

LATE DEALS

UK/IRELAND

■ **CORNWALL:** Cornish Horizons (01841 533331) offers seven nights' self-catering in unit sleeping six at Grade II-listed The Sallmakers in centre of old Padstow from July 16 for £805, down by £268.

■ **BRIGHTON:** Four-star B&B town house The Ambassador (01273 676869) offers five nights for family of four from July 25 for total price £476.85, or £119.21 per person.

■ **EAST DEVON:** Holiday Cottages (01237 459888) offers seven nights' self-catering at Fursdon Farmhouse, sleeping 13, from July 30 for £1,845 per week, or £119 per person at full capacity.

■ **ISLES OF SCILLY:** Star Castle (01720 422317) offers three nights' dinner, B&B in July/Aug from £419, saving £152, incl return helicopter flights from Penzance.

SHORT BREAKS

■ **DUBLIN:** Flexibletrips.com (0844 879 8253) offers three nights' self-catering at three-star Maldron Hotel from £150, ex-Heathrow July 22.

■ **NEW YORK:** vhiphotels.co.uk (0844 573 2460) offers three nights' room-only in deluxe room at Gramercy Park from £1,065, incl Virgin Atlantic flights, on depts until Sept.

■ **SIMPLY VEGAS:** Jetsave (0871 664 0293) offers five nights from Nov 20 from £1,539, incl accom, tickets for three shows with dinner beforehand, and helicopter ride down famed Vegas Strip.

■ **BARCELONA:** Cresta (0844 879 8014) offers three nights B&B at two-star Sunhotel Junior from £275, ex-Luton with EasyJet Aug 9.

■ **PARIS:** Cresta (0844 879 8014) offers two nights' B&B at three-star hotel from £249, ex-Glasgow with EasyJet Aug 21.

■ **BARCELONA:** Cresta (0844 879 8014) offers two nights' B&B at two-star hotel from £289, ex-Luton with EasyJet Aug 9.

■ **DUBAI:** vhiphotels.co.uk (0844 573 2460) offers five nights' B&B at Dar Al Masayf from £885, based on two adults and two under-12s sharing Arabian summer house, on selected depts in Sept.

■ **TORONTO:** Virgin (0844 557 3870) offers three nights' room-only at five-star Fairmont Royal from £695, incl sched flights ex-Heathrow, on depts Sept 16-23.

SHORT-HAUL SUN

■ **ALGARVE:** Sovereign (0871 664 0227) offers seven nights' half-board at five-star Hilton Vilamoura As Cascatas Golf Resort from Aug 27 from £1859 for a family of three, incl return flights, free upgrade to half-board, free child place and free entrance to Paradise Island Kids Village.

■ **KEFALONIA:** Sovereign (0871 664 0227) offers seven nights' B&B at four-star Villa Costa from July 13 from £549, saving over £385 per couple, incl flights ex-Gatwick, transfers.

■ **TURKEY:** Jewel in the Crown (01293 533 338) offers seven nights' B&B at two-star B&B in Hisaronu from £288, saving £151, ex-Gatwick July 25.

■ **CANARIES:** Thomas Cook Style (0844 412 5970) offers seven nights' half-board at four-star Iberostar Palaca on Fuerteventura from £584, ex-Gatwick July 20.

■ **GOZO:** Thomas Cook (0844 412 5970) offers seven nights' B&B at four-star hotel in Marsalforn Bay from £384, ex-Gatwick July 15.

■ **TURKEY TURQUOISE COAST:** Jewel in Crown (01293 533 338) offers 14 nights' B&B at two-star hotel in Kalkan ex-Gatwick July 18 from £258, saving £211.

■ **ZANTE:** Club 18-30 (0844 800 7038) offers seven nights' self-catering at three-star plus hotel in Laqanas from £379, ex-Manchester July 22.

■ **TURKEY LYCIAN COAST:** Vintage (01954 261 431) offers three-bedroom house sleeping six in hamlet of Islamlar and close to Kalkan from July 16 for total rental £995, saving £455. Flights, car hire extra.

■ **IBIZA:** Thomson (0871 231 5595) offers seven nights' half-board at four-star Presidente, Portinatx from £429, saving £311, ex-Gatwick July 16.

LONG-HAUL

■ **RED SEA COAST:** Tropical Sky (0870 907 9600) offers seven nights' B&B at five-star Savoy Sharm El Sheikh from £499, saving £250, on selected depts through July, incl BA return flights and transfers.

■ **MAURITIUS:** Tropical Sky (0870 907 9600) offers seven nights' all-inclusive at Maritim Hotel from £1,399, incl Air Mauritius flights, transfers on depts until Sept 30. Ideal for couples and families, facilities incl watersports, floodlit tennis, nine-hole golf course, archery.

■ **TIBET:** Travel Indochina (01865 268940) offers 12-day Tibet Experience from £1,825 from Aug 1, incl 11 nights' B&B with highlights incl Lhasa, Potala Palaca (once home to the Dalai Lama), and pilgrims at Jokhang Temple, Western tour leader (for min seven people) and English-speaking guides.

■ **CUBA:** Thomas Cook Signature (0844 879 8014) offers seven nights' all-inclusive at three-star hotel in Santa Cruz del Norte from Sept 8 from £739, ex-Gatwick with Virgin Atlantic.

■ **ANTIGUA:** Thomas Cook Signature (0844 879 8015) offers seven nights' all-inclusive in deluxe beachfront room at Galley Bay resort from July 14 for £2019, saving £632.

■ **EGYPT:** Thomson (0871 231 5595) offers seven nights' all-inclusive at four-star Tropicana Sea Beach, Sharm El Sheikh, from £599, saving £190, ex-Manchester July 19.

■ **KENYA:** Thomson (0871 231 5595) offers 14 nights' half-board at four-star Southern Palms from £999, saving £310, ex-Manchester July 22.

getaway

Life here is good...

NORWAY: Rosalind Gibb visits Stavanger

The national flag flies outside many of the white wooden houses and residents socialise in the sunshine at the harbourside bars and cafes, sharing a bottle of wine and local delicacies like freshly-caught shrimps.

First impressions of Stavanger are that life is good. Norway's fourth biggest city is a curious mix of cosmopolitan and traditional. It now enjoys a booming economy thanks to the oil industry but was built on the fishing trade, and has retained an intimate and friendly feel.

We flew with Widerøe Airlines from Newcastle and the flight was surprisingly quick – in little over an hour we had landed and headed to Sola Strand Hotel on the coast, just a short drive from the airport.

A delicious buffet lunch was followed by a massage in the hotel's newly opened spa. The rooms have ceiling-to-floor windows and look out onto the turquoise sea and white sand dunes. Bliss. I could have laid there all afternoon post-massage, but the delights of Stavanger were waiting to be enjoyed.

The city prides itself on its history but in recent years has sought to promote its cultural riches too.

It has a population of just 120,000 but boasts more than 20 museums and galleries and in 2008 was twinned with Liverpool as European Capital of Culture. Annual events include Gladmat food festival and Mai Jazz festival.

The latter was on during our trip and we were taken to a performance at the Konserthuset (concert house) by duo Joshua Redman and Brad Mehldau, highly regarded musicians and a favourite with jazz aficionados.

The magnificent Skagen Brygge Hotel overlooks the harbour and the breakfast buffet offers a great choice: typical Scandinavian fare of eggs, salmon, crackers and mustard, plus a cooked breakfast, cold meats, cheeses, bread, muesli and fruit.

Stavanger's coastal location means there's plenty to enjoy for

both thrill seekers and those just wanting to relax.

Fjord Events run RIB (rigid inflatable boat) trips, essentially a speed boat with room for around 10 passengers. We had to wear blue boilersuits, lifejackets, goggles and buffs (headwear favoured by adrenaline junkies, it transpired).

Once the boat took off the need for all these extras became clear as the stinging wind whipped up the waves and we hung on for dear life. It was exhilarating though, the perfect way to blow away the cobwebs.

For a more chilled-out experience take a trip on a Rodne Fjord Cruise. All that's required here is to sit back on the top deck and enjoy the sunshine and the stunning views of the 23-mile Lysefjord, with its islands, waterfalls and dramatic rock formations, including the spectacular Pulpit Rock, 604 metres high.

Eating out and drinking in Norway isn't cheap: a glass of the local beer, for example, was around £6.

But if you adapt to the slower pace of life – downing countless drinks in a matter of hours isn't really the Norwegian way – it's perfectly possible to enjoy an affordable (and civilised) night out.

Dinner was at the City Brasserie and Vinbar next to our hotel and, the following night, at Tango Bar & Kjøkken, where we indulged in a six-course dinner.

Each course was accompanied by a different wine and included smoked cream of halibut with white asparagus, avocado, Swedish caviar and wild garlic; and coconut marshmallow with a

chocolate coating, milk sorbet and a sphere of coconut milk.

The craftsmanship behind these artfully presented dishes was quite something, not least because the restaurant – which Gordon Ramsay will visit later this month during Gladmat – changes its menu every night.

Simpler foods have an important place in Stavanger's history, as we learned on a 'food safari', a walking tour of the old town led by Arne Hatloy. He took us to the fish market and the Norwegian Canning Museum, which tells the story of what was Stavanger's main industry for more than 150 years.

Sounds dry doesn't it? Thanks to the unbridled enthusiasm of curator Piers Crocker – an Egyptologist before settling in Norway with his wife – it was anything but, and the museum should be on every visitor's list.

As should the sleek Norwegian Petroleum Museum. Stavanger's canning industry was replaced by oil in the 1960s and the city soon became Norway's oil capital. This story, and a wider look at the industry, is documented here with state-of-the-art displays.

Outside the museum there is a colourful outdoor playground made entirely of material from decommissioned oil-rig equipment. It was designed for young people but is evidently enjoyed by older folk too, as mums and dads joined in the fun with their kids.

Oil might have brought riches and status to Stavanger but the city has retained its charm and friendliness and this, along with its beautiful location, make it well worth a visit.

TRAVELNOTES

Rosalind Gibb travelled by Norwegian airline Widerøe, which flies from Newcastle to Stavanger three times a week. Widerøe's Explore Norway ticket offers one or two weeks'

unlimited travel to the top 35 destinations within Norway (with a choice of one, two or three zones) from £312. Visit www.wideroe.no/explore norway

YOUR SATURDAY TRAVEL GUIDE



Alesund: The Norwegian coastal town was rebuilt in a German, Art Nouveau style by Kaiser Wilhelm II after it was destroyed by fire in 1904

VIVIENNE CROW



Stavanger: Norway's fourth largest city is a curious mix of cosmopolitan and traditional

Vivienne Crow goes in search of Norway's high points

It might not be easy to reach Norway by road, but it's certainly worth the effort. After two overnight ferries – with a mad dash across three countries in between – my partner and I arrived in the capital Oslo 74 hours after leaving Newcastle.

Our most ambitious journey yet in our relatively new camper-van, the plan was to head up the E6 – the 1,500-mile road that links Oslo with the Russian border – and see how far north we could get before heading back down via the fjords.

Of course, that spectacularly indented coastline, carved millennia ago by huge glaciers, is Norway's most famous attraction, but this long, thin country is also home to some beautiful mountain ranges divided by clear, sparkling lakes.

Even on wet days – to which Norway seems even more prone than the UK – the scenery retains a sort of moody magnificence as wisps of mist cling to low-lying crags, and impenetrable, rocky slopes rise steeply into the clouds.

The Norwegians have a lovely word for such weather: they call it 'trolsk' – and you can almost imagine the trolls sitting up there lurking in hollows on the foggy mountains.

We decided to tackle some of these mountains as we headed towards the Arctic Circle. The first two or three proved pretty tough going: what the Norwegian hiking organisation said was suitable for children turned out to be a full-blown scramble.

While we resorted to hands and knees, the Norwegian families took it all in their stride, walking upright at full pelt most of the time.

The fourth walk – up Snohetta, one of Norway's highest mountains – proved a little too much. The first hour or so was an unrelenting slog up a loose, stony path, occasionally crossing old snow. As young families, many carrying large packs, powered past us, we laboured slowly upwards,

our sights firmly set on the 2,286m summit.

It was then that I heard a dim, but persistent rumbling noise; the sound of water... lots of water. Before long, we reached the raging river and stood looking across to the other side... longingly. We wandered upstream and downstream, looking for a crossing; we stood; we scratched our heads...

Meanwhile, local families came and went, nonchalantly leaping from precarious boulder to precarious boulder in the middle of the torrent.

In the end, we had to give up and try something a little more 'sedate'. Sightings of some of Europe's last truly wild reindeer herds as well as rare musk ox more than made up for the disappointment.

Having driven across the Arctic Circle just north of a small town called Mo-i-Rana, we began our return journey through the fjords – not the tourist-filled southern fjords, but a quieter area of coast further north.

Here, Highway 17 weaves its way through a landscape of almost surreal beauty, sometimes clinging to steep mountain sides, sometimes passing colourful, timber-built fishing villages. Every hour or two the road would simply end at the waterside and we'd have to wait for the next ferry to take us across the fjord.

After several days, we finally arrived at Alesund. Norwegian towns tend to be either dull and modern or full of clapboard houses, but not Alesund; mock-gothic turrets, neo-classical facades and pastel colours are the order of the day in this town strung out on a series of islands that stretch out into the Norwegian Sea.

Sitting on top of Aksla, the small hill overlooking this lovely town, and watching the sun set over jagged lumps of rocks rising from a blue-black ocean, seemed a fitting end to our mountain and coastal odyssey before the long drive back to Oslo.

TRAVELNOTES

Vivienne Crow travelled with DFDS Seaways. The ferry company operates daily, overnight crossings from Newcastle to Amsterdam and from Copenhagen to Oslo. For

more details, visit the website at www.dfdsseaways.co.uk or phone 0871 522 9955.

Recommended reading: Walking in Norway by Constance Roos, published by Cicerone, £12.

for excellent
exchange rates
& commission free
currency visit...

DAWSON
& SANDERSON LTD

on Lowther St, Carlisle

Your local Foreign Exchange Specialist

Call 01228 596636

or go online at www.forexco.co.uk