

NORWAY – THE FJORDLANDS OF THE WEST

8-days/ 7-nights **SELF-GUIDED** inn-to-inn walking holiday



This is the ideal introduction to the splendour and the majesty that is wilderness walking in the fjord region of Scandinavian Norway. Our walk is undertaken from several centres using easy to catch transportation on local trains and boats. You travel by rail to some of the wildest, most spectacular, classic 'picture postcard' settings within the realms of Norwegian mountain and fjord land.

Many tourists will enjoy taking a leisurely cruise along the Norwegian coast to see the beauty of the countryside from below (looking up), but on this tour you can be looking down and walking amongst the highlands, a much more engaging experience.

The route embraces the famous Hardangervidda area of western Norway where there is the potential for wonderful highland walking through the remnants of the last Ice Age. The retreating glaciers once overwhelmed and moulded this landscape; gouging out the great coastal grooves which, with postglacial rising sea levels, have become the fjords. The beautiful Sognefjord is the longest and deepest in the country.

There are a wide range of walks to take in the highlands, which lead you right up onto the glacier's edge; it is even possible to take an excursion out onto the ice. There are also the more lush walks down into the pastoral settings of the Flåm and Aurland Valleys. These are furnished with forests, farmsteads, cascades and churches. All in all an unforgettable experience, especially if the Norse gods favor you with good weather!

This self-guided tour is not suitable for solo travellers due to the rugged terrain and isolation.

Departs: Daily from mid-July to late September

Cost from: **\$2870** per person twin share. Single room supplement from \$760

Starts: Geilo **Ends:** Aurland

Includes: 7 nights' twin-share accommodation in hotels / chalets; 7 breakfasts, 2 packed lunches, 7 dinners; luggage transfer from Flåm to Aurland on Day 6; route notes and maps (one set per room); emergency hotline.

Not included: Train transfers, local transport such as cable car, taxi or ferry services; meals not mentioned; beverages; entrance fees; personal expenses; travel insurance; travel to/from the start and end points of the trip. There is only one baggage transfer included on this tour, from Flåm to Aurland. Because most of your transfers are by train and you will need to travel with your own bags, we recommend that you keep your luggage weight down and for convenience use an easily portable bag, and bring with you a smaller day pack.

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Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Make your way by train to Geilo, a scenic railway journey in itself; the route winds up into the high eagle swept forests, lakes and moorlands of Norway. You stay two nights here, in a pleasant hotel within walking distance from the center of Geilo. Rooms are newly renovated and there is a cozy informal atmosphere. Facilities include restaurant, indoor swimming pool, sauna and tennis court, lounge-bar and pub. We recommend you travel to Geilo from Oslo (*book flights to Oslo Gardermoen, rather than Oslo Torp which is served by some low-cost carriers and is 100km south of Oslo city*). There are normally four train services daily from Oslo to Geilo, with the latest departure in the mid-afternoon. Journey time is approx. 3.5-4 hours. You can also get to Geilo from Bergen. Although Bergen is closer, train timings may not be as convenient as from Oslo.

Day 2: Geilo is superbly located by the Hardanger Vidda Mountain Plateau, at 800m above sea level. Take the chairlift (until mid-August) to access the Hallingskarvet Mountains and complete a great introductory walk with stunning views in reasonable weather. There is a challenging walk to climb Prestholtskarvet (1859m) in the Hallingskarvet, a moderate moorland walk, or an easy lakeside ramble.

Day 3: Morning train to Finse, first popularised by British aristocrats before the railways arrived. Walk across the moorland towards the ice fields of the Hardanger Glacier for a picnic. Or you can do a return walk along the old railway workers' track that connects Finse with Myrdal, where Captain Scott did his winter training for the Antarctic. In good weather, strong walkers may like to attempt the ascent of St Paul (1700m). You stay two nights in Finse at a cosy chalet-style hotel with spectacular views. The hotel, a short walk from the train station, began as a shelter for occupants of snow bound trains (an increasingly rare event). Over the years it has been through many upgrades converting it into an extraordinary hotel with the emphasis on outdoor activities within a superb landscape. Rooms are simple but comfortable. There is a little pub in the basement with railway memorabilia, and a relaxation center with a sauna and ice bath.

Day 4: On the second day in Finse, you can do another walk, or there is the option of doing a guided walk up on to the glacier, donning crampons as you go (book and pay locally). The walk begins from the hotel / station area and the cost paid locally is approximately 590 kroner. Equipment is provided, but your boots will need to be reasonably stiff to take a crampon. The glacier excursion is subject to weather conditions and availability.

Day 5: Train transfer to Myrdal and walk down to Flåm (21 km). This is an easy to moderate classic walk. Check your baggage at Myrdal for local transfer down to Flåm station (approx. 50 kroner per bag, paid locally). The walk down to Flåm is beautiful, following the lush valley route, through woods and pastures, and eventually dropping down to the Aurlandsfjord, a branch of Sognefjord. In Flåm stay in a cosy basic pension, located next to the Aurlandsfjord, only 400 metres from the famous Flåm railway. There is a room with an open fireplace, TV lounge and a large garden. The rooms are basic, but are warm and simple ensuite.

Days 6 and 7: A short ferry ride takes you to Aurland for two nights, giving you plenty of time to explore this beautiful area. There are some shorter circuit walks you can do here, or walk up the breathtaking Aurland Valley, using a local bus at the start and end of the walk. In some ways this place is lost in time; from Ovstebo, you can only follow a mule track into the higher pastures, enjoying the sights and sounds of this landscape. We also recommend a fjord cruise (4 hours, about 295 kroner) into the Sognefjord, described as the most beautiful destination in the world by *National Geographic* magazine. In Aurland the hotel overlooks the fjord. It is spacious with fine rooms and there is a café bar and restaurant.

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Day 8: Tour ends after breakfast. Take a bus or taxi (approx. 10 minutes) to Flåm, then the scenic train from Flåm on Sognefjord to Myrdal (about 1 hour), a private line claimed to be the steepest “normal gauge” railway in the world. Weather permitting there are beautiful views back to Sognefjord and around. At Myrdal, join mainline trains to Bergen or back to Oslo, arriving mid-afternoon. We recommend you stay a night or two in Bergen or Oslo to make the most of your stay in Norway. If you are flying out immediately after the tour, flight departures should be in the evening.

Grading: We grade this tour as moderate, with some challenging options; anyone used to hill walking with a daily height gain/loss of up to 1000m should find the tour within their capability. On most days there is a choice of shorter or longer walks. There can be snow on higher trails, especially on our two most challenging walks, while new snowfalls are possible even during the summer period when this tour operates. Later departures in September are suitable for the more experienced walker. Please note that this tour is NOT suitable for solo travellers due to the rugged terrain. Trails are well marked, well mapped and often signposted. However poor visibility at times will mean that it is advisable to carry and be able to use a compass in case of mist or fog.

The duration of walking per day varies. You will have to take a morning train (or a ferry transfer) on some days to get you to the next hotel (normally under an hour’s journey) and your walks must fit in with this. However due to the long daylight hours you will normally be able to fit in up to 6 hours walking per day.

General tour Information:

Accommodation and Meals: Accommodation is on a half board basis (dinner, bed & breakfast) in characterful, traditional style hotels or simple pensions with ensuite where possible. The hotels described are our usual choice of accommodation; if not available then alternatives are used (sometimes with a supplement) and you will be informed at the time of booking. Two lunches are included in the tour cost, in Finse, where you will usually pack a picnic lunch from the breakfast buffet. Five lunches are not included in the tour cost, and the route notes will advise the options for lunch during your walks. In some cases you may be able to purchase picnic lunches from the hotel if arranged in advance. Please advise when booking if you have any special dietary requirements.

Train Travel: It is probably advisable to buy your tickets in advance – the best deals on Norwegian trains are usually in advance and booked outside the country. See <http://www.nsb.no>, the Norwegian state railway site (NSB), or your travel agent. It is advised to have a seat reservation between Oslo and Geilo and between Flåm and Oslo. You may or may not be able to reserve seats on the trains from Geilo to Finse and from Finse to Myrdal because these are short sections of under an hour; if the train is busy you may not get a seat for these short sections. Even if you have purchased your tickets in advance, please reconfirm timetables locally.



* Photos courtesy www.visitnorway.com – credit Johan Berge and Pål Bugge

Outdoor Travel walking holidays include guided in small groups or self-guided with inn-to-inn in many parts of Europe including the **Loire Valley**, **Provence**, **Auvergne**, the **Pyrenees** or **Dordogne** in France, the **Amalfi** or **Cinque Terre** coast in Italy. Pilgrimage walks such as the **Way of St James** from Le Puy in France to Santiago in Spain, the **Via Francigena** in Italy or classic walks such the **West Highland Way** in Scotland or Wainwright’s **Coast to Coast** walk in England are also available.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

- Call toll free on 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or Fax (03) 57501020
- Email: info@outdoortravel.com.au
- Web: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au>
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright, VIC 3741, Australia