at the base of sheer cliffs.

Gudvangen Fjordtell (☎ 57 63 39 29; www.gudvangen.com; s/d from Nkr780/1180; ☒ May–Sep; ☑) has rooms in a cluster of buildings, both historical and sprucely contemporary, some of which have mini-kitchens. Most original are its 12 Viking rooms; with wooden swords and shields for wall decoration and pelts as bed covers – they teeter just the right side of naff. The restaurant is worth visiting for its gorgeous view down the fjord though the food (mains Nkr85 to Nkr120) is nothing to write postcards home about.

Scenic ferries between Gudvangen and Flåm (one way/return Nkr215/294) via Aurland run up to five times daily. A car ferry runs up

SNØVEGEN

The Snow Road climbs from sea level, twisting precipitously to the high plateau (1309m) that separates Aurland and Lærdalsøyri (Lærdal). This magnificent drive – strictly for summertime (snow banks line the road and tarns are still deep-frozen even in late June) – has been designated as a National Tourist Route so get there quickly before the coaches catch on. Even if you don't opt for the whole route, drive the first 8km from Aurland to the magnificent **observation point**. Projecting out over the fjord way below, pine-clad, simple and striking like the best of Norwegian design, it's almost as impressive as the magnificent panorama itself.

to four times daily to/from Lærdal (car and driver/passenger Nkr210/500; three hours) via Kaupanger. Up to seven daily buses run to/from Flåm (Nkr43, 20 minutes), Aurland (Nkr58, 30 minutes) and Voss (Nkr81, one hour).

AURLAND

pop 600

Peaceful Aurland is so much less hectic and trodden than its neighbour, Flåm. It marks the end of the spectacular Aurlandsdalen hiking route. These days it's also renowned as one end of Lærdalstunnel, the world's longest road tunnel (24.5km long – 6km more than China's Zhongnanshan tunnel, its nearest rival). This essential link in the E16 highway that connects Oslo and Bergen (before its completion, traffic had to ferry-hop between Lærdal and Gudvangen) is a fast alternative to the beautiful but sinuous and seasonal 45km-long **Snøvegen** (☒ Jun–mid-Oct). It's a choice between tunnel vision, speed and convenience set against a sometimes hair-raising ascent that offers inspirational views all the way up and down...

The Aurland **tourist office** (☎ 57 63 33 13; www.alr.no; ☒ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat & Sun Jun–Aug, 8am–3.30pm Mon–Fri rest-of-year) is beside the village church.

Between Flåm and Aurland, and high above the fjord perches the restored hamlet of **Otterens** (adult/child Nkr50/free; ☒ 10am–6pm mid-May–Sep), a complex of 27 restored buildings, the earliest dating from the 17th century. To get full value

from the visit, follow the one-hour guided tour (Nkr20 extra; available in English four times daily) and plan a rest break to lick a locally made organic ice cream or eat a bowl of *rømmegrot*, a rich sour-cream porridge.

Activities

HIKING

The Aurland and Lærdal tourist offices have produced several walker-friendly sheets of local walks, where the route is superimposed upon an aerial photo.

The classic trek down Aurlandsdalen from Geiteryggen to Aurland follows a stream from source to sea as you tramp one of the oldest trading routes between eastern and western Norway. From mid-July, you can start this four-day walk in Finse, on the Oslo–Bergen rail line, with overnight stops at Geiterygghytta, Steinbergdalen and Østerbø. The final section from Østerbø (820m) to Vassbygdi (95m) is the most scenic and makes for a hugely enjoyable day hike (allow six to seven hours).

The lower sections of the walk are usually open between early June and late September. From Vassbygdi (15 minutes) and Østerbø (one hour), buses run to/from Aurland three times daily.

Sleeping & Eating

Lunde Gard & Camping (☎ 57 63 34 12; www.lunde-camping.no; per person/site Nkr30/110, cabins Nkr350-900; ☹ May-Sep) This small camp site nestles agreeably beside a river, 1.2km up a side valley.

Vangsgaarden (☎ 57 63 35 80; www.vangsgaarden.no; d Nkr850, cabins Nkr750-1075; 📍) The complex embraces four 18th-century buildings, six cabins down at sea level and the Duehuset (Dovecot) Café & Pub. Most rooms are furnished in antique style; the dining room, for example, could be your grandmother's parlour.

Aurland Fjordhotell (☎ 57 63 35 05; www.aurland-fjordhotel.com; s/d/tr Nkr1145/1490/1785; 📍) At this friendly 30-room, family-owned hotel, most of the comfortable, well-furnished rooms have fjord views and there's a solarium, steam bath and sauna. To help you sleep, have a shot from the owner's huge collection of brandies and spirits in a couple of display cases beside reception.

Getting There & Away

Buses run up to seven times daily between Aurland and Flåm (Nkr29, 15 minutes) and one to three times daily between Aurland and

Lærdal (Nkr62, 30 minutes). Express buses to/from Bergen (Nkr275, 3¼ hours) call in up to six times daily.

Watch out for the speed cameras in Lærdalstunnelen; they'll certainly have their eye on you...

LÆRDAL

Lærdalsøyri

pop 2150

The village of Lærdalsøyri, usually called simply Lærdal, is where the lovely green dale of the same name (whose fertile lower reaches produce the juiciest of cherries) meets the fjord.

Its **tourist office** (☎ 57 64 12 07; www.alr.no; Øyraplassen 7; ☹ 9am-7pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 9am-4pm rest-of-year) occupies a lovely old clapboard house, once the town's bank, that's set back from the main street.

If you're planning to camp anywhere within the western fjords, this place, which locals claim is Norway's second-driest village, is your spot!

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

To learn all you'd ever want to know about Atlantic salmon and their unique migration and breeding habits, visit the **Wild Salmon Centre** (Norsk Villaks Senter; ☎ 57 66 67 71; www.norsk-villakssenter.no; adult/child Nkr75/40; ☹ 10am-5pm, to 6pm or 7pm May-Sep). You can watch wild salmon and sea trout through viewing windows, see an excellent 20-minute film about the salmon's life cycle and learn to tie flies to increase the odds of you hooking one of your own.

The town makes for pleasant strolling beside well preserved 18th- and 19th-century timber homes, warehouses and fisherfolk's shacks. The tourist office has a free town map that describes the best of them and sets out a walking route. It will also lend you a free audioguide that takes you around the town's Top Eleven spots.

Lærdal Sport og Rekreasjon, which is based at the camp site (see opposite), rents row-

COMBINATION TICKET

To take in the valley's two principal sights, the Wild Salmon Centre and Borgund Stave Church, buy a combination ticket (adult/child/family Nkr115/70/250), which gives admission to both venues.

A FISHY COINCIDENCE

Helene Maristuen, managing director of the Wild Salmon Centre, tells of two bizarre coincidences that led her to mount the museum's most recent addition: an exhibition devoted to 'The English Era'. It commemorates the time when, in the early 20th century, members of the British aristocracy – including the then Prince of Wales – fished the creeks and rivers for giant salmon. Helene says 'I'd been planning to mount something on this theme for quite some time. Then, one day, quite by chance, a colleague put on my desk a copy of *A Valet's Diction*, the diary of an English valet who spent a season in Lærdal in the company of his master, edited with a commentary by his grandson, John Michael Wade. Then some months later, the author's brother, who was visiting our town, left three copies at reception. So I determined to track down the author, invited him over – and he inaugurated our latest permanent exhibition.'

As told to Miles Roddis

ing boats and canoes (Nkr45 per hour), motor boats (from Nkr100) and bikes (from Nkr40/150 per hour/day).

There's free **fishing** in the fjord and the upper reaches of the Lærdal river are good for trout (permits, available from the tourist office, cost Nkr50 per day).

For **hiking**, pick up the tourist office's free leaflet of walks in the area.

SLEEPING & EATING

Lærdal Ferie og Fritidspark (☎ 57 66 66 95; www.laerdalferiepark.com; camp site Nkr140, 2-/3-/4-bed cabins Nkr775/825/875) This camp site, almost at the water's edge, has sweeping views of the fjord. Its newest venture is the adjacent **motel** (s/d Nkr490/550), which has communal self-catering facilities and a common room with a broad picture window that gives a magnificent panorama of the fjord.

Lindstrøm Hotell (☎ 57 66 69 00; www.lindstroem-hotel.no; s Nkr695-845, d Nkr950-1150, all incl breakfast; ☹ May-Sep; 📍) The most charming house of this five-unit complex, these days a protected building, is, alas, no longer used for accommodation. Ask for a room in the gabled building just behind it, constructed in 1899, renovated with all modern conveniences and a great second best. Cosy public areas in the main building (which houses reception) are attractively decorated and furnished in period style.

After the Lindstrøm Hotell, Lærdalsøyri's next best place for eating is the informal **Laksen Pub & Restaurant** (☎ 57 66 86 20; pizzas Nkr140-150, mains Nkr200-240) at the Wild Salmon Centre, which dispenses tempting snacks and sandwiches during the daytime, then morphs into a restaurant from 6pm to 9pm.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

If you're driving south, you have the choice between the world's longest road tunnel linking Aurland and Lærdal or, in summer, climbing up and over the mountain, following the Snøvegen. For details of both, see p237. Express buses run to/from Bergen (Nkr320, 3¼ hours) two to six times daily via the tunnel.

There are four daily car ferries that run to/from Gudvangen (passenger/car Nkr210/500, three hours).

Borgund Stave Church

Some 30km southeast of Lærdalsøyri along the E16, this 12th-century **stave church** (adult/child Nkr65/45; ☹ 8am-8pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 9.30am-5pm May–mid-Jun & mid-Aug–Sep) was raised beside one of the major trade routes between eastern and western Norway. Dedicated to St Andrew, it's one of the best-known, most-photographed – and certainly the best-preserved – of Norway's stave churches. Beside it is the only freestanding medieval wooden bell tower still standing in Norway. Buy your ticket at the visitors centre, which has a worthwhile exhibition (included in the price of your admission) on this peculiarly Norwegian phenomenon. If you enjoy walking, build in time to undertake the two-hour circular hike on ancient paths and tracks that starts and ends at the church.

VIK

pop 1600

On the southern outskirts of the village of Vik is the splendid **Hopperstad stave church** (adult/child Nkr50/free; ☹ 10am-5pm mid-May–mid-Jun & mid-Aug–mid-Sep, 9am-7pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug), about 1km from the centre. Built in 1130 and Norway's second oldest, it escaped demolition by a whisker in

STAVE CHURCHES

Stave churches, so typically Norwegian, are essentially wooden structures with roof-bearing posts (or staves) sunk deep into the earth. The majority of the 28 that survive from around a thousand originals date from the 12th and 13th centuries, although most have been much modified over the centuries.

First, horizontal sills, delineating the structure, were laid out above ground level on a raised stone foundation. On these, the upright, vertical plank walls rested. At each corner a vertical stave post – hence the name of the style – was pounded into the ground to hold together the sill below and a wall plate above.

Most stave church interiors are little more than a small nave and a narrow chancel. In some, nave and chancel combine into a single rectangular space, divided only by a chancel screen. The most elaborate stave church still standing, at **Borgund** (p239), also has a semicircular apse at its eastern end.

Typically, other freestanding posts, spaced about 2m apart and around 1m in from the walls, support the roof of the nave although smaller churches managed with just one central post. All today's stave churches are surrounded by outer walls, creating external galleries or protective passageways. It was these that, together with the use of tar on the roofs as a preservative, helped them to survive.

Interior walls are often painted in elaborate designs, including *rosemaling*, which are traditional rose paintings (for a 'modern' example of the genre, visit the flamboyantly decorated 18th-century church at **Stordal**, p259), and the complex roof lines are frequently embellished with scalloped wooden shingles and Viking-age dragon head finials, rather like those of Thai monasteries. Often, the most intricate decoration comes from the wooden carvings on the support posts, door frames and outer walls (especially at **Urnes**, p243), representing tendrils of stems, vines and leaves. They're frequently entwined with serpents, dragons and other fantasy creatures, thus meshing Norway's proud pagan past with newer Christian themes.

To learn more visit www.stavechurch.org, the website of architect and building historian, Dr Jurgen Jensenius.

the late 19th century. Inside, the original canopy paintings of the elaborately carved bald-equin have preserved their freshness of colour. For an additional Nkr20 you can use the same ticket for the Hove stone church, 1km to the south, which dates from the same era.

BALESTRAND

pop 800

Balestrand sits comfortably beside the fjord, at its rear an impressive mountain backdrop. Genteel and low-key, it has been a tranquil, small-scale holiday resort ever since the 19th century. Its **tourist office** (☎ 57 69 12 55; www.midsogn.com; ☎ 7.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug; 8am–4pm Mon–Fri May–early Jun & mid-Aug–Sep) is opposite the ferry quay.

Sights & Activities

The road running south along the fjord, bordered by apple orchards and farmsteads, sees little motor traffic. Beside it, the **Church of St Olav** (1897) was constructed in the style of a

traditional stave church at the instigation of English expat Margaret Green, who married a local hotel-owner. Should you find it closed, the owner of Midtnes Hotel (see opposite) has the key.

Less than 1km south along the fjord, excavation of two **Viking Age burial mounds** revealed remnants of a boat, two skeletons, jewellery and several weapons (no longer on site). One mound is topped by a statue of legendary **King Bele**, erected by Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II, who was obsessed with Nordic mythology and regularly spent his holidays here prior to WWI (a similar monument, also funded by the Kaiser and honouring Fridtjof, the lover of King Bele's daughter, peers across the fjord from Vangnes).

Near the ferry dock is the **Sognefjord Aquarium** (☎ 57 69 13 03; adult/child Nkr70/35 incl a free hr of canoe or rowing boat hire; ☎ 9am–11.30pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 9.30am–5pm May–mid-Jun & mid-Aug–Sep), which has an interesting audiovisual presentation and plenty of tanks in which saltwater creatures lurk.

HIKING

The 5km circular **Granlia forest nature trail** is a signed loop, beginning just above the Rv55 tunnel. For more suggestions about walks in the area, long and short, buy from the tourist office *Balestrand Turkart* (Nkr70), a good walking map at 1:50,000 with trails marked up.

Sleeping & Eating

Sjøtun Camping (☎ 57 69 12 23; www.sjotun.com; per person/site Nkr25/50, 4-/6-bed cabin Nkr250/320; ☎ Jun–mid-Sep) At this place, a 15-minute walk south along the fjord, you can pitch a tent amid apple trees or rent a rustic cabin.

Vanderhjem Kringsjø (☎ 57 69 13 03; www.kringsjo.no; dm/d incl breakfast Nkr245/740; ☎ mid-Jun–mid-Aug) Balestrand's HI-affiliated hostel, an outdoor activities centre during the school year, is a fine lodge-style place with a restaurant and self-catering facilities.

Midtnes Hotel (☎ 57 69 11 33; www.midtnes.no; s Nkr630–710, d Nkr690–960, all incl breakfast; ☎ year-round; ☎) Beside St Olav's church, this 32-room, family-run place has a breakfast room with great views of the water, an attractive terrace and a lawn that extends down to a jetty, where a rowing boat, free for guests, is moored.

Balestrand Hotell (☎ 57 69 11 38; www.balestrand.com; s Nkr590–665, d Nkr840–990, all incl breakfast; ☎ Jun–Aug; ☎) This summertime-only hotel, also family-run, is a friendly, jolly, intimate place that eschews the tour groups that fill so many beds elsewhere in town. As at the Midtnes, it's well worth paying that little extra for inspirational views over the fjord.

our pick **Kvikne's Hotel** (☎ 57 69 42 00; www.kvikne.no; s/d from Nkr1045/1590; ☎ May–Sep; ☎) The majestic pale-yellow, timber-built Kvikne's Hotel, on the point just south of the ferry landing, has lashings of mid-19th-century luxury, including exquisite antiques in its public areas. The newer building (whose rooms are comfortable to a fault) is a grotesque concrete pile by comparison. The hotel's Balholm Bar og Bistro is a reliable place for snacks and light meals. For a gastronomic delight, choose the main restaurant's set menu (Nkr530) or invest Nkr415 in their superb dinner buffet.

Café Galleri (salads Nkr50–70, snacks & sandwiches Nkr32–40) Next door but two to the tourist office, this quaint little place is integrated into a small art gallery. Outside, the tables of its small terrace are adorned with fresh cut flowers.

Getting There & Away

Express boats to/from Bergen (Nkr440, four hours) hurtle off twice daily, Monday to Saturday, and to/from Sogndal (Nkr140, one hour) once daily.

Between May and September, a car ferry departs at 8.05am and noon and follows the narrow Fjærlandsfjorden to Fjærland (one way/return Nkr175/263, 1¼ hours), gateway to the glacial wonderlands of Jostedalbreen. For a great day tour, Nkr480/241 per adult/child will get you a return trip on the ferry, bus to the glacier museum, museum admission and a visit to the glacier itself. See p245 for more details.

Express buses link Balestrand and Sogndal (Nkr86, 1¼ hours, three daily).

The scenic Gaularfjellsvegen (Rv13) is an exciting drive to Førde, on Førdefjord, negotiating hairpin bends and skirting Norway's greatest concentration of roadside waterfalls.

Getting Around

The tourist office hires out bicycles for Nkr30/75/140 per hour/half-/full day.

SOGNDAL

pop 6050

Sogndal, though not the area's prettiest place, makes a good base for a trio of magnificent day drives: Jostedalen and Nigardsbreen (p246), Urnes and a circuit of Lustrafjord (p243) and the spectacular Sognefjellet circuit, p242.

Its **tourist office** (☎ 97 60 04 43; www.sognefjorden.no; Hovevegen 2; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat, 3–8pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 10am–4pm Mon–Fri rest-of-year), a five-minute walk east of the bus station, can book accommodation for callers-in. To stretch your legs, ask for its booklet of hill walks (Nkr40). The town library, in the same building, has free internet access.

Sights & Activities

The extensive open-air **Sogn Folkmuseum** (☎ 57 67 82 06; Vestreim; adult/child Nkr60/30, audioguide Nkr20; ☎ 10am–5pm Jun–Aug, 10am–3pm May & Sep) is in the hamlet of Vestreim between Sogndal and Kaupanger. Here, over 30 buildings have been brought from their original sites and embedded in the surrounding woods. In summer there are handicraft workshops, a traditional village shop, a section on children's lives and a typical farm, complete with its animals.

In **Kaupanger**, 2km southeast along the Rv5 and reachable by bus, the **Sogn Fjordmuseum**

THE SOGNEFJELLET CIRCUIT

A spectacular circular, day-long driving route runs beside one of Norway's loveliest fjords, climbs a sizable chunk of the magnificent Sognefjellet National Tourist Route, meanders along a lonely, lightly travelled single-lane road that threads across the heights, then plunges in a knuckle-clenching descent, once more to fjord level. The trip can't be done by public transport and cyclists will need to be very fit to attempt it over a few days.

From Sogndal, head out on the Rv55 to the northeast as it hugs, for the most part, lovely Lustrafjord all the way to Skolden (opposite), at the head of the waters. About 5km beyond this tiny settlement, the road starts to seriously twist and climb. You're following an ancient highway where for centuries, when it was no more than a rough track, fish and salt would be hauled up from the coast, to be exchanged for iron, butter and hides from communities deep inland.

At Turtagrø, no more than a cluster of wind-battered shacks, you can continue along the Rv55, which runs alongside Jotunheimen National Park (p184) up and over northern Europe's highest road pass (1434m) and on to Lom (p182).

To return to Sogndal, turn right to leave the Rv55 and head for Årdal. The narrow road, known as Tindevegen, the Route of the Peaks, keeps climbing, just above the tree line, until the pass (1315m) and a toll booth (Nkr50 per vehicle).

Then, it's a plunge down through woods of spindly birch to the emerald green waters of Årdalsvatnet and the undistinguished village of Øvre Årdal. From here, the Rv53 takes you, via the ferry between Fodnes and Mannheller, back to Sogndal.

(admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Jun-Aug) has a collection of 19th- and 20th-century fishing boats and equipment. From here, you can also rent a rowing boat (Nkr50 per hour) to explore the sound.

Kaupanger's main claim for your attention is its impressive **stave church** (adult/child Nkr30/20; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug). Constructed in 1184, its wonderfully ornate interior is shaped like an upturned Viking ship. The wall paintings feature musical notation and the Celtic-style chancel arch is unique.

Sleeping & Eating

Kjøernes Camping (☎ 57 62 45 80; www.kjornes.no; per person/site Nkr30/90, cabin Nkr290-600, apt Nkr700; ☎ May-Sep) This camp site enjoys a pretty fjord-side setting, 3km from town off the Rv5.

Sogndal Vandrerhjem (☎ 57 62 75 75; sogndal.hostel@vandrerhjem.no; Helgheimsvegen 9-10; dm/s/d with shared bathroom Nkr200/280/550, d with bathroom Nkr650, all incl breakfast; ☎ mid-Jun-mid-Aug) This well-equipped, summertime-only HI-affiliated hostel, near the bridge that carries the Rv5, functions as a boarding school during the rest of the year.

Loftnes Pensjonat (☎ 57 67 15 77; Fjoravegen, s/d/tr Nkr400/600/750) This small place, above the China House restaurant, is great value. Nine of its 12 rooms have complete bathrooms and there are self-catering facilities and a rooftop terrace. If no-one's around, take any room

that has its key in the lock and sign the guest register. If no-one has turned up before you leave, pay the restaurant staff down stairs.

Hofslund Fjord Hotel (☎ 57 62 76 00; www.hofslund-hotel.no; s/d/tr Nkr890/1090/1330; ☎) This venerable 100-bed hotel, approaching its first century, has been run by the same family for four generations. Service is courteous and friendly and it enjoys a wonderful location. Most rooms have a balcony and view of the fjord, a neatly cropped lawn sweeps down to the water, the pool's heated and there are a couple of rowing boats and fishing gear, free on loan to guests.

Norlandia Park Hotel (☎ 57 62 84 00; www.norlandia.no/park; s Nkr915-1075, d Nkr1250-1550) They were still hammering and painting when we called by Sogndal's newest hotel. Its 28 rooms, with their parquet flooring and plasma TV, are particularly large (the smallest measures 31 sq metres) and each comes equipped with fridge, cooker and dishwasher.

In a town with limited gastronomic pleasures, your best bet is **Quality Hotel Sogndal** (☎ 57 62 77 00; Gravensteinsgata 5), which has three restaurants. Both its more intimate **Dr Hagen Café & Bar** (mains Nkr95-275) and main restaurant, Compagniet, have the same short à la carte list while the latter also does a copious dinner buffet (Nkr295) in summer. Its Dolly Dimple's does mainly pizzas, to eat in or take away.

Getting There & Away

Sogndal has Sognefjord's only **airport** (☎ 57 67 26 16) officially called Haukåsen, which has two daily flights to/from Bergen and five to/from Oslo.

Passenger boats connect Sogndal with Balestrand (Nkr140, 45 minutes, once or twice daily) and Bergen (Nkr525, four hours, once daily).

Daily buses run between Sogndal and Kaupanger (Nkr33, 20 minutes, up to eight), Fjærland (Nkr67, 30 minutes, three to six) and Balestrand (Nkr86, 1¼ hours, three). Twice daily buses (mid-June to late August) head northeast past Jotunheimen National Park to Lom (3¼ hours) and Otta (4¼ hours).

URNES & SOLVORN

The **stave church** (adult/child Nkr40/25; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm early Jun-Aug) at Urnes is famed for its unique and elaborate wooden carvings – animals locked in struggle, stylised intertwined bodies and abstract motifs.

This lovely structure, a Unesco's World Heritage Site, gazes out over Lustrafjord. Built in the 1130s, it has undergone several alterations through the ages; it's likely that much of the rich carving on its gables, pillars and door frames were transferred from an 11th-century building that previously stood here.

A car and passenger ferry (adult/child/car Nkr27/13/73, 20 minutes) shuttles roughly every hour between Solvorn and Urnes; many drivers prefer to leave their vehicles on the Solvorn bank. From the Urnes ferry landing, it's a 1km uphill walk to the stave church.

Solvorn has a splendid accommodation option.

ourpick Eplet (☎ 41 64 94 69; www.eplet.net; camping per person Nkr80, dm Nkr120, d Nkr500; ☎) is run by Trond Erik Eplet, himself an environmental geologist, seasoned traveller, climber and seriously long-distance cyclist. It has

magnificent views of Lustrafjord. Below are line upon line of raspberry bushes and apple trees (you won't get scurvy here), children can feed the lambs in season and there are self-catering facilities and a good library too. Not to speak of what must be the world's mini-est minigolf course on the handkerchief of a lawn. There are free bikes for guest use – ideal for slipping onto the ferry and exploring Urnes and Lustrafjord's east bank.

SKJOLDEN

pop 500

Skjolden, at the limit of Lustrafjord, is a charming little village. In Fjordstova, you'll find most that matters tucked under one roof: the **tourist office** (☎ 97 60 04 43; www.skjolden.com; ☎ 11am-7pm Jul-mid-Aug, 2-7pm Jun & late Aug), which has internet access (per 30 minutes Nkr25), a café, a swimming pool and even a climbing wall. The bit of industrial-looking junk on display outside is a turbine from the Norsk hydropower station.

For land- or water-based exercise, you can hire bicycles (Nkr75/100 per half/full day) and kayaks (Nkr75/150 per half/full day) at the tourist office, which can also supply you with a brochure (Nkr20) on signed walks in the area.

About 2km east of Skjolden, the Rv55 runs beside the lovely turquoise glacial lake **Eidsvatnet**. **Mørkriddalen**, the valley that runs north of the village makes for some excellent hiking.

A little further along the Rv55, 3km from Skjolden, **Vassbakken Kro & Camping** (☎ 57 68 61 88; www.skjolden.com/vassbakken; per person/site Nkr20/100, 2-4-bed cabins with outdoor bathroom Nkr380/480, 5-bed cabin Nkr770, ☎ May-Sep) is a smallish camp site, set beneath a surging waterfall.

Bus 153 connects Skjolden with Sogndal (Nkr100, 1¼ hours) and Fortun (Nkr27, 10 minutes) two to five times daily.

EXTREME SWIMMING

Most people think thrice before dipping even a toe into the cold waters of Sognefjord. Not so Lewis Pugh, an Anglo-South African lawyer, who, in 2004, plunged into the 6°C brine off Skjolden, then swam the entire length of Europe's longest fjord – all 204km of it. Gradually losing the extra 10kg that he'd gained as protection against the cold, he ploughed forward for five hours each and every day for three weeks. Three years later, he undertook what is, by comparison and strictly in terms of distance, a mere drop in the ocean – a 1km swim along a cleft in the ice at the geographic North Pole. Specialising in extreme swims, he uses the publicity his watery escapades generate to highlight the threat to the fragile ocean environment from global warming.

If you're heading north on Rv55, check your fuel gauge; Skjolden's petrol stations are the last for 77km.

JOSTEDALSBREEN

For years mighty Jostedalsbreen, many-tongued and mainland Europe's largest icecap, crept counter-current, still slowly advancing while most glaciers elsewhere in the world were retreating as a result, most scientists agree, of global warming. Now Jostedalsbreen herself has succumbed and, since 2006, has been withdrawing. Brikdalsbreen, which attracts day visitors by the coachload, is cracking and fissuring and, as always, you shouldn't venture onto the ice anywhere without a qualified guide.

With an area of 487 sq km and in places 600m thick, Jostedalsbreen rules over the highlands of Sogn og Fjordane county. The main icecap and several outliers are protected as the Jostedalsbreen National Park (for details of the park information centre, see p250).

The best hiking map for the region is Statens Kartverk's *Jostedalsbreen Turkart* at 1:100,000. The *Jostedalsbreen Glacier Walks* brochure, available at tourist offices and many other venues, gives a comprehensive list of glacier walks, their levels and guiding companies.

For more details on the gateway towns of Skei, Stryn, Olden and Loen, see p249.

FJÆRLAND

pop 300

The village of Fjærland (also called Mundal), at the head of scenic Fjærlandsfjorden, pulls in as many as 300,000 visitors each year. Most come to experience its pair of particularly accessible glacial tongues, Supphellebreen and Bøyabreen. Others come to bookworm. This tiny place, known as the 'Book Town' of Norway (www.bokbyen.no), is a bibliophile's nirvana, with a dozen shops selling a wide range of used books, mostly in Norwegian but with lots in English and other European languages. Its annual book fair, held on the Saturday nearest 21 June, attracts booksellers and antiquarians from around the country.

The village leaps to life in early May, when the ferry again runs and virtually hibernates from October onwards. Its **tourist office** (☎ 57 69 32 33; www.fjaerland.org; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Sep) is within the Bok & Bilde bookshop on the main

street, 300m from the ferry point. It displays a full list of accommodation options, together with prices, on the main door.

Sights & Activities

SUPHELLEBREEN & BØYABREEN

You can drive to within 300m of the Supphellebreen glacier, then walk right up and touch the ice. Ice blocks from here were used as podiums at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer.

At blue, creaking Bøyabreen, more spectacular than Supphellebreen, its brother over the hill, you might happen upon glacial calving as a hunk tumbles into the meltwater lagoon beneath the glacier tongue.

NORWEGIAN GLACIER MUSEUM

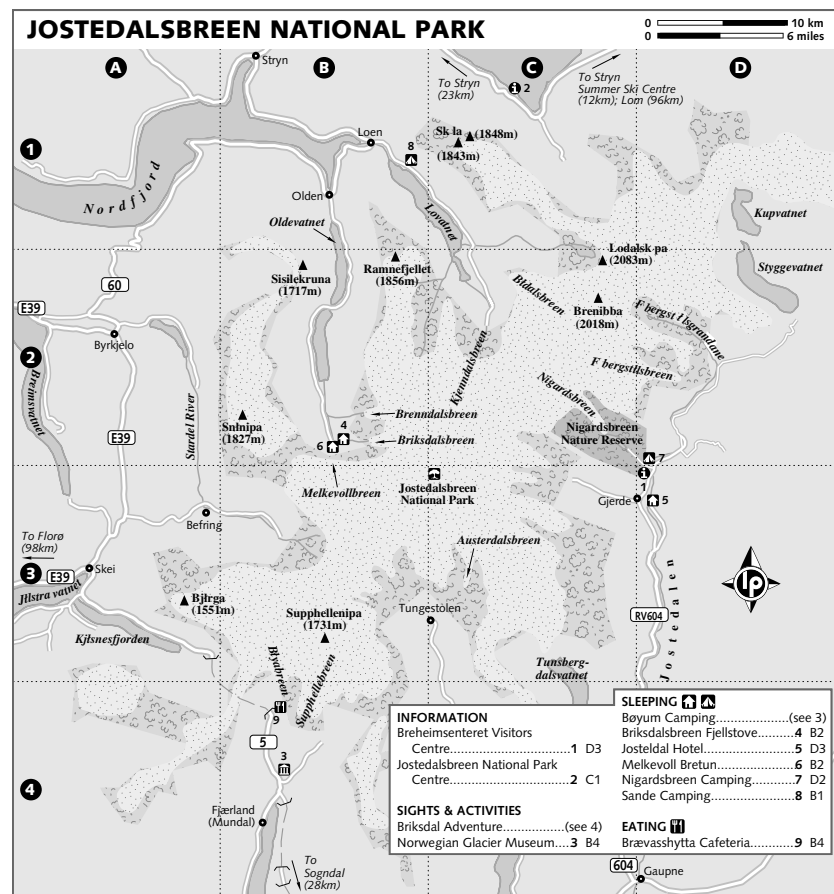
For the story on flowing ice and how it has sculpted the Norwegian landscape, visit this superbly executed **museum** (Norsk Bremuseum; ☎ 57 69 32 88; adult/child Nkr95/45; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Apr, May, Sep & Oct), 3km inland from the ferry jetty.

The hands-on exhibits will delight children. You can learn how fjords are formed, see an excellent 20-minute multiscreen audiovisual presentation on Jostedalsbreen (so impressive that audiences often break into spontaneous applause at the end), wind your way through a tunnel that penetrates the mock-ice and even see the tusk of a Siberian woolly mammoth, which met an icy demise 30,000 years ago. There's also an exhibit on the 5000-year-old 'Ice Man' corpse, which was found on the Austrian-Italian border in 1991.

The newest of the museum's themes is its multimedia (sounds, smoke, rumblings underfoot and more) exhibition, *Our Fragile Planet*. It leads you from the earth's creation via a tertiary-era forest and the last ice age to the present – and on to the consequences of our contemporary overuse of the world's resources. After a doomsday visual hypothesis, it ends on a note of qualified optimism as the breathy voice of Sir David Attenborough urges responsible, personal action to save our planet. In synopsis, it sounds preachy. On the spot, it's stimulating and thought provoking.

BOOK BROWSING

As you saunter through this one-street village, pause to browse a selection of its dozen bookshops. Tusand og Ei Natt (Thousand



and One Nights), the bookshop nearest to the ferry jetty, has a 15m-long row, stacked seven shelves high, of novels in English. If thrillers are your bedtime frisson, call by Onkel Mikkel Bokkaffe, within Hotel Mundal.

HIKING

The tourist office's free leaflet, *Escape the Asphalt*, lists 13 walking routes, varying from 30 minutes to three hours. Supplement this with *Turkart Fjærland* (Nkr60) at 1:50,000, which comes complete with route descriptions and trails indicated, pull on your boots and you're away. Most walks follow routes the local shepherds would have used until quite recently to lead their flocks to higher summer pastures. After you complete four,

the local sports association will register your achievement and issue a diploma, available through the tourist office!

Tours

A bus meets the twice-daily ferry from Balestrand, leaving the quayside at 9.35am (Nkr140) and 1.20pm (Nkr110). Both tours stop en route to allow visits to the interactive Glacier Museum (free with tour) and Bøyabreen glacier. The earlier tour also takes in the Supphellebreen glacier and leaves plenty of bookshop-browsing time before you catch the ferry back to Balestrand. Alternatively, a taxi from the Fjærland dock to Bøyabreen, with waiting time, costs about Nkr550 return.

Sleeping & Eating

Bøyum Camping (☎ 57 69 32 52; www.fjaerland.org/boyum camping; camp sites Nkr135, dm Nkr135, basic d Nkr270-340, 6-/8-bed cabins Nkr680/950; ☞ Jun-early Sep) Beside the Glacier Museum and 3km from the ferry landing, Bøyum Camping has something for all pockets and sleeping preferences, including a great view of the Bøyabreen glacier at the head of the valley.

Mrs Haugen's Rooms (☎ 57 69 32 43; d Nkr400-450; ☞ May-mid-Oct) In the white building behind the village church, Ms Alma Haugen rents just a couple of rooms with shared kitchen and bathroom that represent outstanding value.

Fjærland Fjordstue Hotell (☎ 57 69 32 00; www.fjaerland.no; s/d incl breakfast from Nkr785/1050; ☞ May-Sep; Ⓟ) The majority of this charming small family hotel's 17 rooms overlook the fjord where, with a smattering of luck, you might see porpoises playing. Its lounge and restaurant (lunch mains Nkr130 to Nkr145, dinner menu Nkr340) both have stunning views through their picture windows.

our pick Hotel Mundal (☎ 57 69 31 01; www.hotelmundal.no; s/d incl breakfast from Nkr995/1500; ☞ May-Sep; Ⓟ) This excellent option, built in 1891, retaining much of its period furniture and run by the same family ever since, features a welcoming lounge and a lovely round tower (invest Nkr1950 and you can sleep the night in its one room with wraparound views). The dining room (look for the evocative 1898 map of Sognefjorden) serves truly wonderful traditional four-course Norwegian dinners (Nkr485). Because the food comes fresh, non-guests need to book by 6pm at the latest.

Brævasshytta Cafeteria (☎ 57 69 32 96; ☞ 8am-8pm May-Sep) Do visit the Brævasshytta, built into the moraine of Bøyabreen's latest major advance, even if it's only for a cup of coffee. With the glacier right there and in your face, it's like eating in an IMAX cinema, but for real.

There's also a good cafeteria at the glacier museum.

Getting There & Away

Ferries run twice daily between Balestrand and Fjærland (Nkr175/263 one way/return, 1½ hours) from May to September. The 9.40am departure connects in Balestrand with the boat to Flåm and the 3.25pm links with the Bergen-bound ferry.

Buses bypass the village and stop on the Rv5 near the glacier museum. Three to six run

daily to/from Sogndal (Nkr100, 30 minutes), Stryn (Nkr190, two hours) and Florø (Nkr220, 2¾ hours) via Skei (Nkr58, 30 minutes).

Drivers may need to stock up at an ATM before visiting Fjærland. The long tunnels on either side of the village cost Nkr400 million to burrow and there's a punitive toll of Nkr160 to travel to/from Sogndal; by contrast, roll in from the Skei side and it's free.

Getting Around

Both the tourist office (Nkr30/140 per hour/day) and Bøyum Camping (Nkr25/125 per hour/day) rent bikes.

JOSTEDAL & NIGARDSBREEN

The Jostedal valley pokes due north from Gaupne, on the shores of Lustrafjord. It's a spectacular drive as the slim road runs beside the milky turquoise river, tumbling beneath the eastern flank of the Nigardsbreen glacier.

Of the Jostedalsbreen glacier tongues visible from below, Nigardsbreen is the most dramatic and easy to approach. If you're an experienced walker and fancy communing alone with (but not on) the ice, nip further up the road past the braided glacial streams at Fåbergstolsgrandane to the dam that creates the big glacial lake, Styggevatnet. Along the way you'll find several scenic glacial tongues and valleys offering excellent wild hiking.

Sights

The **Breheimsenteret visitors centre** (☎ 57 68 32 50; www.jostedal.com; ☞ 9am-7pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 10am-5pm May-mid-Jun & mid-Aug-Sep), 34km up the valley from Lustrafjord, has a **display** (adult/child Nkr50/35) that tells how glaciers were formed and how they sculpt the landscape. There's also a 20-minute film on the area and an exhibit on the girl Jostedalsrypa, the only villager to survive the Black Death. It also carries a worthwhile free pamphlet, *Walking in Jostedal*, that describes five short (one- to 2½-hour) walks.

Activities

You can book at the visitors centre for all these outfits.

Jostedalens Breførarlag (☎ 57 68 31 11; www.bfl.no) does several guided glacier walks. Easiest is the family walk to the glacier snout and briefly along its tongue (around one hour on the ice, adult/child Nkr170/80). Fees for the two-hour (Nkr370), three-hour (Nkr450) and five-hour

(Nkr650) walks on the ice include the brief boat trip across Nigardsvatnet lake.

For a truly original glacial perspective, sign on for a guided kayak outing with **Ice Troll** (☎ 57 68 32 50; www.icetroll.com). Walking and kayaking tours of seven to eight hours (Nkr750), suitable for first-timers as well as the more experienced, take you where those without paddles never get. It also does overnight sorties (Nkr1200).

Recently established **Leirdalen Bre og Juv** (Leirdal Glacier & Canyon; ☎ 470 27 878; www.breogjuv.no) offers trout fishing (Nkr500), canyon clambering (Nkr450) and day glacier hikes (Nkr550).

With **Moreld** (☎ 404 67 100; www.moreld.net) you can surge down the swift-flowing Jostedal river on one of their twice daily rafting trips (Nkr500).

Less strenuously, take a five-hour pony trip (Nkr500) with **Raudskarvfjellet Turriding** (☎ 57 68 32 50; www.jostedal-horseguiding.no).

Sleeping & Eating

Nigardsbreen Camping (☎ 57 68 31 35; tent/caravan sites Nkr100/120, cabins Nkr350; ☞ late May-Sep) There's basic camping and cabins, near the entrance to the toll road leading to the glacier, 400m north of the visitors centre.

Jostedal Hotel (☎ 57 68 31 19; www.jostedalhotel.no; s/d incl breakfast Nkr700/950; Ⓟ) Just 2.5km south of the visitors centre, this friendly place has been run by the same family for three generations. Meat, milk and vegetables for the restaurant come, wherever possible, from the family farm. There are also family rooms (Nkr1050) with self-catering facilities that can accommodate up to five guests.

For a great view, enjoy a coffee or snack in the small café of the visitors centre.

Getting There & Around

Leave the Rv55 Sognefjellet Road at Gaupne and head north up Jostedal along the Rv604.

From late June to early September, Jostedalsbussen (No 160) runs between Sogndal (with connections from Flåm, Balestrand and Lærdal) and the foot of the Nigardsbreen glacier, leaving at 8.45am and setting out on the return journey at 4.50pm.

From the visitors centre, a 3.5km-long toll road (Nkr25 per vehicle) or a pleasant walk with interpretive panels leads to the car park at Nigardsvatnet, the lagoon at the glacial snout. From mid-June to August, a ferry shuttles over the lagoon to the glacier face (Nkr30 return).

BRIKS DALSBREEN

From the small town of Olden (p249) at the eastern end of Nordfjord, a scenic road leads 23km up Oldedalen past Brenndalsbreen, and from there on to the twin glacial tongues of Melkevollbreen and Briksdalsbreen. The more easily accessible, Briksdalsbreen, attracts hordes of tour buses. It's a temperamental glacier; in 1997 the tongue licked to its furthest point for around 70 years, then subsequently retreated by around 500m. Then, in 2005, the reaches where glacier walkers would clamber and stride cracked and splintered. For the moment, there are no guided hikes on Briksdalsbreen but she's a fickle creature and this may change.

Activities

Two companies offer a range of outdoor activities in Oldedalen and neighbouring valleys.

Briksdal Adventure (☎ 57 87 68 00; www.briksdal-adventure.com), also known as Briksdal Breføring, is based at Briksdalsbre Fjellstove, the end of the blacktop road. **Olden Aktiv** (☎ 57 87 38 88; www.oldenaktiv.no), which operates from the Melkevoll Bretun camp site, is a five-minute walk down the hill. Each organises a good range of treks, glacier hikes and climbs (that don't demand previous experience) in Oldedalen and adjacent valleys.

Both, for example, offer guided glacier walking on Brenndalsbreen (Nkr600), the next glacial tongue north of Briksdalsbreen. Treks last between six and seven hours, including around 2½ hours on the ice and depart daily between June and August.

It's about a 5km-return walk to the Briksdal glacier face, either up the steepish path or along the longer, gentler cart track. Alas, the traditional pony-carts that plied the route for over 100 years no longer transport visitors but **Oldedalen Skyss** (☎ 57 87 68 05) has 'troll cars', vehicles like giant golfing carts (Nkr170 per person). From their turnaround point, there's still a 15-minute hike on a rough path to see the ice. To breathe up close in the glacier's face, take a guided trip in an inflatable dinghy. Dinghies, operated by Briksdal Adventure, depart hourly in summer. We strongly recommend advance reservation for both troll cars and dinghies as places are often snapped up by tour groups.

The recently erected **activity tower** opposite Briksdalsbre Fjellstove offers a range of climbing activities for all ages.

Sleeping & Eating

Our pick Melkevoll Bretun (☎ 57 87 38 64; www.melkevoll.no; per person/site Nkr40/90, dm Nkr90, basic cabins Nkr420, 6-bed fully equipped cabins Nkr750) You'll find accommodation for all pockets and gorgeous views whichever way you turn here. Look south and the Melkevollbreen glacier is sticking its tongue out towards you, spin west and the long, slim Volefossen waterfall cascades, turn north and the long reach of Oldevatnet lake shimmers, while eastwards the Briksdalsbreen glacier blocks the horizon. There's a gorgeous green camp site with stacks of space between pitches. The larger cabins are particularly well furnished. For budget sleeping with attitude, spread your sleeping bag in the 'stone-age cave' (Nkr110).

Briksdalsbreen Fjellstove (☎ 57 87 68 00; www.briksdalsbreen.no; s/d Nkr650/900, 4-bed cabin Nkr800) This cosy mountain lodge run by Briksdal Adventure (see p247) has six comfortable rooms and a café-restaurant serving delicacies such as trout and reindeer.

Getting There & Away

Between June and August, a bus leaves Stryn for Briksdal (Nkr64, one hour) at 9.30am, calling by Loen and Olden. The return bus leaves Briksdal at 1.40pm. There's also a second departure at 3.45pm on weekdays from Stryn to Melkevoll Bretun.

If you park for the day at Melkevoll Bretun (Nkr40), there's a free sauna thrown in after your hike.

KJENNDALSBREEN & BØDALSBREEN

Lovely Kjenndalsbreen is 17km up Lodalen from the Nordfjord village of Loen (opposite). The least visited of the four best-known glacial tongues, it vies with Nigardsbreen for the most beautiful approach as you run parallel to the turquoise glacial lake of Lovatnet. Bødalsbreen, in a nearby side valley, provides good hiking possibilities.

Briksdal Adventure (☎ 57 87 68 00; www.briksdal-adventure.com; see p247) has on offer five- to six-hour guided glacier walks (your crampons crunch the ice for about half this time) on Bødalsbreen (Nkr600). It and **Olden Aktiv** (☎ 57 87 38 88; www.oldenaktiv.no; see p247) offer considerably more demanding 12-hour treks (Nkr750) to 2083m-high Lodalskåpa, the highest point on the Jostedal glacier. Tours set out from Sande camp site.

As you ascend the valley, notice the huge blocks of stone that dislodged from Ramnefjell and crashed down into the lake in 1905, 1936 and 1950 and prepare to duck; the first wave killed 63 people and deposited the lake steamer 400m inland, the second killed 72, while the third just left a bigger scar on the mountain. These are referred to as the Lovatnet disasters.

Sleeping

Sande Camping (☎ 57 87 45 90; www.sande-camping.no; Loen; camp sites Nkr110, 2-/4-bed cabin Nkr280/420, 4-/6-bed apt Nkr560/890) You could spend an active day or two in the lovely environs of Sande Camping, near the northern end of Lovatnet, with its small restaurant, free sauna, rowing boats (Nkr85/270 per hour/day), canoes (Nkr30/100) and plenty of walking possibilities.

Getting There & Away

A wonderful way to approach Kjenndalsbreen is on the *Kjendal*, a boat that chugs up Lovatnet from Sande (adult/child under 10 years return Nkr180/free). The trip includes a return bus between Kjenndalstova Café, at the southern end of the lake, and the glacier car park. From here, it's a 2km walk to the glacier face. From June to August, the boat leaves Sande at 10.30am and Kjenndalstova at 1.30pm several days per week. For current sailings, ask at the Stryn tourist office or **Hotel Alexandra** (☎ 57 87 50 50) in Loen.

STRYN SUMMER SKI CENTRE

Nowhere near the town of Stryn, despite its name, this **ski centre** (Sommerkiskenter; ☎ 92 25 83 33; www.strynefjellet.com; Videdalen; ☎ 10am-4pm Jun-Aug) is in fact on the Tystigen outlier of Jostedalsbreen, at its northernmost point. Here is Norway's most extensive and best known summer skiing, and most of those photos of bikini-clad skiers you see around were snapped here. There are six red runs, one blue and a black. The longest alpine run extends for 2100m with a drop of 530m, and there are also 10km of cross-country ski tracks.

A ski bus runs from Stryn (Nkr150 return, one hour) at 9.15am and returns from the ski centre at 4.15pm, roughly between mid-June and mid-July, depending upon snow conditions. Drivers will enjoy the scenic Gamle Strynefjellsvegen, the old road that

connects Grotli with Videsæter. Pick up a free leaflet at Stryn tourist office.

SOGNEFJORDEN TO NORDFJORD

For most travellers the 100km-long Nordfjord is but a stepping stone between Sognefjorden and Geirangerfjorden. These two popular fjords are linked by a road that winds around the head of Nordfjord past the villages of Byrkjelo, Olden and Loen to the larger town of Stryn. Both Olden and Loen make good bases for visiting the spectacular Briksdalsbreen and Kjenndalbreen glaciers (see p247).

SKEI

pop 400

The inland village of Skei lies near the head of lake Jølstravatnet at the junction of Rv5 and the E39. **Astrupnet museum** (☎ 57 72 67 82; adult/child Nkr40/free; ☎ 11am-4pm mid-May-mid-Jun & mid-Aug-late Sep, 10am-6pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug), 15km west of the village on the south side of the lake, is the former home of artist Nicolai Astrup (1880-1928) and includes a gallery plus open-air exhibits.

Jølster Rafting (☎ 90 06 70 70; www.jolster-rafting.no) does white-water rafting on the Stardal and Jølstra rivers. Shorter trips range from Nkr590 to Nkr750 while one- and two-day excursions are both Nkr1190.

Sporty **Skei Hotel** (☎ 57 72 78 00; www.skeihotel.no; s/d from Nkr1065/1510; (P) (Q)) has an indoor heated swimming pool, sauna, Jacuzzi, solarium, rowing boat (per hour Nkr25), cycles (per hour Nkr10) – and even a tennis court. Unappealing from the outside, it's much more attractive within and has a cosy bar and decent restaurant.

For good-value meals and snacks, drop into the cafeteria of **Audhild Vikens Vevstove** (☎ 57 72 81 25; pizza Nkr45, mains around Nkr100; ☎ 9am-5pm), Norway's largest store with tax-free facilities. Less than 100m from the road junction, it's a veritable emporium of souvenirs, clothing and Christmas products, sold year-round.

Many long-distance buses connect at Skei, including services to Fjærland (Nkr58, 30 minutes), Sogndal (Nkr115, 1¼ hours), Stryn (Nkr145, 1½ hours), Ålesund (Nkr340,

six hours), Florø (Nkr180, two hours) and Bergen (Nkr335, 5¼ hours).

OLDEN

pop 550

Olden serves as a Jostedalsbreen gateway to Briksdalsbreen (p247) and has a seasonal **tourist office** (☎ 57 87 31 26; ☎ 11am-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug).

Galleri Cylindra (☎ 91 56 46 95; www.cylindra.net; ☎ May-Aug), opposite the cruise boat jetty, displays the works of Peter Opsvik, artist and industrial designer – photography, painting and sensuously rounded works in wood were executed by master craftsman Kjellbjørn Tusvik.

If you fancy a little fishing, the **Isabella** (☎ 91 35 10 42 or reserve via Olden or Stryn Tourist Office) does two- to three-hour trips (per person including gear Nkr200), leaving Olden marina at 4pm and 7.30pm, Monday to Friday.

For walks you can do in and around the valley, pick up the map *Olden og Oldendalen* (1:50,000), which indicates and describes 15 signed trails.

Sleeping & Eating

There are around 10 camp sites in the area, most of them along the route to Briksdalsbreen and several in stunningly pretty sites.

The automatic swing doors that purr open when you're still a couple of metres from the threshold of **Olden Fjordhotel** (☎ 57 87 34 00; www.olden-hotel.no; s Nkr970-1120, d Nkr1340-1640, all incl breakfast; ☎ May-Sep) are symptomatic of the warm welcome the Fjordhotel imparts. All of its comfortable rooms have views of the fjord, nearly all have balconies and the hotel does a fine Norwegian buffet dinner (Nkr385).

LOEN

pop 400

Loen, at the mouth of dramatic Lodalen, is, like Olden, a gateway to Jostedalsbreen, with a road service to the spectacular Bødalen and Kjenndalen glacial tongues (see opposite).

Like Olden too, it makes a good base for hikers. Arm yourself with *Walking in Loen & Lodalen* at 1:50,000, which describes 20 day walks. One great, though strenuous five- to six-hour hike leads to the Skålatårnet tower, near the 1843m-high summit of Skåla. The route begins near Tjugen farm, north of the river and immediately east of Loen.

Sleeping & Eating

Lo-Vik Camping (☎ 57 87 76 19; fax 57 87 78 11; per person/site Nkr25/110, 4-bed cabins with outdoors bathroom Nkr400, with bathroom Nkr600-950; ☹ May-Sep) Install yourself at the furthest end, beside the fjord, where there's a peaceful green area, well away from the road and its traffic.

Hotel Loenford (☎ 57 87 50 00; www.loenford.no in Norwegian; s/d incl breakfast Nkr905/1370; 📍) The Loenford offers waterside accommodation that's a little less expensive than the Alexandra and altogether gentler on the eye. Less crowded, it offers a boat trip on Lovatnet and bicycle hire so you can really get away.

Hotel Alexandra (☎ 57 87 50 00; www.alexandra.no; s/d incl breakfast from Nkr1105/1710; 📍) Loen's undisputed centre of action is as much a holiday centre as hotel and dominates tourism in the valley. It offers restaurants, bars, a nightclub, swimming pools (both indoors and open), a spa and fitness centre, a tennis court and marina. Although run as a family hotel since 1884, its current external architecture approaches the eyesore level. From the hotel you can book the Lovatnet boat, bicycles and other Jostedalbreen excursions.

STRYN

pop 1700

The small town of Stryn, de facto capital of upper Nordfjord, is something of a sprawl. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 57 87 40 40; www.nordfjord.no; ☹ 8.30am-8pm Jul, 8.30am-6pm Jun & Aug, 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) is two blocks south of Tonningsgata, the main drag. It can arrange accommodation, charges Nkr1 per minute for internet access (wifi for Nkr40 per hour) and rents mountain bikes (Nkr50/190 per hour/day). Its booklet, *Guide for Stryn*, (Nkr10) includes local hikes. For more details, invest Nkr30 in *Kart over Fjallturar I Stryn*. This map of mountain walks in the Stryn region at a scale of 1:50,000 features a whole holiday's worth of hiking trails.

Sights & Activities

The **Jostedalbreen National Park Centre** (Jostedalbreen Nasjonalparksenter; ☎ 57 87 72 00; www.jostedalbreen.no; adult/child Nkr60/30; ☹ 10am-4pm, to 6pm May-Aug) is at Oppstryn, 15km east of Stryn. It has glacier-oriented exhibits, a unique garden with 325 species of endemic vegetation and a lively audiovisual presentation. For good measure, it also covers avalanches,

local minerals and meteorites and has a section on the Lovatnet disasters (see p248).

Sleeping

Stryn Camping (☎ 57 87 11 36; www.stryn-camping.no in Norwegian; Bøavegen 6; tent/caravan sites Nkr150/200, 4-bed cabin with outdoor bathroom Nkr350, 6-bed cabin Nkr890-1090; ☹ year-round) The facilities are well maintained at trim Stryn Camping, at the eastern end of town and just two blocks uphill from the main street.

Stryn Vandrerhjem (☎ 57 87 11 06; Geilevegen 14; stryn.hostel@vandrerhjem.no; dm/s/d incl breakfast Nkr245/400/530; ☹ late May-mid-Sep) This friendly HI-affiliated hostel, on the hillside and 2km by road from town, was once a Nazi military barracks.

our pick Visnes Hotel (☎ 57 87 10 87; www.visnes.no; Prestestegen 1; s Nkr650-925, d Nkr1150-1495; ☹ mid-May-Sep) The Visnes, tautly run by the same family for six generations, occupies two magnificent listed properties, each with its own character. Most rooms are in the larger building, constructed in 1850. Higher room rates are for stunning fjord views and there are also a couple of large family rooms (Nkr1750). To feel like royalty, request a room in the smaller 1890 'dragon style' building that was occupied by King Rana V of Thailand during his 1908 tour, or the one where King Oscar of Sweden and Norway rested his head in 1913.

Stryn Hotel (☎ 57 87 07 00; www.strynhotel.no; Visnesvegen 1; s/d Nkr995/1250; 📍) Should the Visnes be full the Stryn, in the town itself and overlooking the fjord, is a decent alternative with a good restaurant.

Eating & Drinking

For wholesome, bog-standard eating, choose the cafeteria of the **Coop supermarket** (nr Tonningsgata & Tinggata) or **Kafe Hjorten** (Tinggata), the café attached to the town cultural centre.

Stryn Vertshus (☎ 57 87 05 30; Tonningsgata 19; ☹ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat; 📍) Both inside and on its flower-bedecked terrace, the Stryn Tavern serves tasty snacks and offers free wifi to customers.

Bryggja (☎ 90 16 81 34; Perhusvegen 11; mains Nkr165-235; ☹ 2pm-midnight Jun-Sep) Dine on the outside terrace of this recently opened fish restaurant or simply pop in for a drink and savour its gorgeous riverside location. If it rains, the staff simply pull over the sail-shaped cover. Decorated in nautical style, it's an intimate

place (there are only 30 seats) so you'll need to reserve.

Viknes Hotel restaurant (☎ 57 87 10 87; Prestestegen 1; menus Nkr350-450, mains Nkr195-235; ☹ 7-11pm) In the larger building of the hotel, it serves excellent gourmet food.

Base Camp (☎ 57 87 23 83; Tonningsgata 31) Also on the main street, Stryn's most popular bar sometimes operates as a disco too.

Getting There & Away

Stryn lies on the Nor-Way Bussekspress routes between Oslo (Nkr570, 8½ hours, three daily) and Måløy (Nkr180, two hours); Ålesund (Nkr235, 3¼ hours, two to three daily) and Bergen (Nkr425, six hours, four to six daily); and Bergen and Trondheim (Nkr530, 7½ hours, twice daily). Bergen-bound buses call in at Loen (Nkr29, 10 minutes) and Olden (Nkr38, 15 minutes). The Ålesund route passes Hellesylt (Nkr95, one hour), from where the ferry runs to Geiranger.

NORDFJORDEID

Above the village of Nordfjordeid, midway between Stryn and Måløy, are the stables of the **Norsk Fjordhestsenter** (☎ 57 86 48 00; www.norsk-fjordhestsenter.no), which specialises in rearing the stocky, handsome Norwegian fjord ponies with their bristle-stiff, Mohican manes and creamy-caramel hides. If you want a ride (Nkr250 for the first hour, Nkr100 for subsequent hours), do reserve since the ponies are often in demand for school groups and summer camps.

THE FLEETING HERRING

Florø, founded in 1860 as a herring port, prospered for a couple of decades from 'fishy silver'. But then the overfished shoals got wise, survivors simply swam away and Florø lost its prime industry. After a near moratorium on commercial fishing during WWII, the seas again glistened silver. But humankind is a slow learner, the seas were once again overexploited and a couple of decades later, the very last herring was hauled in, while the smarter survivors swam away to the relative sanctuary of the Barents Sea. Half a century later, after decades of strict control and limited fishing, herring stocks are almost back to the level of the 1950s.

FLORØ

pop 8300

Florø, Norway's westernmost town, is a pleasant if unexciting little place whose coat of arms features, appropriately, three herrings rampant.

Nowadays, wealth comes from the black gold of the oil industry. The large Fjord Base, just northeast of town, employs around 400 workers and serves the giant Snorreankeret offshore oil field. Florø is also enriched by fish farming, shipbuilding – and the return of the herring, the town's original raison d'être.

For a scenic overview, it's an easy 10-minute climb up the Storåsen hill from the Florø Ungdomsskule on Havrenesveien.

Information

Laundrette (Marina) Opposite Quality Hotel.

Library (Markegata 51; ☹ core hrs 11am-3pm Mon-Fri) Has free internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 57 74 75 05; www.vestkysten.no; Strandgata 30; ☹ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug; 10am-2pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year)

Sights

SOGN OG FJORDANE COASTAL MUSEUM

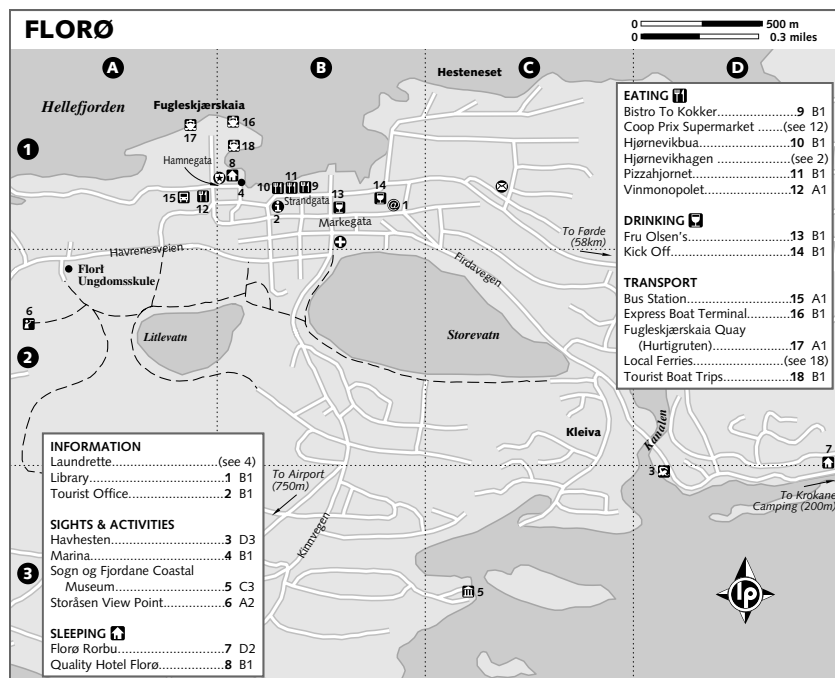
The two main buildings of the **Kystmuseet** (☎ 57 74 22 33; Brendøyvegen; adult/child Nkr40/free; ☹ 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-Aug, 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, noon-3pm Sun Sep-mid-Jun) are chock-full of fishing exhibits and there's a model 1900 fishing family's home too. Also within the complex are several old warehouse buildings, moved from Florø and Måløy, and an old herring salt house. On a more contemporary theme, the Snorreankeret oil platform display illustrates the history, exploration and exploitation of the North Sea oil and gas fields.

THE OLD QUARTER

On and around Strandgata, the main street, the most significant 19th-century timbered houses are well signed and documented in both Norwegian and English.

OFFSHORE ISLANDS

Local ferries connect the mainland to the islands of Kinn, Svanøy, Batalden, Askrova and Tansøy from Fugleskjærskaiqa Quay. Schedules are intermittent and complicated; check for current information with the tourist office, which can reserve ferries and also advise on island accommodation.



Kinn has a beautifully restored 12th-century church, believed to have been built by British Celts sheltering from religious persecution. On the second or third weekend in June, it's the site of the Kinnespelet pageant, which celebrates the history of the church on the island. Climbers and hikers will savour the dramatic landscapes, particularly the Kinnaklova cleft.

On Svanøy, you can hike and pass by the small deer centre (☎ 57 75 21 80), where the animals are fed at 11am and 8pm.

On Batalden, check out the gallery and small museum at Batalden Havbu fishing cottages (☎ 57 74 54 22), where you can overnight in their sensitively restored cottages (d Nkr880-940; ☞ May-Sep).

Askrova has a prehistoric Troll Cave, whose deepest depths have never been explored. The highest point of adjoining Tansøy, connected to it by a bridge, at 233m offers great panoramic views over the surrounding archipelago.

Activities

BOATING

Florø Rorbu (opposite) hires motor boats (Nkr200 to Nkr400 per day) and sea kayaks (Nkr200 per day), while Krokane Camping (opposite) rents

out rowing boats (Nkr50/100 per three hours/day) and motor boats (from Nkr200/300).

HIKING & CYCLING

The tourist office sells two useful booklets: *Cycling in Flora* (Nkr20) and *On Foot in Flora* (Nkr50).

SWIMMING

If the fjord's too chilly, visit Havhesten (☎ 57 75 67 20; adult/student/child Nkr80/65/50; ☞ core hrs 11am-5pm late Jun-mid-Aug, 10am-8pm rest-of-year). Plunge into one of its three indoor heated pools and savour the fantastic view of the fjord as you bob up, work up a sweat in the gym, then get all aglow in the sauna. Everything, even the view, is included in your admission.

Tours

From late June to mid-August, the tourist office runs a number of tempting tours. On Friday, for example, its Lighthouse Safari (adult/child Nkr350/200 including snack lunch) takes you by boat to the offshore lighthouses at Stabben, Kvanhovden and the remote Ytterøyane (no landing at Ytterøyane,

which is a bird sanctuary), passing by a seal colony. Another good option is its guided tour of Kinn (adult/child Nkr203/112), for which visits can be arranged daily.

Sleeping

Krokane Camping (☎ 57 75 22 50; www.krocamp.no; camp sites Nkr100, 2-/4-bed cabin Nkr450-500, 5-/6-bed cabin Nkr580-800; ☞ year-round) Krokane Camping occupies a wooded site on a peninsula 2.5km east of town. The shoreside meadow, though a trek to the toilets, is a tent camper's delight.

Florø Rorbu (☎ 57 74 81 00; www.florbu.com; Krokane Kai; 4-bed apt Nkr600-650, 6-bed apt Nkr750-800) These excellent, family-owned, fully furnished flats are right beside a tiny inlet and have their own moorings (you can hire a boat or kayak and putter around the fjord to celebrate sunset).

our pick Quality Hotel Florø (☎ 57 75 75 75; www.florahotel.no; Hamnegata 7; s/d Mon-Fri Nkr1390/1690, Sat & Sun Nkr995/1195; ☎ ☞) On the quayside, right beside the marina and constructed in the style of a dockside warehouse (the present banqueting area is a former fish store), this is Florø's best option. Rooms with sea views cost no extra and a couple have 'boat beds', made of recycled rowing boats.

Eating & Drinking

Bistro To Kokker (☎ 57 75 22 33; Strandgata 33; dishes Nkr65-145) This gloomy place where ageing bachelors stare into their cocoa does decent enough fare and portions are large. There's squid, salmon, monkfish and other seafood on the menu or, for more pedestrian palates, it has fish and chips (Nkr50 to Nkr60), burgers (Nkr45 to Nkr105), good salads (Nkr60 to Nkr84) and pizzas (Nkr115) too.

Hjørnevikbua (☎ 57 74 01 22; Strandgata 23; lunch Nkr65-125) The 2nd floor of the Hjørnevikbua pub and restaurant, with its ship-like interior, serves lunch that includes some mean fish soups (Nkr85). You can also eat outdoors on their barge that's moored to the quay, where smokers can puff at will.

Pizzahjornet (☎ 99 47 44 45; Strandgata 25; pizzas Nkr160-180) Pizzahjornet serves up decent pizzas, kebabs and shawarmas, to eat in or take away.

our pick Hjørnevikhagen (☎ 57 75 33 28; Strandgata 28; lunch mains Nkr75-100, dinner mains Nkr180-195; ☞ Mon-Sat) This recent addition to Florø's very limited dining options has style. Outside on the split-

THE WORLD'S LONGEST HERRING TABLE

OK, so the competition may not be all that extensive but a herring table 400m long is an impressive achievement in its own right. Each year, Florø and Haugesund, further down the coast, used to vie with each other for the year's largest and longest spread but, now that Haugesund has retired, there's no longer the same north-south rivalry and Florø has the field to itself.

Every second or third weekend in June, the table is erected in the heart of Florø. Just imagine a standard 400m running track, straightened out and laden with plates of herring, potatoes, bread and drinks, all free of charge, and you've got the scene.

level terracing, furniture is smart, angular, of glass and metal, while the interior has good views of the marina. Dishes are well priced, tasty and attractively presented and it's also the most enticing spot in town for a quiet drink. It's just behind the tourist office.

Bryggekannten (Quality Hotel Florø, Hamnegata 7; mains Nkr195-25) The restaurant at Quality Hotel Florø sources most of its food locally and warrants a visit in its own right.

Vinmonopolet is in the same block as the Coop Prix supermarket, located next to the bus station.

Drinking & Entertainment

Kick Off (☎ 57 74 15 00; Strandgata 58; ☞ 3pm-midnight Mon-Thu, noon-midnight or 2.30am Fri-Sun; ☞) is, as you'd expect, a sports bar that shows all major football matches. It's also where the young folk of Florø head, drawn by its pool table, darts and massive music collection (make a request and test them out). It serves pizzas and snacks, there's free wi-fi and every Friday and Saturday are disco nights.

Fru Olsen's (☎ 57 74 10 00; Markegata 43), the pub at the Rica Victoria Hotell, is an altogether quieter drinking spot.

Getting There & Away

DAT (www.dat.dk) offers budget flights two to four times daily to/from both Oslo and Bergen from Florø airport (☎ 57 74 67 00).

Florø is the first stop on the Hurtigruten coastal ferry as it heads north from Bergen. Northbound, it calls by at about 2am (4.45am

KALVÅG

If you're travelling from Florø to Måløy via Bremanger island, do make the 5km detour from the ferry landing point at Smørhamn to the sensitively preserved fishing village of Kalvåg (population 370). Nowadays it's picture-postcard pretty and there's just one giant fish-processing factory on its outskirts. But at its peak Kalvåg had over 50 herring salt houses that employed a seasonal workforce of around 10,000. You can still visit one or two of them; ask at the friendly quayside **tourist office** (☎ 57 79 37 50; www.visitbremanger.no; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun Jul, 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year), itself once a salt house.

mid-September to mid-April) and southbound, at 7.45am. Stops further north include Måløy, Ålesund and Trondheim.

Express boats call in twice daily on the run between Bergen (Nkr535, 3½ hours) and Måløy (Nkr190, one hour).

Florø is situated at the end of a Nor-Way Bussekspress route from Oslo (Nkr605, 12¼ hours, twice daily) via Stryn.

If you're driving, the most scenic way north to Måløy by road is via Bremanger island.

AROUND FLORØ
Ausevik Rock Carvings

These vivid rock carvings, featuring deer and other motifs from around 1000 BC, are a mere five-minute walk from the Fv611 (about 40 minutes' drive south of Florø). An upgrade, planned for 2008, will allow easier visitor access.

Vingen Petroglyphs

The 1500 early-Stone Age petroglyphs at Vingen, facing the sea from the slopes of Vingenfjellet south of Måløy, are northern Europe's largest concentration. They're thought to be the work of early Stone Age hunters, chipped into the rock between 6000 and 4000 BC. There's no road to the paintings, which are protected, but the Florø tourist office organises a weekly boat (adult/child Nkr270/140), departing from Florø and/or Bremanger between 1 July and mid-August.

MÅLØY
pop 3500

The little fishing town of Måløy, at the mouth of Nordfjord, lies on Vågsøy island. Nestling beneath a pair of rounded hills, for all the world like a pair of giant breasts, it's linked to the mainland by the graceful S-curve Måløybrua bridge.

Though there are no monuments or sights to make you gasp, it's a refreshingly real, alive place – when compared to the tourist toy-towns to its south – where commercial boats ply up and down. Also, Vågsøy island and neighbouring Selje are laced with sea-view hiking routes (pick up the 1:50,000 walking map *Outdoor Pursuits: Selje & Vågsøy Communes*). Three places are well worth a visit: the bizarre seaside rock, **Kannesteinen**, about 10km west of town, rising from the sea like a giant stone mushroom; **Refviksanden**, a 1.4km reach of pure white sand that ranks among Norway's top three finest beaches; and **Kråkenes Lighthouse** (see below), perched precariously on a rock shoulder. Sunny or stormy, it's a romantic spot with stunning views where you can have a meal, enjoy coffee and homemade cakes – and even spend the night.

Måløy's seasonal **tourist office** (☎ 57 84 50 77; Gate 1 No 53; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Jul, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat mid-end Jun & early Aug) is on the main street. It has an internet point (Nkr1 per minute).

Sleeping & Eating

Steinvik Camping (☎ 57 85 10 70; oddbnyg@online.no; per person/site Nkr20/80, 2-bed cabin with toilet Nkr380, 4-bed cabin Nkr550, 4-bed self-catering apt Nkr480-650; ☹ year-round) The nearest camp site to Måløy has spectacular views over the busy sea lane. To get there, cross the bridge to the east bank, turn right after 2km beside a school and follow the track downhill for 1.2km.

our pick **Kråkenes Lighthouse** (☎ 57 85 55 27; www.krakenesfyr.no; Kråkenes; d with shared bathroom Nkr600-800, with bathroom Nkr1200, 6-bed ste Nkr1900; ☹ year-round) Take the Rv617 to the very tip of the promontory that runs northwards from Måløy to find this delightful, truly original overnighting option, run to a high standard by an enterprising German couple. You can either stay in the former lighthouse-keeper's house with self-catering facilities or enjoy the splendid top-floor suite, with bathroom, in the lighthouse itself. Meals are also available, if you order in advance. Even if you don't stay, drop

by their café (open noon to 6pm mid-June to mid-August) to savour this isolated spot.

Norlandia Måløy Hotel (☎ 57 84 94 00; www.norlandia.no; Gate 1 No 25; s/d Nkr825/1090) This large glass-fronted hotel is the centre of most tourist activity in town. Its Aquarius restaurant (open 7pm to 10pm) offers a three-course dinner (Nkr275) and a good à la carte selection.

Stormen Pub (☎ 57 85 11 25; Sjøgata) It's vast and a bit like eating in a station waiting room but this pub at the harbour opposite the Norlandia Måløy hotel lays on decent food and often has dancing on weekend evenings. Dine on its open-air terrace overlooking the sound.

Havfruen Fiskeutsalg (☎ 57 85 23 36; ☹ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) The Mermaid, beside the express boat jetty, is both a wet fish shop ('Born to fish, forced to work' says the plaque on the wall) and small café, serving rich fish soups (Nkr50 to Nkr65), salmon sandwiches (Nkr25) and other fishy dishes.

Getting There & Away

The express boat from Bergen (Nkr645, 4¼ hours) to Selje puts in at Måløy. The northbound Hurtigruten coastal ferry passes at 4.30am daily (7.30am mid-September to mid-April); the southbound one at 5.45am.

Nor-Way Bussekspress runs three times daily to/from Oslo (Nkr643, 11 hours), via Stryn (Nkr180, two hours, up to six buses daily).

SELJE & SELJA ISLAND**pop 700**

Few visitors make it to Selje and therein lies the charm of this pleasant village on the western edge of Norway, with its strand of pristine, white beach. Vestkapp, 32km by road from Selje, isn't Norway's westernmost point despite the name but it still provides superb sea views.

Selje's **tourist office** (☎ 57 85 66 06; sunniva1@start.no; ☹ 9am-7pm Jul, core hrs 10am-4pm Jun & Aug, 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri Apr, May & Sep, Mon-Tue Oct-Mar), at the harbour, keeps lists of cabins and apartments in the area and has internet access (Nkr1 per minute).

The haunting ruins of **Selja monastery** and the **church of St Sunniva** on Selja island date from the 11th and 12th centuries, respectively. You can climb the 40m-high tower for a splendid panorama. From mid-June to the end of August, there are one to three

daily two-hour guided tours (adult/child Nkr150/75 including return boat trip). Reserve in advance through the tourist office and check the timetable, which may change when the current boatman retires.

The **Selje Hotel** (☎ 57 85 88 80; www.seljehotel.no; s Nkr925-1045, d Nkr1160-1550), a delightful wood and shaped-stone pile right beside the beach, is the village's only hotel. Within it is Spa Thalasso, a health centre with pool, Jacuzzi and a range of relaxing activities and treatments to tone you up – something you might welcome if you've stayed up late to enjoy the hotel's live-music duo.

From Måløy, you have two stunningly attractive ways of arriving – the splendid fjord-side drive along the Rv618 or aboard the twice-daily Nordfjord express boat route (Nkr67, 20 minutes). Local buses also run between Måløy and Selje (Nkr86, one hour) six times daily on weekdays and once at weekends.

THE NORTHERN FJORDS

It's yet more crinkly coastline and yet more deeply incised fjords as you push further northwards into the region of Møre og Romsdal. Geirangerfjord, recently declared a Unesco World Heritage site, a must on most tours and a favourite anchorage for cruise ships, staggers beneath its summer influx. Stray from this tour operators' mecca and you'll find the waterways and roads less crowded and the scenery almost as spectacular as further south. The coastal towns of Ålesund and Kristiansund each deserve an overnight stop – and the spectacular drive over the Trollstigen pass will have you checking your safety belt.

The region's official website, www.visitmr.com has a host of useful links.

ÅNDALSNES**pop 2500**

There are two dramatic ways to approach Åndalsnes: by road through the Trollstigen pass or taking the spectacularly scenic Raumabanen, the rail route from Dombås, as it ploughs through a deeply cut glacial valley flanked by sheer walls and plummeting waterfalls. Badly bombed during WWII, the modern town, nestled beside Romsdalfjord, is nondescript, but the surrounding landscapes are magnificent.

The **tourist office** (☎ 71 22 16 22; www.visitandalsnes.com; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug; 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) is at the train station. It has internet access (Nkr40 per 30 minutes) and rents bikes (Nkr50/170 per hour/day).

Sights

TROLLVEGGEN

Approaching from Dombås, the road and rail lines follow the dramatic 1800m-high Trollveggen (Troll Wall), first conquered in 1965 by a joint Norwegian and English team. The highest vertical mountain wall in Europe, its ragged and often cloud-shrouded summit, 1800m from the valley floor, is considered the ultimate challenge among mountaineers.

TROLLSTIGEN

The Trollstigen (Troll's Ladder), south of Åndalsnes, is a thriller of a road, completed in 1936 after eight years of labour, with 11 hairpin bends and a 1:12 gradient. To add an extra daredevil element, it's one lane practically all the way. On request, bus passengers get a photo stop at the thundering 180m-high Stigfossen waterfall, and a quick halt at the top for a dizzy view down the valley. If you have wheels and a camera, make sure you pause for photos of the dramatic peaks of Karitind, Dronningen, Kongen and Bispen – as well as Norway's only 'Troll Crossing' road sign.

More energetically, you can also take it at a slower pace and puff your way up and over the old horse trail, narrow and blazed with white spots, that was previously the only communication between the two valleys. Both routes are closed in winter.

At the pass, the small **Vegmuseum** (☎ 99 29 20 00; admission Nkr15; ☎ 9.30am-7pm late Jun-mid-Aug) tells the engineering history of this awesome road.

RAUMABANEN RAILWAY

Trains run daily year-round along this spectacular route, meeting the main line, after 114km, at Dombås. There's also a tourist train (adult/child/family return Nkr295/70/660) that runs intermittently in summer from the lakeside station up to Bjorli, at 600m. Book at the tourist office.

MARDALSFOSSEN

East of Åndalsnes, up Langfjorden and then past the dramatic lake, Eikesdalsvatnet,

is Mardalsfossen – once the fifth-highest waterfall in the world. How did it lose this status? Well, in the 1970s, this two-level, 655m waterfall was sucked dry by a hydroelectricity project. Although environmentalists chained themselves together to prevent construction, it went ahead and Mardalsfossen now flows strictly for the tourists, from late June to mid-August.

For mountain thrills, take the bucking single-track mountain road **Aursjøvegen** (Nkr50 toll), open between late June and September and linking Mardalsfossen and Sunddalsøra.

Activities

HIKING

The pamphlet *Geiranger Trollstigen* (Nkr20) describes eight signed hiking trails in the Trollstigen area. You'll need to supplement this with the map *Romsdals-Fjella* at 1:80,000. The tourist office carries both.

An excellent day hike, signed by red markers, begins in town, 50m north of the roundabout before the Esso petrol station, and climbs to the summit of Nesaksla (715m), the prominent peak that rises above Åndalsnes. At the top, the payoff for a steep ascent is a magnificent panorama. In fine weather, the view extends up and down Romsdalen and into Isterdalen, rivalling any in Norway.

From the shelter at the top, you can retrace your steps or undertake the straightforward ascent to the summit of Høgnosa (991m) and trek on to Åkesfjellet (1215m). Alternatively, traverse along the marked route 5km eastward and descend to Isfjorden village, at the head of the Isfjord.

The tourist office can also arrange mountain walks of four to six hours with a qualified guide (Nkr250 to Nkr350).

CLIMBING

The best local climbs are the 1500m-high rock route on Trollveggen and the 1550m-high Romsdalshorn, but there are a wealth of others. Serious climbers should buy *Klatring i Romsdal* (Nkr280), which includes rock and ice-climbing information in both Norwegian and English; it's available from the tourist office.

FISHING

John Koføed (☎ 71 22 63 54) runs three-hour fishing tours (Nkr300 per person, including rod hire) on Romsdalsfjorden three times

daily in summer. Reserve directly or through the tourist office.

CANOEOING

Trollstigen Hytteutleie (see below for detailed info) organises guided canoe trips, as well as mountain walks.

Festivals & Events

Norsk Fjellfestivalen (Norway Mountain Festival) in early July is a week-long jamboree for lovers of the great outdoors with plenty of folk events thrown in. The town's other big moot is **Rauma Rock** (www.raumarock.com), central Norway's largest pop gathering, held over two days in early August.

Sleeping

The tourist office keeps a list of a few private homes offering accommodation for around Nkr400.

Åndalsnes Camping (☎ 71 22 16 29; www.andalsnecamp.no; car/caravan sites Nkr125/140, 4-bed basic cabin with outdoor bathroom Nkr450, 6-7 bed cabins with bathroom Nkr880; ☎ May-mid-Sep; ☎) Less than 2km from town, it enjoys a dramatic setting beside the River Rauma. There's internet access (Nkr60 per hour) and it hires canoes (Nkr50/200 per hour/day) and bikes (Nkr50/110 per hour/day).

Trollstigen Hytteutleie (☎ 71 22 68 99; www.trollstigen-hytteutleie.no; camp sites Nkr140, 4-/5-bed cabins from Nkr550/650) Recognisable by the strapping wooden troll at its entrance, this well-kept camp site is altogether quieter and has an equally scenic location, 2km along the Rv63 highway, direction Geiranger.

Åndalsnes Vandrerhjem Setnes (☎ 71 22 13 82; aandalsnes.hostel@vandrerhjem.no; dm/s/d incl breakfast Nkr245/450/650 mid-May-mid-Sep, dm only Nkr175 rest-of-year) This welcoming HI-affiliated and sod-roofed hostel is 1.5km from the train station on the E136, direction Ålesund. It's worth staying here for the pancakes-and-pickled-herring bumper breakfast alone. The Ålesund bus that meets the train passes right by.

Hotel Aak (☎ 71 22 71 71; www.hotelaak.no; s/d Nkr750/990; ☎ mid-Jun-mid-Aug; ☎) This charming place, the oldest tourist hotel in Norway, lies beside the E136, direction Dombås, 4km from town. Most of the 16 comfortable bedrooms are named after a mountain that you can see from the bedroom window (though in one or two you may have to poke your head out a little). Its restaurant (mains Nkr150 to Nkr190;

open 4pm to 10pm) is equally impressive and offers excellent traditional cuisine. As it's so small, reserve in advance.

Grand Hotel Bellevue (☎ 71 22 75 00; www.grandhotel.no; Åndalgata 5; s/d Nkr850/1050 Jun-Aug, Nkr750/850 rest-of-year; ☎) This large whitewashed structure caps a hillock in the centre of town. Most of its 86 rooms have fine views, particularly those facing the rear. There's a public swimming pool only 100m away. Its restaurant (mains Nkr195 to Nkr285; open for dinner only) offers the town's most formal dining, but you can always nibble on a lighter dish for around Nkr100. Take a look at the vintage black-and-white photos in the corridor, including one of a very young and sprightly Cliff Richard. When we last visited, an annexe to contain the town library, cinema and auditorium was nearing completion.

Eating

For sandwiches, sweet treats and all things delicious, call by **Måndalen Bakeri** (Havnegate 5; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat), on the waterfront near the train station.

Buona Sera (☎ 71 22 60 75; Romsdalsveien 6; dishes from Nkr80; ☎ core hrs 4-10.30pm) The Italian-oriented Buona Sera predictably specialises in pizzas and pasta, yet has much more character than most Norwegian pizza joints. All wood, with intimate crannies and friendly staff, it also does crispy salads (Nkr100) and juicy meat mains (around Nkr175).

Kaikanten (☎ 71 22 75 00; daily specials Nkr98, snacks Nkr35-78, mains Nkr120-155; ☎ 10am-11pm mid-May-Aug) Sit back and relax here at the jetty's edge and enjoy a drink, a snack and one of Norway's prettiest panoramas in this welcoming restaurant, run by the Grand Hotel.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses along the 'Golden Route' to Geiranger (Nkr197, three hours), via Trollstigen, the Linge-Eidsdal ferry and scenic Ørnevegen, run twice daily between mid-June and August. The Trollstigen pass is cleared and opens by at least 1 June; early in the season it's an impressive trip through a popular cross-country ski field, between high walls of snow. Buses leave Åndalsnes at 8.30am and 5.30pm daily, and from Geiranger at 1pm and 6.10pm. There are also services to Molde (Nkr120, 1½ hours, up to eight daily) and Ålesund (Nkr200, 2¼ hours, twice daily).

TRAIN

Trains to/from Dombås (Nkr198, 1½ hours) run up to six times daily, in synchronisation with Oslo–Trondheim trains. Trains connect in Åndalsnes twice daily with the express bus service to Ålesund via Molde.

**VALLDAL & AROUND
Valldal**

Valldal is a place that people tend to pass through, having driven over the famous Trollstigen pass from Åndalsnes or savoured the exquisitely beautiful ferry journey from Geiranger. Perched in a nick of Norddalsfjord, its agricultural surrounds lay claim to being Europe's northernmost orchards. Here apples, pears and even cherries thrive – and you'll also find strawberries in profusion, commemorated in an annual **Strawberry Festival**, usually on the last weekend in July.

To sample the goods, whatever the season, call by **Syltetøysbutikken** (☎ 70 25 75 11; Syltegata), on the road leading to the church. It has a healthy selection of jams and juices, pressed and simmered in the small factory behind the shop and sourced in the main from local farmers.

The **tourist office** (☎ 70 25 77 67; www.visitnorddal.com; ☎ 10am–7pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 10am–5pm Mon–Fri rest-of-year) rents bikes (Nkr25/100 per hour/day) and can also arrange motorboat hire (Nkr85/400 per hour/day). Invest Nkr20 in its useful booklet of signed walks, ranging from Geiranger to Trollstigen and lasting from 15 minutes to three hours. Each one sets out from a public car park.

From Valldal you can experience a four-hour white-water rush (Nkr590; 11am daily May to September) down the Valldola River. Contact **Valldal Naturopplevingar** (☎ 90 01 40 35; www.valldal.no), whose headquarters is 200m from the tourist office. It also offers kayak hire and a variety of other outdoor activities such as wilderness camping and, in winter, moonlight ski trips.

SLEEPING & EATING

There's no shortage of camp sites, many overpopulated with caravans, parked semipermanently. For somewhere with more character, push on to **Gudbrandsjuvet Camping** (☎ 70 25 86 31; tent/caravan sites Nkr110/140, 4-bed cabins Nkr350; ☎ late May–mid-Sep), 15km towards Åndalsnes up the Rv63, where the stream races through a tight gorge.

Fjello Turisthotell (☎ 70 25 75 13; www.fjello.no; s/d incl breakfast Nkr690/890; ☎ May–Sep) At charming 'Mountain Peace', just behind (northeast of) Valldal's church, the welcome is warm and the rooms are well appointed. There's a café and restaurant (open 7pm to 11pm) that specialises in fish, and a pub on the ground floor that's open at weekends. At the rear is a tranquil garden with a small children's playground.

Lupinen Café (☎ 70 25 84 10; mains Nkr50–88) This café serves pizza, beef and fish dishes and puts on an inexpensive buffet (Nkr155).

Jordbærstova (☎ 70 25 76 58; ☎ May–Sep) About 6km up the Åndalsnes road, Jordbærstova honours the valley's mighty strawberry. So stop in for a fat slice of their gooey, creamy *svele* (strawberry cake), the local pancake speciality that is served with strawberries and cream. It also offers light meals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Valldal lies on the 'Golden Route' bus service that runs from mid-June to August between Åndalsnes (Nkr88, 1¼ hours) and Geiranger (Nkr75, 1¼ hours), up and over the spectacular Trollstigen pass. If you're driving, pause too at Gudbrandsjuvet, 15km up the valley from Valldal, where the river slots through a 5m-wide, 20m-deep canyon.

Equally scenic is the spectacular ferry cruise (adult/child single Nkr160/80, return Nkr250/120, 2¼ hours) that runs twice daily between Valldal and Geiranger from late-June to mid-August.

Tafjord

In 1934 an enormous chunk of rock 400m high and 22m long – in all, a whopping eight million cu metres – broke loose from the hillside. It crashed into Korsnæs fjord and created a 64m-high tidal wave that washed up to 700m inland and claimed 40 lives in Fjorra and Tafjord.

The **Tafjord Power Museum** (Kraftverk museum; ☎ 70 17 56 00; www.tafjord.net/museum; admission free; ☎ noon–5pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug), located within a now-defunct power station, shows how the advent of hydroelectric power changed the valley. The road that climbs from the village up to the Zakarias reservoir passes through a bizarre corkscrew tunnel and, a couple of kilometres higher up, a short walking route drops to the crumbling bridge at the dam's narrow base, where you feel at close

range the stresses this 96m-high structure has to tolerate.

Stordal

If you're travelling between Valldal and Ålesund on the Rv650, do make a short stop at Stordal's **Rose Church** (Rosekyrkya; adult/child Nkr30/15; ☎ 11am–4pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug). Unassuming from the outside, it was constructed in 1789 on the site of an earlier stave church, elements of which were retained. Inside comes the surprise: the roof, walls and every last pillar are sumptuously painted with scenes from the Bible and portraits of saints in an engagingly naive interpretation of high baroque.

**GEIRANGER
pop 250**

Scattered cliffside farms, most long abandoned, still cling along the towering walls of twisting, 20km-long emerald-green Geirangerfjord, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Down its near-sheer cliffs waterfalls – the Seven Sisters, the Suito, the Bridal Veil and more – sluice and tumble. The one-hour scenic ferry trip along its length between Geiranger and Hellesylt is as much minicruise as means of transport – take it even if you've no particular reason to get to the other end.

If you arrive from Hellesylt, Geiranger village, at the head of the fjord, comes as a shock to the system, despite its fabulous site, as you mingle with the hordes of visitors, brought in by bus and ship. Every year Geiranger wilts under the presence of over 600,000 visitors and more than 150 cruise ships (three were moored offshore last time we visited, each polluting the pure air with dark fumes from its smokestack, while their bumboats belched diesel vapours at the jetty).

By contrast, if you drop from the north along the Rv63 from Åndalsnes and Valldal (called Ørnevegen, the Eagle's Way), you'll gasp as it twists down the almost sheer slope in 11 hairpin bends, each one giving a yet more impressive glimpse along the narrow fjord. And whichever way you're coming or going, in the evening, once the last cruise ship and tour bus has pulled out, serenity returns to this tiny port.

The **tourist office** (☎ 70 26 30 99; www.geiranger.no; ☎ 9am–7pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 9am–6pm mid-May–mid-Jun & mid-Aug–mid-Sep) is beside the pier.

Sights & Activities**GEIRANGER FJORD CENTRE**

The **Geiranger Fjordcenter** (☎ 70 26 30 07; www.geirangerfjord.no; adult/child Nkr85/40; ☎ core hrs 9am–4pm May–mid-Sep, to 6pm Jul, to 10pm Aug) has tools, artefacts and even whole buildings that have been uprooted and brought here, illustrating the essential themes – the mail packet, avalanches, the building of early roads and the rise of tourism – that have shaped the land and its people.

FLYDALSVJUVET

Somewhere you've seen that classic photo, beloved of brochures, of the overhanging rock Flydalsjuvet, usually with a figure gazing down at a cruise ship in Geirangerfjord. The car park, signposted to Flydalsjuvet, about 5km uphill from Geiranger on the Stryn road, offers a great view of the fjord and the green river valley, but doesn't exactly provide the postcard view. For that, you'll have to drop about 150m down the hill, then descend a slippery and rather indistinct track to the edge. Your intrepid photo subject will have to scramble down gingerly to the overhang about 50m further along...

CYCLING

Geiranger Downhill (☎ 47 37 97 71; www.geirangerdownhill.com) will drive you up to Djupvasshytta (1038m), from where you can coast for 17 gentle, scenically splendid kilometres by bike (Nkr195) down to the fjord; allow a couple of hours. Book at the sod-roofed cabin 50m above the harbour, which also rents bikes (Nkr50/200 per hour/day).

BOAT TOURS

Geiranger Fjordservice (☎ 70 26 57 86; www.geirangerfjord.no) does 1½-hour sightseeing **boat tours** (adult/child Nkr110/45, sailings 4 times daily Jun–Aug). Its kiosk is within the tourist office. From mid-June to August, it also operates a smaller, 15-seater boat (Nkr390/190) that scuds deeper and faster into the fjord.

SEA KAYAKING

Coastal Odyssey (☎ 91 11 80 62; www.coastalodyssey.com), based at Geiranger Camping, is run by Jonathan Bendiksen, a Canadian from the Northwest Territories who learnt to kayak almost before he could walk. He rents sea-kayaks (Nkr150/300/600 per hour/half-day/day) and does daily hiking and canoeing

trips to four of the finest destinations around the fjord.

HIKING

Get away from the seething ferry terminal and life's altogether quieter. All around Geiranger there are great signed hiking routes to abandoned farmsteads, waterfalls and vista points. The stylised tourist office map features 13 such short walks leading from the village.

A popular longer trek begins with a ride on the Geiranger Fjordservice sightseeing boat. A steep 45-minute ascent from the landing at Skagehola brings you to Skageflå, a precariously perched hillside farm. You can retrace your steps to the landing, where the boat stops (on request; tell the crew on the way out or just wave) or, to stretch your legs more, continue over the mountain and return to Geiranger via Preikestolen and Homlung.

Another recommended walk follows a sometimes muddy path to the Storseter waterfall, where the track actually passes behind the cascading water. Allow about 45 minutes each way from the starting point at the Vesterås farm.

Sleeping & Eating

Around the village, you'll find plenty of *rom* signs, indicating **private rooms and cabins** (s/d about Nkr300/500) for rent. Hotels are often booked out by package tours, but a dozen or so camping possibilities skirt the fjord and hillsides.

Below the Grande Ford Hotel are a couple of friendly, tranquil camp sites in unbeatable locations. Even if you're carrying a weighty pack, it's well worth the 2km walk northwards to get there. Both rent kayaks, rowing and motor boats and have internet access (Nkr60 per hour).

Grande Hytteutleige og Camping (☎ 70 26 30 68; www.grande-hytteutleige.no; per person/site Nkr20/90, 4-bed cabins with outdoors bathroom 350-450, with bathroom Nkr690-750, 5-/6-bed cabin Nkr720/920; ☹ Apr-Oct; 📺) Take the smaller, northernmost of its two fields for the best views up the fjord. Has wi-fi.

Geirangerfjorden Ferienserter (☎ 95 10 75 27; www.geirangerfjorden.net; per person/site Nkr20/100, 4-bed cabins Nkr450-720, 5-bed cabins Nkr820-920; ☹ May-mid-Sep; 📺) Right next door, this is another excellent camping option.

Geiranger Camping (☎ 70 26 31 20; www.geirangercamping.no; per person/site Nkr20/110; ☹ mid-May-mid-Sep; 📺) A short walk from the ferry terminal, Geiranger Camping is sliced through by a

fast-flowing torrent. Though short on shade it's pleasant and handy for an early morning ferry getaway. Has wi-fi.

Grande Fjord Hotel (☎ 70 26 94 90; www.grande-fjordhotel.com; d Nkr980; 📺) This warmly recommended 48-room hotel does great buffet breakfasts and dinners. It's well worth paying an extra Nkr100 for a room with a balcony and magnificent view over the fjord. Take the shoreside Rv63, direction Åndalsnes, for 2km to find yourself half a world away from the ferry terminal bustle.

our pick Villa Utsikten (☎ 70 26 96 60; www.villa-utsikten.no; s Nkr890, d Nkr1290-1490; ☹ May-Oct; 📺) 'A temple to lift your spirits'. So observed the King of Siam when he stayed here in 1898 during his grand Norwegian tour. A century later, there's no reason to gainsay his judgement. High on the hill above Geiranger (take Rv63, direction Grotli) the venerable family-owned Utsikten, constructed in 1893, has stunning views over town and fjord. Aida, its recommended restaurant, offers splendid à la carte fare (mains around Nkr200) and is open to allcomers.

Union Hotel (☎ 70 26 83 00; www.union-hotel.no; s Nkr1150-1250, d Nkr1760-1960; ☹ Feb-mid-Dec; 📺) The large, spectacularly situated Union Hotel is high on the hill above town. It has a couple of pools (one indoor and heated). Even if you're not staying here, head up the hill, then roll back down after tucking into their gargantuan dinner buffet (Nkr415), which has a minimum of 65 dishes. The restaurant also offers à la carte (mains Nkr255 to Nkr375) and a four-course set menu (Nkr495).

Laizas (☎ 70 26 07 20; ☹ 10am-10pm mid-Apr-Sep) At the ferry terminal, just beside the tourist office, the young team at this airy, welcoming place put on a handful of tasty hot dishes, good salads and snackier items such as focaccia, wraps and sandwiches. There's also an internet terminal (Nkr1 per minute).

Getting There & Away

BOAT
The popular, hugely recommended run between Geiranger and Hellesylt (passenger/car with driver Nkr100/210, one hour) is quite the most spectacular scheduled ferry route in Norway. It has four to eight sailings daily between May and September (every 90 minutes, June to August). Almost as scenic is the ferry that runs twice daily between Geiranger and Valldal (adult/child single Nkr160/80, return

Nkr250/120, 2¼ hours) between late-June and mid-August.

From mid-April to mid-September, the Hurtigruten coastal ferry makes a detour from Ålesund to Geiranger (departs 1.30pm) on its northbound run only.

BUS

In summer, daily buses to Åndalsnes (Nkr197, three hours) via Valldal leave Geiranger at 1pm and 6.10pm. For Molde, change buses in Åndalsnes; for Ålesund, change at Linge.

HELLESYLT

pop 250

The old Viking port of Hellesylt, through which a roaring waterfall cascades, is altogether calmer, if less breathtaking, than Geiranger.

The **tourist office** (☎ 94 81 13 32; ☹ core hrs 10am-5pm mid-Jun-Aug) is in the Samfunnhuset (Community Centre) building. For hikers, it carries *Tafjardfjella*, a walking map at 1:50,000, and for cyclists, *Hellesylt Mountain Biking Map*. There's also an internet terminal (Nkr40 per hour).

The **Peer Gynt Galleriet** (adult/child Nkr50/free; ☹ 11am-7pm Jun-Aug) is a collection of fairly kitsch bas-relief wood carvings illustrating the Peer Gynt legend and fashioned by local chippy, Oddvin Parr. You may find the food at the complex's cafeteria more to your taste.

Sleeping & Eating

Hellesylt Camping (☎ 90 20 68 85; per person/site Nkr15/105) The absence of shade is more than compensated for by its fjord-side location and proximity to the ferry pier.

Hellesylt Vandrerhjem (☎ 70 26 51 28; hellesylt.hostel@vandrerhjem.no; dm Nkr160, s/d with shared bathroom Nkr230/400, d with bathroom Nkr550, 4-bed cabin Nkr340; ☹ Jun-mid-Sep) This HI-affiliated hostel, perched on the hillside overlooking Hellesylt, is on the road towards Stranda, about 200m from the junction. Go for one of the cabins with stunning fjord views if you're in a group. If you're arriving by bus, ask the driver to drop you off to save a long slog back up the hill.

Getting There & Away

For details of the spectacular ferry ride to/from Geiranger see opposite.

Some ferries from Geiranger connect with buses to/from Stryn (Nkr95, one hour) and Ålesund (Nkr136, 2¼ hours).

NORANGSDALEN

Norangsdalen is one of the most inspiring yet little visited crannies of the Northern Fjords. This glorious hidden valley connects Hellesylt with the Leknes-Sæbø ferry, on the scenic Hjørundfjorden, via the village of Øye.

The boulder-strewn scenery unfolds among towering snowy peaks, ruined farmsteads and haunting mountain lakes. In the upper part of the valley at Urasætra, beside a dark mountain lake, are the ruins of several stone crofters' huts. Further on, you can still see the foundations of one-time farmhouses beneath the surface of the pea-green lake Langstøylvatnet, created in 1908 when a rock slide crashed down the slopes of Keipen.

Hikers and climbers will find plenty of scope in the dramatic peaks of the adjacent Sunnmørsalpane, including the lung-searingly steep scrambling ascent of Slogen (1564m) from Øye and the superb Råna (1586m), a long, tough haul from Urke.

Beside the road about 2km south of Øye, there's a monument to one CW Patchell, an English mountaineer who lost his heart to the valley.

The historic 1891 **Hotel Union** (☎ 70 06 21 00; www.unionoye.no; Øye; s/d Nkr865/1730; ☹ May-Sep) has attracted mountaineers, writers, artists and royalty for over a century. With period artwork and furnishings, panelled in wood and speaking old-world charm, it's a delight. Rooms are named after celebrities who have slept in them: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Karen Blixen, Kaiser Wilhelm, Edvard Grieg, Roald Amundsen, Henrik Ibsen, a host of kings and queens – even Coco Chanel. The restaurant serves one-/three-course lunches (Nkr195 to Nkr350) and a three-/five-course dinner costs Nkr475/595.

RUNDE

pop 150

The squat island of Runde, 67km southwest of Ålesund and connected to the mainland by a bridge, plays host to half a million sea birds of 230 to 240 species, including 100,000 pairs of migrating puffins that arrive in April, breed and stay around until late July. There are also colonies of kittiwakes, gannets, fulmars, storm petrels, razor-billed auks, shags and guillemots, plus about 70 other species that nest here.

ÅLESUND

pop 15,000

The coastal town of Ålesund is, for many, just as beautiful as Bergen, if on a much smaller scale, and it's certainly far less touristy.

After the sweeping fire of 23 January 1904, which left 10,000 residents homeless, the German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II sent shiploads of provisions and building materials and Ålesund was rebuilt in record time. Teams of young, committed Norwegian architects, trained for the most part in Germany, designed the town in the characteristic Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) style of the time, while bringing to the movement traditional local motifs and ornamentation. Buildings graced with turrets, spires

and gargoyles sprout throughout town. The best examples are along Apotekergata, Kirkegata, Øwregata, Løvenvoldgata and, especially, Kongensgata.

Ålesund is on a narrow, fishhook-shaped sea-bound peninsula. So tightly packed is the town centre that expansion would be impossible; today most of the townspeople live scattered across nearby islands and peninsulas.

Information

Internet access Available at the tourist Office (Nkr60 per hr). Log on for free at the library in the town hall or, for customers, at Lyspunkt (p265; also has wi-fi) and Lille Løvenfold (p265; also has wi-fi).

Tourist office (☎ 70 15 76 00; www.visitalesund.com; Skaregata 1; ☹ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat,

11am-5pm Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) Its free booklet *On Foot in Ålesund* details the town's architectural highlights in a walking tour.

Sights & Activities

SUNNMØRE MUSEUM

Ålesund's celebrated **Sunnmøre Museum** (☎ 70 17 40 00; www.sunnmoremuseum.no; Borgundgavlen; adult/child Nkr65/15; ☹ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun late-Jun-Aug; 11am-3pm Mon, Tue & Fri, noon-4pm Sun rest-of-year) is 4km east of the centre. Here, at the site of the old Borgundkaupangen trading centre, active from the 11th to 16th centuries, over 50 traditional buildings have been relocated. Ship-lovers will savour the collection of around 40 historic boats, including replicas of Viking-era ships and a commercial trading vessel from around AD 1000. Take bus 618 or 624.

Should you coincide with its restricted opening hours, don't overlook – as many visitors often do – its **Medieval Age Museum** (Middelaldermuseet; ☹ noon-3pm Tue-Thu & Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug). Displayed around excavations of the old trading centre are well documented artefacts discovered onsite and reproductions of medieval illustrations depicting the way of life of the west Norwegian coastal folk who inhabited this thriving community. A pity that entry hours are so reduced...

ATLANTIC OCEAN PARK

At the peninsula's western extreme, sitting 3km from the centre, the **Atlantic Ocean Park** (Atlanterhavsparken; ☎ 70 10 70 60; Tueneset; adult/child Nkr90/55; ☹ 10am-7pm Sun-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat Jun-Aug, 11am-4pm Tue-Sun rest-of-year) can merit a whole day of your life. It introduces visitors to the North Atlantic's undersea world with glimpses of the astonishing richness of coastal and fjord submarine life. Children will wow at the 'snails, seashells and weird marine animals' section, and can dangle a line for crabs or feed the fish in the touch pool while the whole family will gasp at the enormous four-million-litre aquarium. Be there at 1pm (also 3.30pm, June to August) when the largest ocean fish thrash and swirl as they're fed by human divers.

There's also a sanctuary for orphaned seals and the grounds offer superb coastal scenery, bathing beaches and walking trails. In summer, a special bus (adult/child Nkr27/14) leaves St Olav's Plass hourly from 9.55am to 3.55pm, Monday to Saturday.

JUGENDSTIL ART NOUVEAU CENTRE

Everyone from serious aesthetes to kids out for fun will get pleasure from this **art centre** (Jugendstil Senteret; ☎ 70 10 49 70; www.jugendstilsenteret.no; Apotekergata 16; adult/child Nkr50/25; ☹ 10am-7pm Jun-Aug, 11am-5pm Tue-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun rest-of-year). The introductory Time Machine capsule presents 'From Ashes to Art Nouveau', a high-tech, very visual story of the rebuilding of Ålesund after the great fire, while the displays offer carefully selected textiles, ceramics and furniture of the genre. It's in and above a renovated chemist's shop that has retained its magnificent corkscrew staircase and 1st-floor dining room.

Drop into the one-time Bank of Norway building next door where **Kube**, Ålesund's most recent cultural asset, mounts quality temporary exhibitions of architecture, art and design.

AALESUNDS MUSEUM

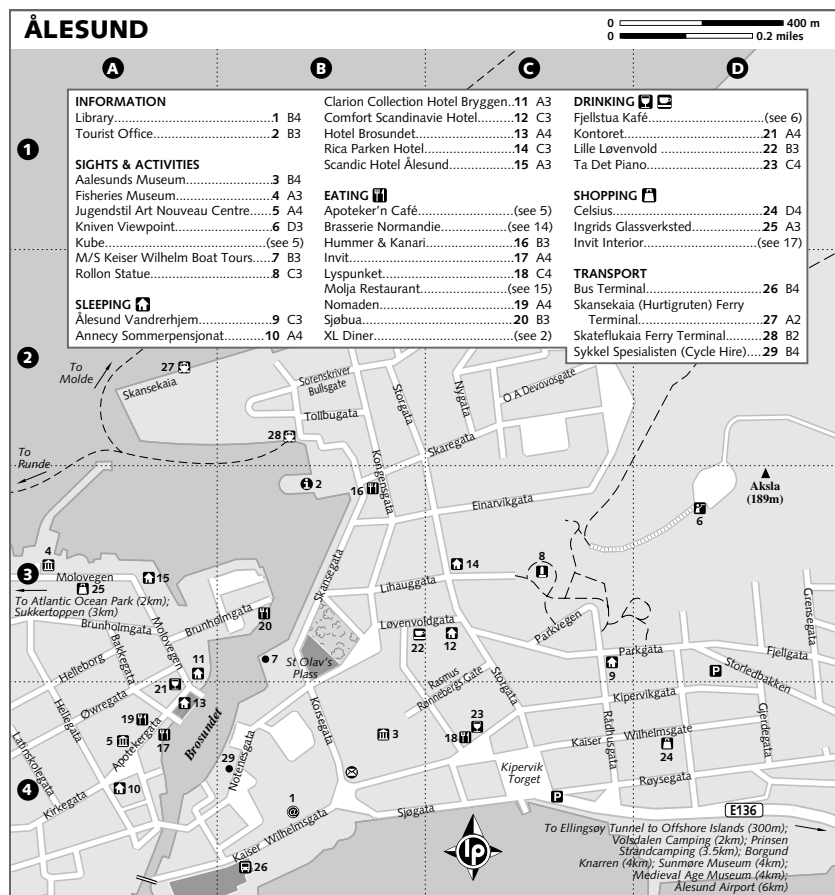
The **town museum** (☎ 70 12 31 70; Rasmus Rønnebergs Gate 16; adult/child Nkr40/10; ☹ 11am-4pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug; 11am-3pm rest-of-year, closed Sat & Sun Feb, Mar, Nov & Dec) illustrates the history of sealing, fishing, shipping and industry in the Sunnmøre region, the fire of 1904, the Nazi WWII occupation and the town's distinctive Art Nouveau architecture. There's also a collection of boats and ships, including the *Uræd* lifeboat (piloted across the Atlantic in 1904 by an intrepid Ole Brude), and an 1812 barn, converted into an old-time grocery.

The affiliated, much smaller **Fisheries Museum** (Ålesund Fiskerimuseet; ☎ 70 12 31 70; Molovegen 10; adult/child Nkr30/10; ☹ 11am-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun & 6-8pm Wed-Fri mid-Jun-mid-Aug), in the 1861 Holmbua warehouse (one of the few to survive the 1904 fire), contains exhibits on fishing through the ages and a special section on drying stockfish and the processing of cod liver oil.

HARBOUR BOAT TOUR

If you're interested in a different perspective of the town, take the **M/S Kaiser Wilhelm** (☎ 70 11 44 30; adult/child Nkr150/75), which does 1¼-hour tours of the harbour and nearby skerries four times daily.

For a more exotic sail, hop aboard the **Borgundknarren**, a replica Viking trading ship that leaves from Sunnmøre Museum for a one-hour cruise (adult/child Nkr50/20) at 1pm every Wednesday, from late June to early August.



AKSLA

The 418 steps up Aksla lead to the splendid **Kniven viewpoint** over Ålesund and the surrounding mountains and islands. Follow Lihauggata from the pedestrian shopping street Kongensgata to the start of the 20-minute puff to the top of the hill. There's also a road to the top; take Røysegata east from the centre, then follow the Fjellstua signposts up the hill.

Up top, the **Fjellstua Kafé** (☎ 70 10 74 00; ☹ mid-May–Aug) is a good place to recover your breath while enjoying a drink with a view.

SUKKERTOPPEN

A more challenging hike leading to an even wider-ranging view leads to the summit of Sukkertoppen (314m). It begins on the street Sukkertoppvegen, on the hook of Ålesund's peninsula. The track follows the easiest route, right up the east-pointing ridgeline. Take bus 618 from town and ask the driver to stop at Hessla school.

Tours

To really delve into Ålesund's Art Nouveau heritage, sign on for the tourist office's excellent 1½- to two-hour **guided town walk** (adult/child Nkr75/free; ☹ mid-Jun–mid-Aug), which leaves the office at noon.

Festivals & Events

Ålesund knows how to party. In late May or early June, there's the **Big Band Festival**. Yachting will be in seventh heaven at the **Ålesund Boat Festival** (www.batfestivalen.no), a week of watery pleasures in the first half of July, while the **Norwegian Food Festival** in the last week of August is a treat for all gourmets and gourmands.

Sleeping

The tourist office has a list of private rooms that start at about Nkr300 per person.

Volsdalen Camping (☎ 70 12 58 90; www.volsdalen camping.no; Volsdalsberga; car/caravan sites Nkr100/150, 2-/4-bed cabins with outdoor bathroom Nkr300/450, with bathroom Nkr800; ☹ year-round) Above the shore about 2km east of the centre, this particularly friendly camp site is the nearest to town. Mainly for caravans and motorhomers, it has a secluded grassy area for campers at its far end. Take bus 613, 614, 618 or 624.

Anney Sommerpensjonat (☎ 70 12 96 30; Kirkegata 1b; basic s/d with shared bathroom Nkr360/390, d with bath-

room Nkr490; ☹ mid-Jun–mid-Aug) This simple place is an excellent budget choice, letting out self-contained student rooms in summer.

Ålesund Vandrerrhjem (☎ 70 11 58 30; aalesund .hostel@vandrerrhjem.no; Parkgata 14; dm/s/d incl breakfast Nkr235/490/690; ☹ year-round; ☑) This central, HI-affiliated hostel is in an attractive building (see the murals in the vast common room) that's just celebrated its first century. There are self-catering facilities and free internet, wi-fi and washing machine. Most doubles have en suite and, for those with a head for heights, bunk beds in the women's dorm are three tiers tall.

Scandic Hotel Ålesund (☎ 21 61 45 00; www.scandic-hotels.com; Molovegen 6; r Nkr890 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, s/d from Nkr1070/1270 Sun–Thu, Nkr870/1070 Fri & Sat rest-of-year, all incl breakfast; ☑) The Scandic has a lot going for it. Around 30% of its 150 rooms, all of which have parquet flooring, overlook the harbour, there's a free sauna and three rooms are equipped for the disabled. Guests – and those dropping in – also eat well; choices at the buffet breakfast are truly substantial and the dinner buffet (Nkr195) at its restaurant, the Molja, is a bargain. Families will welcome the children's play area and separate kids' buffet.

Hotel Brosundet (☎ 70 11 45 00; www.brosundet .no; Apotekergata 5; s/d from Nkr850/1070 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr990/1150 Sun–Thu, Nkr850/1070 Fri–Sun rest-of-year, all incl breakfast; ☑) Although no longer the splendid family concern that it recently superseded, this revamped hotel, right on the waterfront, retains its charm. An ex-warehouse and protected building, it was converted in the 1990s – just look at the wonderful old beams they've preserved, feel the way the floors list and slope and be careful not to crack your head on the huge pulleys, once used to haul up fish.

Rica Parken Hotel (☎ 70 12 50 50; www.rica.no; Storgata 16; s/d Nkr855/1070 Sun–Thu mid-Jun–mid-Aug & Fri & Sat year-round, Nkr1530/1745 Sun–Thu rest-of-year; ☑) Equipped to the usual high Rica chain standards, some of its attractive modern rooms have views of the town park. Its Brasserie Normandie (opposite) is a quality eating option.

Comfort Scandinavie Hotel (☎ 70 15 78 00; www.choice.no; Løvenvoldgata 8; s/d Nkr1255/1455 Sun–Thu, Nkr880/1030 Fri & Sat; ☑) This fine place, Ålesund's oldest hotel, was the first to be constructed after the fire of 1904. With touches and flourishes of Art Nouveau (the furniture is original and in keeping with this theme, and even the lobby flatscreen TV seems to blend in), it exudes style and confidence.

Clarion Collection Hotel Bryggen (☎ 70 12 64 00; www.choice.no; Apotekergata 1-3; s/d Nkr1475/1750 Mon–Thu, Nkr870/1150 Fri–Sun; ☑) This wonderful 130-room waterfront option occupies a converted fish warehouse, artfully decorated with former tools and equipment. Rates include a light evening meal and free waffles throughout the day. There's a sauna, free to guests, too.

Eating

A couple of attractive cafés gaze at each other from opposite sides of trendy Apotekergata.

Nomaden (☎ 97 15 89 85; 0 12; Apotekergata 10; ☹ 11am–5pm) Affiliated to the art gallery next door, this welcoming café, where cool jazz trills in the background, serves sandwiches, gooey cakes and fresh coffee and has its own changing art exhibition.

Invit (☎ 70 15 66 44; Apotekergata 9; ☹ 8.15am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4.30pm Sat) Gosh, the style shaws at this suave coffee bar, which also serves tasty snacks. Just what you'd expect from a place that runs the accompanying interior design boutique (see p266). You can also sip your espresso outside on their floating pontoon, where they considerately supply blankets if the wind whips up.

Apoteker'n Kafé (☎ 70 10 49 70; Apotekergata 16) Within the Jugendstil Art Nouveau Centre (p263) and completing a trio of tempting choices on the same street, this stylish, friendly little place rustles up good snacks, tempting cakes and great coffee.

ourpick Hummer & Kanari (☎ 70 12 80 08; Kongensgata 19; mains Nkr100–275; ☹ Mon–Sat) Behind the bar sit row upon row of liqueur and spirit bottles for mixers and shakers. Here at the downstairs bistro, you order at the counter. Upstairs, it's waiter service. But both call upon the same kitchen, which turns out ample portions of pasta (Nkr110 to Nkr130) and pizza (Nkr100). To save the decision-making, simply sit back, put yourself in the cook's capable hands and go for the best the sea can offer that day, 'Hummer & Kanari's selection of fish and shellfish.' (Nkr245).

Lyspunkt (☎ 70 12 53 00; Kipervikgata 1; mains Nkr125–150; ☹ Tue–Sun; ☑) There are a couple of internet points and free wi-fi for clients at this great-value, great-ambiance, youthful place. Loll back in its deep sofas (though you might not want to sit directly beneath the magnificent swirls and pipes of the giant glass chandelier). There are free refills for coffee and soft drinks, and dishes, such as their

turkey in a caramelised apple and curry sauce, are creative.

Brasserie Normandie (☎ 70 13 23 00; mains Nkr190–205) This brasserie, the main eating option at the Rica Parken Hotel, runs a short but impressive à la carte menu of local and international dishes.

XL Diner (☎ 70 12 42 53; Skaregata 1; mains around Nkr250; ☹ dinner only) Nothing could be further from your traditional greasy diner than this 1st-floor fish restaurant overlooking the harbour. Bacalao is the house speciality. This quintessentially Norwegian dish is offered with a variety of sauces – Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, even Louisiana, and *Bacalao de Mirita Style* (sic), served in a zesty lime and mildly chilli sauce. Vegetables, still firm and crunchy, are cooked to perfection. Better not to request one of the tropical display fish that eye you apprehensively from their heated aquarium.

Sjøbua (☎ 70 12 71 00; www.sjoebua.no; Brunholmgtata 1a; mains Nkr250–360; ☹ 4pm–1am Mon–Sat) In yet another converted wharfside building, stylish Sjøbua is one of northern Norway's finest fish restaurants, where you can choose your crustacean, wriggling and fresh, from the lobster tank.

For a simple snack from a bag, buy a scoop of fresh shrimps directly from the fishing boats that moor along the harbour front beside Skansegata.

Drinking

Ta Det Piano (☎ 70 10 06 99; Kipervikgata 1b; ☹ from 11am) 'Take it Easy' is just that – a laid-back bar with a steep rear garden (live bands sometimes use its flat roof as a stage). Now in its second decade, it's the place to meet the town's younger movers and shakers.

Lille Løvenvold (☎ 70 12 54 00; Løvenvoldgata 2; ☹ 11am–midnight Mon–Thu, 11am–3am Fri & Sat) Here's a Jekyll and Hyde of a place. By day an intimate place for a coffee in relaxing surroundings, it morphs each evening into a bar where canned rock is the accompaniment to your beer. Also has free wi-fi.

Kontoret (☎ 70 10 05 80; Apotekergata 2; ☹ 6pm–late Mon–Sat) 'The Office', headquarters of the Ålesund chapter of Liverpool supporters club, packs 'em in with its hearty pub atmosphere.

Shopping

Ålesund has a couple of quality glass-blowing workshops.

Ingrids Glassverksted (☎ 70 12 53 77; www.ingrids.glassverksted.no; Molovegen 15; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) You'll find everything from practical and stylish glasses, bowls and ornaments to quirky, multicoloured chickens with spiky coxcombs. Should you pass by out of hours, you can watch Ingrid at work on the DVD that plays in her window.

Celsius (☎ 70 1001 16; Kaiser Wilhelmsgata 52; ☎ Tue-Sat) This small glass studio blows unconventional pieces in vivid colours. The kiln is at the front, the shop at the rear.

Invit Interior (☎ 70 15 66 44; Apotekergata 9) Appropriate for such a tasteful town, this shop-cum-gallery displays the very best of creative modern furniture and Scandinavian kitchenware and home appliances.

Getting There & Away

AIR

From Ålesund's **airport** (☎ 70 11 48 00), SAS has three daily flights serving Bergen, two to/from Trondheim and up to eight to/from Oslo. It also has two direct flights weekly between Ålesund and London (Gatwick).

BOAT

An express boat speeds down the coast daily to Bergen (8½ hours). Hurtigruten coastal ferries arrive/depart at 8.45am/6.45pm northbound and depart at 12.45am southbound. On its northbound run, there's a popular detour, mid-April to mid-September, via Geiranger – hence the large gap between arrival and departure times.

BUS

Nor-Way Bussekspress runs five times daily, Monday to Friday, to/from Hillesylt (Nkr149, 2½ hours) with three services continuing to Stryn (Nkr235, 3¾ hours). There's also one express bus daily to/from Bergen (Nkr580, 9¼ hours), three to/from Trondheim (Nkr500, 7½ hours) via Molde (Nkr131, 2¼ hours) and both a day and night run to/from Oslo (Nkr790, 10 hours). Local buses run to/from Åndalsnes (Nkr200, 2¼ hours, twice daily).

Getting Around

Ålesund's airport is located on Vigra island, connected to the town by an under-sea tunnel. **Flybussen** (☎ 177) departs from Skateflukaia (Nkr70, 25 minutes) and the bus station one hour before the departure of domestic flights.

Town buses are run by **Nettbuss Møre** (☎ for timetables 177).

Drivers to the airport and offshore islands pay tunnel tolls totalling Nkr60 each way for a car and driver, plus Nkr19 per additional passenger.

Sykel Spesialisten (☎ 70 12 28 20; Notenesgata 3) rents bicycles (Nkr140 per day).

For a taxi, call ☎ 70 10 30 00.

AROUND ÅLESUND Offshore Islands

With wheels, you can take in the four offshore islands of Valderøy, Vigra, Giske and Godøy in a pleasant day trip from Ålesund. All offer excellent short hill or coastal walks.

At the furthest, northern extremity of the furthest island, **Godøy**, is the picturesque 1876 **lighthouse** (☎ 70 18 50 90; adult/child Nkr20/10; ☎ noon-6pm Jun-Aug) in the fishing station of **Alnes**. For that end-of-the-world feeling, climb to the circular balcony via the five floors of this all-wood structure, each displaying the canvases of renowned Norwegian artist and Godøy resident, Ørnulf Opdahl. Don't leave without sampling one of the delightful cakes, baked on the spot by Eva, the lighthouse custodian.

Giske was also the home of Gange-Rolv (known as Rollon in France; he's also claimed by Vigra), the Viking warrior who besieged Paris, subsequently founded the Duchy of Normandy in 911 and was an ancestor of England's William the Conqueror. Highlight of the island is its ornate 12th-century **church** (adult/child Nkr20/10 incl guided tour; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-7pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug). Built largely of marble, its real jewels are the elaborately carved polychrome altarpiece and pulpit. The island's Makkevika marshes are a prime spot for bird-watching.

On **Valderøy**, the **Skjonghellaren** caves have revealed bones of Arctic fox, sea otter and ringed seal, plus evidence of human occupation at least 2000 years ago. In the northwest of the island, they're reached by a breezy 500m walk from the parking spot between cliff and shoreline, then a steep five-minute boulder scramble.

Vigra has Ålesund's airport and **Blindheimssanden** (also called Blimsand) a long white-sand beach.

MOLDE

pop 19,200

Molde, hugging the shoreline at the wide mouth of Romsdalsfjorden, is well known as the 'Town of Roses' for its fertile soil, rich vegetation and mild climate. But the town's chief claim to fame is its annual July jazz festival.

Modern Molde, though architecturally unexciting, is a pleasantly compact little place whose coastal landscapes recall New Zealand or Seattle's Puget Sound. To test the comparison, drive or trek up to the Varden overlook, 400m above the town.

Information

Dockside Pub (Target) Internet access at a popular pub (see p268).

Laundrette (Guest Marina)

Library (Kirkebakken 1-3) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 70 20 10 00; www.visitmolde.com; Torget 4; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug; 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) Sells *Molde Fraena* (1:50,000), the best hiking map of the area. Also offers free internet access.

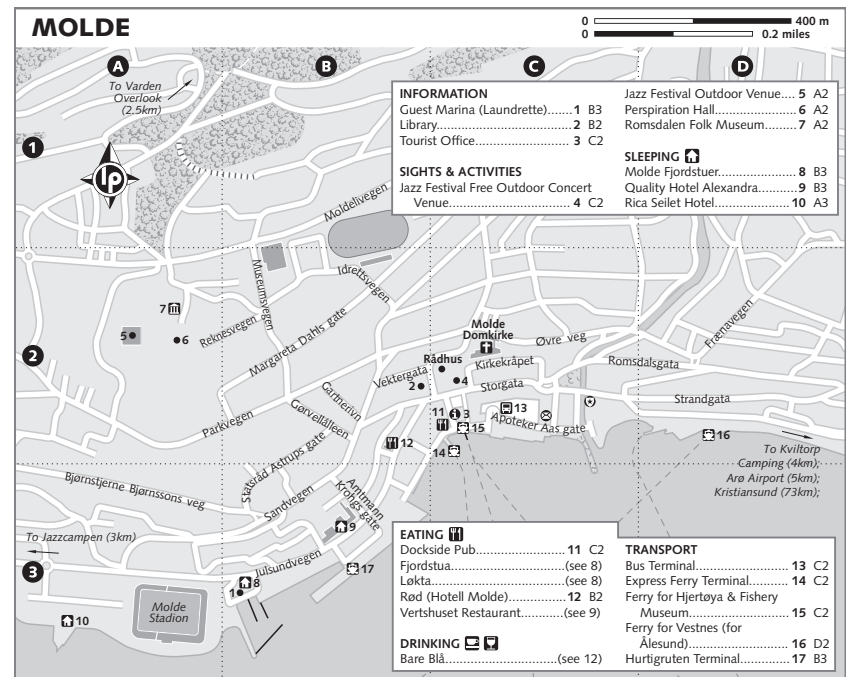
Sights

ROMSDALEN FOLK MUSEUM

Sprawling across a large area within this open-air **museum** (Romsdalsmuseet; ☎ 71 20 24 60; Per Amdamsveg 4; admission free; ☎ 8am-10pm) are nearly 50 old buildings, shifted here from around the Romsdal region. Highlights include Bygata (an early-20th-century town street) and a 'composite church', assembled from elements of now-demolished local stave churches. In summer, there are very worthwhile **guided tours** (adult/child Nkr60/free; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun Jul, 11am-3pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun 15-30 Jun & 1-15 Aug), in English on request.

FISHERY MUSEUM

This **museum** (Fiskerimuseet; ☎ 93 42 54 06; adult/child Nkr60/free; ☎ noon-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug), on Hertoya island, is a short ferry ride from the Torget terminal. Also open-air, its cod liver oil factory, cottages and fishermen's shacks, tiny school-room and collection of boats bring to life the coastal fishing cultures around the mouth of Romsdalsfjorden from the mid-19th century onwards. When it's open, **ferries** (☎ 99 54 98 94;



MOLDEJAZZ

Every year, Moldejazz pulls in up to 100,000 fans and a host of stars, mainly Scandinavian (in 2007 it included the intriguingly named Funky Butt) but with a sprinkling of the internationally famous (such as, in 2007, Steely Dan and Elvis Costello).

The town rocks all the way from Monday to Saturday in the middle of July. Of over 100 concerts, a good one-third are free, while big events are very reasonably priced at Nkr100 to Nkr280.

Trad jazz sweats it out in Perspiration Hall, while the big draws perform outdoors near the Romsdalsmuseet and there are plenty of free supporting events (including a daily street parade) from noon onwards in front of the Rådhus.

For the lowdown on this year's events, dial ☎ 71 20 31 50 or log onto www.moldejazz.no. You can book by credit card for a Nkr10 surcharge through **BillettService** (☎ 81 53 31 33).

adult/child Nkr50/25) run four times daily from Molde between 11am and 5.45pm.

Festivals & Events

Moldejazz, the Molde International Jazz Festival (see above) is a magnet for jazz fiends from all over Norway and further afield.

Sleeping

The tourist office has a number of private homes on its books, most with self-catering facilities and costing from Nkr150 to Nkr200 per person. During the Molde International Jazz Festival, there's a large temporary camp site, Jazzcampen, 3km west of the centre.

Kviltorp Camping (☎ 71 21 17 42; www.kviltorp.no in Norwegian; Fannestrandveien 142; car/caravan sites Nkr120/140 plus per person Nkr10, 2-bed cabins Nkr400, 4-bed cabins with shower Nkr650-750) This fjord-side camp site occupies a potentially noisy spot at the end of the airport runway but fortunately there's very little air traffic. Cabins are available year-round. Bus 214 and the Flybussen pass right by.

Quality Hotel Alexandra (☎ 71 20 37 50; www.choice.no; Storgata 1-7; s/d Nkr750/960 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr1475/1595 Mon–Thu, Nkr895/1050 Fri–Sun rest-of-year; ☎ ☎ ☎) Most rooms here have a balcony and offer great views. There's a sauna and mini-gym (free to guests) and, for an aperitif, the cosy Bar A. It runs a good restaurant, the Vertshuset (☎ 71 20 37 75; pizzas Nkr89 to Nkr205, mains Nkr185 to Nkr235), all attractive panelled wood and bare brickwork. The hotel's high point (literally: it's up on the top floor) is its indoor heated pool, open all year, even when the snow's around.

our pick **Molde Fjordstuer** (☎ 71 20 10 60; www.havstuen.no; Julsundvegen 6; s/d incl breakfast Nkr740/990 mid-Jun–mid-Aug & Fri & Sat year-round, Nkr990/1240 Sun–Thu rest-of-year) Architecturally exciting, the

Fjordstuer replicates the squat, solid forms of typical fisherfolk cottages. Small and welcoming, half of its 18 rooms have fjord views. Enjoy the vista from its quality restaurant Fjordstua (open 4pm to 10.30pm, Monday to Saturday) with its picture windows, or snack on shrimps, fish soup and other delicacies from the sea at the equally stylish Løkta (open 11am to 7pm Monday to Saturday) on the quayside below.

Rica Seilet Hotel (☎ 71 11 40 00; www.rica.no; Gideonvegen 2; s/d Nkr1015/1115 mid-Jun–mid-Aug; Nkr1500/1750 Mon–Fri, Nkr1015/1265 Sat & Sun rest-of-year; ☎ ☎). This soaring hotel contrasts with its near-neighbour, the Fjordstuer, designed by the same architect, as it juts out into the sound like a huge silver sail. Within, the artwork in public areas is particularly striking. There are bedrooms up to the 14th floor, each with large picture windows and magnificent views. For a dreamier vista, relax in the Glasgow Lounge at water level; for a bird's-eye perspective, shoot up to the Sky Bar on the 15th floor.

Eating & Drinking

Dockside Pub (☎ 71 21 93 90; Torget; soup Nkr45, mains Nkr150-190, salads Nkr82-99; ☎ core hrs noon-12.30am) At this popular place you can snack on pizzas, baguettes and sandwiches, or simply sip a drink either inside or on its attractive quayside terrace, according to the air temperature. It puts on live performances at least weekly.

Rød (☎ 71 20 30 01; Storgata 19; mains Nkr175-230) At 'Red', the restaurant of Hotell Molde, the menu, with plenty of dishes flashed in and out of the wok and tempting mains such as its fillet of beef with sauté of artichoke, squash and cherry cream sauce, is more exciting than its run-of-the-mill décor.

Bare Blå (☎ 71 21 58 88; Storgata 19), in Hotell Molde, is a popular pub on the main street.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Molde's shoreside **Årø airport** (☎ 71 21 47 80) is 5km east of the city centre. Flybussen (Nkr35, 10 minutes) meets and greets all flights. There are three to five services daily to/from Oslo and two daily to/from both Trondheim and Bergen.

BOAT

Northbound, the Hurtigruten coastal ferry leaves at 10pm (6.30pm mid-September to mid-April); southbound, at 9.30pm. Express ferries also operate from Molde.

BUS

Inland buses run to and from Kristiansund (Nkr148, 1½ hours, up to 12 daily). Also, much more attractive and scarcely longer is the coastal run that rolls along the Atlanterhavsveien (see right). Other regional services include Åndalsnes (Nkr120, 1½ hours, up to eight) and Ålesund (Nkr131, 2¼ hours, three daily).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Travelling northwards on the Rv64, the Tussentunnelen short cut (Nkr15) avoids a dog's leg and lops off a good 15 minutes.

AROUND MOLDE

Ona

The beautiful, tiny outer island of Ona, with its bare rocky landscapes and picturesque lighthouse, is home to an offshore fishing community. Its one major event was an enormous tidal wave that washed over it in 1670. It makes a popular day trip from Molde. En route, WWII buffs may want to stop off at **Gossen Krigsminnesamling** (☎ 71 17 15 00; Gossen; adult/child/family Nkr30/10/70; ☎ noon-5pm Tue–Sun late Jun–early Aug), a former Nazi wartime airstrip built by Russian POWs on the low island of Gossen. The abandoned summer-house village of Bjørnsund, where a café and shop operate from June to August, also warrants a brief stop.

Bud

The Rv63 coastal route between Molde and Kristiansund is a pleasant alternative to the faster, ferry-less E89. En route lies the little fishing village of Bud, huddled around its compact harbour. In the 16th and 17th

centuries it was the greatest trading centre between Bergen and Trondheim.

Serving as a WWII museum and memorial, **Ergan Coastal Fort** (Ergan Kystfort; ☎ 91 51 05 26; adult/child Nkr60/40; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun–Aug) was hastily erected by Nazi forces in May 1940. Various armaments and a network of bunkers and soldiers' quarters are dispersed around the hill with the sick bay and store sunk deep inside the mountain.

PlusCamp Bud (☎ 71 26 10 23; www.budcamping.no in Norwegian; car/caravan sites Nkr150/175, 4-bed cabin with outdoor bathroom Nkr400, 8-bed cabin with bathroom Nkr950) lies beside a small marina, where you can hire canoes, rowing boats and motor boats.

Sjøbua Mat og Vinhus (☎ 71 26 14 00; Vikaveien; mains Nkr170-210; ☎ daily mid-May–mid-Sep, Fri–Sun rest-of-year) is a fish restaurant that serves up the local catch in a harbourfront warehouse with wooden floorboards and a boat poised in the middle of the room.

Bus 352 travels regularly between Molde and Bud (one hour; four to seven times daily, except Sunday).

Trollkirka

If you're heading towards Bud and Atlanterhavsveien, it's worth making a short side trip to the Trollkirka (Trolls' Church) cave. Three white marble grottoes are connected by subterranean streams, and in one an impressive 14m waterfall tumbles. The entrance is a steep uphill walk (2.5km; allow two to three hours for the return trip) from the signed car park. You'll need a torch and good boots to explore the caves fully.

Atlanterhavsveien & Averøya

The eight storm-lashed bridges of the Atlantic Ocean Road, designated a National Tourist Route, buck and twist like so many sea serpents as it connects 17 islets between Vegav and the island of Averøya. In 2006, the UK's *Guardian* newspaper crowned it the 'world's best road trip'. That's going it a bit for a stretch of highway barely 8km long but it's certainly hugely scenic and in a storm you'll experience nature's wrath at its most dramatic. Look out for whales and seals offshore along the route in season and perhaps make a short detour north of the main road to the isolated **Hestskjæret Fyr** lighthouse.

Well worth the detour too is **Kvernes stave church** (adult/child Nkr30/free; ☎ 10am-5pm daily mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Sun only rest-of-year) on Averøya, dating

from around the 14th century and rebuilt in the 17th. Inside are a large 300-year-old votive ship and a 15th-century Catholic-Lutheran hybrid altar screen. There's also a small open-air museum and a gallery/handicrafts outlet nearby.

Skjerneset Bryggecamping (☎ 71 51 18 94; www.skjerneset.com in Norwegian; per person/site Nkr25/90, cabins Nkr600-715, d with shared bathroom Nkr390, tr with bathroom Nkr530) is a hyperfriendly place, right beside the sea. At Sveggveika on Ekkilsøya, west of Bremsnes, it's at the end of a 1km dirt road. The owners, themselves former commercial fisherfolk, organise deep-sea trips in their own boat, or you can hire a motorboat and sling your own line. Rooms are in a former fish warehouse, which houses a fascinating family museum on the top floor.

Håholmen Havstuer (☎ 71 51 72 50; www.haholmen.no; s/d Nkr860/1270) is a former fishing station on an offshore islet north of the middle of the archipelago. The 49 rooms, scattered around the renovated complex, are simply and tastefully furnished in rustic style and Ytterbrugga, its restaurant, serves the freshest of fish. To transport you there, the *Kvitserk*, a replica of a Viking vessel, makes the 10-minute sea journey, leaving the roadside car park on the hour, between 11am and 9pm, late June to mid-August.

Year-round, buses of **Eide Auto** (90 77 30 63) link Molde and Kristiansund (Nkr123, 2¼ hours, two to four daily) via the coastal route and Atlanterhavsveien. For car drivers, there are frequent ferry connections between Bremsnes and Kristiansund.

KRISTIANSUND

pop 17,100

The historic cod-fishing and -drying town of Kristiansund ranges over three islands. Its best restaurants serve dishes from the deep, fishing boats – large and small – still moor alongside its quays while Mellemværftet, unkempt and chaotic, hangs on as a working boatyard.

Kristiansund looks both inland and to the sea for its wealth, even though the waters are no longer so bountiful – the huge hauls of yesteryear are now the source of tales as tall as any angler's. In addition to cod-processing (some 80% of the world's klippfisk is cured in and around the town), it remains an important port for the export of timber, hewn from the forests of the interior. And, as the most significant town between Trondheim

and Stavanger for servicing Norway's North Sea oilfields, it takes its share of black gold.

Information

Ark bookshop (☎ 71 57 09 60; cnr Kaibakken & Nedre Enggate) Also good for maps.

Laundrette (Guest Marina)

Onkel og Vennene (Kaibakken 1) Free internet access at a popular place for a drink (see p272).

Tourist office (☎ 71 58 54 54; www.visitkristiansund.com; Kongens plass 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri rest-of-year) Free internet access.

Sights

Kristiansund's **Gamle Byen** (Old Town) occupies part of Innlandet island, a few of whose clapboard buildings date back to the 17th century. The grandiose **Lossiusgården**, at the eastern end of the historic district, was the distinguished home of an 18th-century merchant. The venerable 300-year-old **Dødeladen Café** – where you can still get a decent meal and a drink – hosts cultural and musical events. The most convenient access from the centre is on the Sundbåt ferry (see p273) from Piren ferry port.

Kristiansund's monumental 1914 **Festiviteten** theatre, although plain enough from the outside, has an attractive Art Nouveau interior. Beside Piren, the **Klippfiskkjerringa statue**, by Tore Bjørn Skjøsvik, represents a fishwife carrying cod for drying.

MELLEMVÆRFTET

Something of a nautical junkyard, **Mellemværftet**, free and accessible any time, is best approached on foot along the quayside from the Smia Fiskerestaurant. It's difficult to make out what's what amid the agreeable clutter but it includes the remnants of Kristiansund's 19th-century shipyard, a forge and workshop, and workers quarters.

MUSEUMS

Kristiansund has several museums housed, for the most part, in historic buildings whose exteriors alone warrant a visit. Happily so, since some have severely reduced opening hours – or none at all except by appointment. We detail here the situation as it was when we last visited and trust that things may have improved when you call by. The helpful tourist office will be au fait. Otherwise, try your luck on ☎ 71 58 70 00,

the central phone number for all museums, or www.nordmore.museum.no.

Handelshuset (Freiveien; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm daily mid-Jun–Aug, Sat & Sun only rest-of-year), formally a lively place serving traditional food, seems to have been overcome by the general cultural languor too. Its magnificent vintage jukebox, with old 45rpm hits by Presley, the Stones, the Beach Boys and other distant icons, may have played its last platter unless someone gets around to repairing it. But you can still browse among Handelshuset's old posters and signs, learn something of Kristiansund's commercial history and drink the freshest coffee, roasted on Norway's oldest operational coffee roaster.

The **Norwegian Klippfisk museum** (Norsk Klippfiskmuseum; ☎ 71 58 30 14; adult/child ind Nkr50/free guided tour; ☎ noon-5pm late Jun–early Aug), in the 1749 **Milnbrygga warehouse** on Gomalandet peninsula, presents the 300-year history of the dried-cod export industry in Kristiansund and continues to produce modest quantities of *klippfisk* (salted cod) in the traditional way. From the town centre, take the Sundbåt ferry and ask to be dropped off.

Just north of this museum are **Hjelkrebrygga**, a former *klippfisk* warehouse dating from 1835, and neighbouring **Woldbrygga**, a barrel factory constructed in 1875. Both are open only by appointment.

KIRKELANDET CHURCH

Architect Odd Østby's inspirational church (Langveien; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Aug, 10am-2pm rest-of-year) was built in 1964 to replace the one destroyed by Nazi bombs. The angular exterior, where copper and concrete alternate, is sober and measured. Inside, all lines direct the eye to the 320 panes of stained glass at the rear of the chancel. Moving upward from the earthy colours at the base, they become paler and, at the top, replicate the 'celestial light of heaven'.

Behind the church lies **Vanndammene Park**, with plenty of greenery, walking tracks and the eagle's eyrie Varden watchtower viewpoint.

Sleeping

Atlanten Camping & Kristiansund Vandrerhjem (☎ 71 67 11 04; www.atlanten.no; Dalaveien 22; car/caravan sites Nkr110/130 plus per person Nkr10, 4-bed cabin with outdoor bathroom Nkr380-485, with bathroom Nkr590, motel s/d Nkr530/630, hostel s/d with bathroom Nkr380/430) Occupying joint premises, this hostel, motel and camp site lie within 20-minutes walking

distance of the centre. It's a friendly place and the well-equipped hostel kitchen boasts 17 fridges. Camping facilities could do with a revamp, however.

Utsyn Pensjonat (☎ 71 56 69 70; fax 71 56 69 90; Kongens Plass 4; s/d Nkr440/590) With only eight rooms, the Utsyn is a quiet, uncomplicated, bog-standard boarding house whose chief virtue is its price. Under new Asian ownership, its café offers both Norwegian and Chinese cooking.

Rica Hotel (☎ 71 57 12 00; www.rica.no; Storgata 41; s/d Nkr970/1160 mid-Jun–mid-Aug, Nkr1395/1645 Sun-Thu, Nkr910/1160 Fri & Sat rest-of-year; (P) (Q)) Fundamentally renovated in 2006, the fjord-side Rica has that almost-new feel to it. All rooms have a bathtub and most overlook the water. The view gets better – and best of all from its top-floor bar, open to all – the higher you rise. There's a free sauna and mini-gym for guest use.

Quality Hotel Grand (☎ 71 57 13 00; www.choice.no; Bernstorffstredet 1; s/d Nkr1310/1430 Sun-Thu, Nkr835/1050 Fri & Sat; (P) (Q)) With its 109 rooms, the Hotel Grand is Kristiansund's largest. Six rooms are equipped for the handicapped and 30 take into account guests with allergies. Rooms are comfortable and attractively furnished and the hotel's Edward Restaurant has an à la carte menu that's as good as anywhere in town.

Eating

For a café that's rich in atmosphere, go out of your way to visit Handelshuset (see left).

Bryggeakanten (☎ 71 67 61 60; Storkaia 1; pizza Nkr115; ☎ Mon-Sat) This recently opened brasserie and bar sits right beside the harbour. It's a great choice, even if only for a drink. Even better, tucked into a pizza, bruschetta or creative sandwich (such as *bacalao* in tomato sauce, lightly spiced with chilli) on its broad terrace. Inside, where full dinners are served, is more intimate. Here, too, the menu is imaginative, taking traditional ingredients and giving them a new twist.

our pick **Smia Fiskerestaurant** (☎ 71 67 11 70; Fosnagata 30b; mains Nkr140-240; ☎ 1-11pm) The much garlanded Smia fish restaurant is in an old forge, adorned from wall to ceiling with bellows and blacksmith's tools – plus a couple of whale vertebrae and a hanging split cod. The fish soup (Nkr80) makes a great starter, or you can also have it as a main course (Nkr130).

Sjøstjerna (☎ 71 67 87 78; Skolegata 8; mains Nkr200-235; ☎ 5pm-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat) Here's



another recommended fish restaurant, which offers a similar menu and marine-themed interior. Eat inside or on its pleasant street-side terrace beside pedestrianised Skolegata.

Drinking & Entertainment

Onkel og Vennene (☎ 71 67 58 10; Kaibakken 1; 🚪) At 1st floor level it's a popular place for an

evening beer or snack. It has great harbour views, whether inside or from the small veranda, where smokers can puff away. There's free internet for guests.

Christian's Bar (☎ 71 57 03 00; Storgata 17) On the 1st floor of Hotell Kristiansund, Christian's Bar is an attractive pub where the over-25s congregate.

INFORMATION		SLEEPING 🛏		Onkel og Vennene.....	22 B4
Ark Bookshop.....	1 B4	Atlanten Camping & Kristiansund		ENTERTAINMENT 🎪	
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(Laundrette).....	2 B3	Quality Hotel Grand.....	14 B4	Mucca.....	23 B4
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Lossiusgården.....	9 C4	DRINKING 🍷 🍺		Piren (Sundbåt Ferry Stop & Ferry for Grip).....	30 B4
Mellemværftet.....	10 B2	Christian's Bar (Hotel Kristiansund).....	20 B4		
Norwegian Klippfisk Museum & Milnbygga.....	11 C3	Dødeladen Kafé.....	21 B5		
Woldbygga.....	12 B2				

Mucca (☎ 71 67 74 04; Hauggata 16; 🕒 from 8pm Fri & Sat), located beside the Comfort Hotel Fosna, is where you'll find the town's younger crowd, while **J P Clausens** (☎ 71 57 12 00; Storgata 41-43), the piano and wine bar of the Rica Hotel, is more for slow waltzers.

Shopping

At **Klippfiskbutikken** (☎ 71 67 12 64, 95 20 26 30; Storkaia) genial Knut Garshol, a member of the international slow food ecogastronomy movement, will buttonhole you and enthusiastically proclaim the virtues of klippfisk at this splendid temple to the mighty cod.

Kristiansund has a branch of **Vinnmopolet** (Storkaia), the state booze monopoly, which sits opposite Bryggekannten.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The town's **Kvernberget airport** (☎ 71 68 30 50) is on Nordlandet island. There are up to six flights daily to/from Oslo and two to three to/from Bergen.

Buses travel regularly to/from the airport (Nkr40, 15 minutes, up to eight daily) to meet incoming flights.

BOAT

For day trips to the eastern end of the Atlanterhavsveien and the Kvernes stave church, take the Bremsnes ferry (Nkr24, 20 minutes, every 20 to 30 minutes) from Holmakaia Quay.

Express boats connect Kristiansund with Trondheim (3½ hours, up to three daily from Nordmørkaia). The Hurtigruten coastal ferry also calls in daily at Holmakaia. The southbound ferry departs at 5pm, northbound at 1.45am (11pm mid-September to mid-April).

BUS

Inland buses run to/from Molde (Nkr148, 1¾ hours, up to 12 daily). The coastal route that rolls along the Atlanterhavsveien (see p269) is much more attractive and scarcely longer. Northwards, there are between one and three daily buses to Trondheim (Nkr375, 3¼ hours).

Getting Around

The **Sundbåt ferry** (adult/child Nkr20/10, day ticket Nkr50) is well worth the ride for its own sake and for the special perspective it gives of the harbour. It links the town centre and the islands of Innlandet, Nordlandet and Gomalandet, running every half hour, Monday to Saturday. The full circuit takes 20 minutes.

AROUND KRISTIANSUND

Grip

Crowded onto a tiny rocky island, the colourful village of Grip with its pastel painted houses sits amid an archipelago of 80 islets and skerries. In the early 19th century, after a drop in cod hauls and two powerful storms, the village was practically abandoned. It eventually bounced back and was for years Norway's smallest municipality before being appended to Kristiansund in 1964.

The island's **stave church**, much restored and open according to the ferry's arrival, was originally constructed in the late 15th century and has an interesting, manifestly Catholic altar cabinet. On an offshore skerry, the 47m-tall Bratthårskollen lighthouse, built in 1888, prods skywards.

From mid-May to late August, the **M/S Gripskyss** (☎ 71 58 26 16; www.gripskyss.no) plies the 14km between Kristiansund's Piren terminal and Grip (adult/child Nkr190/95 return, 30 minutes) once or twice daily.