



# Fabled Fjords

Mythic waters overflow with beauty and legend in Scandinavia. BY DEBRA BOKUR

**Northern Sights:**

(Left to right) Eidfjord, Church of Hopperstad, Nærøyfjord Mountains, and Briksdal Glacier

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I'm zipped into a bulky, insulated float suit, flying over the icy waters of Norway's Trollfjord in a rib boat, drinking in the towering cliffs and waterfalls that surround this sparkling strip of water. My guide slows the boat to a crawl and points overhead to a sea eagle that's begun to follow us. The reason for the eagle's interest becomes clear as the guide reaches into a container by his feet and throws a fish into the air. The enormous bird catches it and departs but remains overhead not far away as we circle through the fjord and head back to shore.

The sea eagles are real, but there's no shortage of the mystical to be found in the cold, glittering

waters of Scandinavia's fjords. Ancient tales abound of noble kings and enchanted maidens, of bloody battles and fierce serpents, of brave Vikings and devious wizards. Though the truth beneath the sagas and stories is for someone else to determine, one thing is certain: The rich mythology pales in comparison to the supreme — and very tangible — natural beauty of these watery landscapes.

One can find multiple ways to explore this corner of the world. Whether you make your way by boat, on foot or by car, you'll encounter a host of memorable spots to add to your itinerary, including a multitude of idyllic coastal towns and villages filled with historic sites and natural wonders.

Norway's legion of waterfall-framed fjords includes Sognefjord — sometimes lauded as the king of all fjords — where Hopperstad Stave Church, dating to 1130, and Hove Stone Church, constructed in the late 1100s, remain standing in the shoreline village of Vik. Along the Atlantic Road not far from the waters of Moldefjord, you'll find the small, nearby town of Eide and the Bergtatt marble cave. Take a tour of the cave, conducted on floating wooden rafts that glide across a large subterranean lake and down the many small tunnel streams leading from the main body of water. Numerous candles light the cave from within, and beautiful piped-in music plays in the background



as you traverse the tranquil surface. There's even an opportunity to drink from the natural spring that feeds the lake.

Norway's other essential fjords include Eidfjord and the Sheer Mountains, with its *The Lord of the Rings* scenery and Hardangervidda Nature Centre; the mountain-shrouded Nordfjord, where you can hike at the rapidly receding Briksdal Glacier and enjoy a break for coffee and waffles at the Briksdal Inn; and the breathtakingly lovely Nærøyfjord, a UNESCO World Heritage site that features narrow waters enclosed by soaring, snow-covered peaks.

Though Sweden and Denmark have fewer fjords than Norway, several are worth noting — best enjoyed on foot with a self-guided or organized hiking tour. Located in Sweden north of Göteborg, the hills and slopes rising from Singlefjord brim with the remains of Viking-era ramparts and fortifications, while Sundsvall Fjord, north of Stockholm on the western coast, is popular for seasonal mountain biking and kayaking.

The Limfjord and Mariager fjords in Denmark's

North Jutland region afford hikers expansive vistas that include a meld of rolling countryside, peaceful valleys, and hiking and biking trails with varying levels of difficulty. The island of Mors, located in the deep waters of the Limfjord, offers a marvelous location for cycling. Take a boat across the fjord, and let your explorations include an oyster safari, kayaking or sailing, and wandering along the cobblestone streets of charming fishing villages such as Mariager.

While the geography of each of the Scandinavian countries includes the long, narrow inlets and fingery lakes we know as fjords, some are less accessible than others, particularly if you've chosen to explore via a land route. Some coastlines near the waters are bereft of easily reachable road networks, making travel via terra firma a tricky enterprise. For many, a less stressful and more intimate way to experience the beauty of fjords is to drift upon their surfaces while on a small-ship cruise. Viking, Crystal, Hurtigruten and Windstar, among other cruise lines, offer sailing voyages that allow travelers access to Scandinavia's fjords.

## INFO TO GO

The main airports from which to access cruise ports are Oslo Gardermoen Airport (OSL), Stockholm Arlanda Airport (ARN) and Copenhagen Kastrup (CPH). If you've opted for a driving route through Norway, both Oslo Gardermoen and Bergen Airport, Flesland (BGO) will put you in proximity of fjord lands. All airports make rental cars available. If you prefer an automatic transmission vehicle, make your request prior to travel. Most cruise lines offer transportation options between airports and cruise departure/arrival ports. Be sure to arrange cruise transfers in advance of travel.