



Norway's notables

Deconstructing Norway's fertile land is key to understanding the country's native sons. **Page H4**

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The Norway of summer is song of history

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LILLEHAMMER, Norway – Visitors touring Maihaugen Heritage Village were itching with curiosity.

They had wandered the site's narrow lanes and peered inside the 200-year-old log cabins. They had explored the craft shops and traditional hand-hewn barns brought from far-flung farms and forests, and re-assembled here, under the trees. Now they wanted to know if any of Norway's leading figures – statesmen, filmmakers, painters or artists – had their roots in these humble huts.

"What about Thor Heyerdahl, the anthropologist, who wrote 'Kon-Tiki'?" asked a bearded man in a sweater.

"Is there a connection with Henrik Ibsen or Edvard Grieg?" asked a woman with two teenagers.

Elsa, our guide, tall and blond, paused to think. A frown flitted across her brow. Then she brightened, remembering. "Grieg was here!" she told us. "He vacationed in Lillehammer in summer. The Gudbrandsdalen Valley folk tunes were an important influence on his music."

She adjusted her red-and-blue embroidered skirt and smiled. A half-dozen cameras clicked.

Elsa could be forgiven for wishful thinking. With Norway's tourist season at hand, every rural hamlet with a legendary anecdote claims one of Norway's native sons. From creators to cranks, Norway's finest are familiar to most of us: the controversial playwright Henrik Ibsen; Edvard Munch, the eccentric painter; novelist and Nobel Prize-winning author Sigrid Undset, whose edgy themes remain current. But most often the halo spins over composer Grieg, whose melodies were born in these northern forests.

Plainly, deconstructing Norway was the key to the fertile genius of so many moody and eccentric prodig-

NORWAY

Getting there: Fly direct from New York to Oslo on Continental Airlines and SAS (Scandinavian Airlines). Other airlines connect through Copenhagen, London, Zurich, Frankfurt, Rome and most large European cities. Ferry service is available from Denmark and Sweden.

Touring by car: Reserve a car with Hertz, Avis or Budget before you leave home. All have offices in Oslo and Bergen. Norway requires an international driver's license, usually available through your auto club.

Travel information: For this summer's events, festivals, tickets and discounts, contact the Norway Tourism Board, 655 Third Ave., New York, NY 10017. Call (212) 885-9751, or see www.visitnorway.com.

gies. So we rented a car for 10 days and, after touring Oslo, headed north from the capital through sunny farm country, eventually turning west across Norway's mountain spine. Descending beside blue-green fiords, we ended our trip in Bergen, on the coast.

Along the way, we followed each beckoning back road in search of timbered churches, lakeside villages and botanical gardens. Lunch, often bread, cheese and reindeer sausage, never tasted as good as when we picnicked in a wide spot with a view.

And what a land it is. Dark and brooding in winter, Norway awakens to the midnight sun. Snow-clad peaks feed rushing rivers. Swollen waterfalls career over spongy tundra. Roses bloom. To the west, the coastline climbs out of the North Sea like a polar bear on the hunt, cold fiords probing the cliffs.

May through September? Norwegians – and visitors – take to the outdoors, to pick blueberries, lie in the sun,



Norwegian guides in period costumes take a break at Maihaugen Heritage Village, just one stop on a summer exploration of the Scandinavian nation.

Courtesy of Steve Hagerty
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tour manor houses and gardens, visit art exhibits and take in outdoor concerts and craft fairs.

While we were in Oslo (www.visitoslo.com/en), we strolled through Frogner Park to see sculptor Gustav Vigeland's modernist works, more than 200 in the one park. Oversized, physical and stolid, they are in a formal garden setting that creates a perfect contrast to their sense of free space. Grouped as couples, families and children, their faces expressionless, they are all mankind at its core. Nearby was the Edvard Munch Museum, where reside not just one version of the painter's famous work, the "Scream," but many versions, a subject that obsessed the eccentric Munch.

These and their contemporaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were frequent patrons of the Grand Hotel Cafe, where they met for morning coffee or in the evening, for conversation and beer.

And the cafe is still popular. You won't have to ask who's who among the crowded faces painted onto a wall-length mural. Norway's best and brightest, they are identified by name and position on the back of the menu.

Heading north to Lillehammer, we stopped briefly to see the "long jump" facility, where Olympic-caliber skiers practice in winter. But we spent most of the day at Maihaugen, exploring its more than 140 timbered

houses, barns, craft shops and even a stave church. Farther north, we stopped in Lom to tour another stave church, this one a 12th century relic, and like its kin, built entirely of wood. The gloomy nave and massive beams are hints of darker days; fierce dragon heads topped a half-dozen peaked, shingled gables.

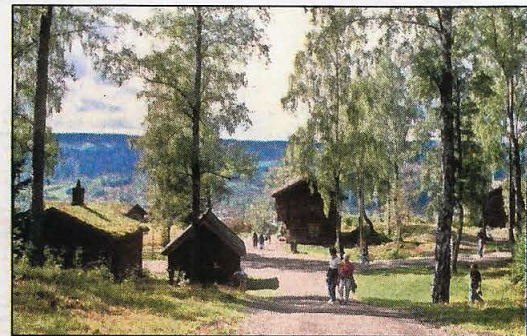
Beyond Lom, a sign on a dirt road pointed the way to the Juvbre Glacier and the summit of 8,148-foot Galdhøpiggen, a mystery we couldn't miss. Icebound year around, the mountain is the site of the SkiCenter, a summer host for Olympic skiers in training. And there, unexpectedly, was the U.S. women's ski team.

"We spend a week or two here in August, because it has Europe's best snow," one of the skiers told us, pausing to smile and chat on her way in for lunch.

Crossing over Norway's snowy spine, (the roads are plowed), we paused to snap photos, then continued downward on the last leg to Bergen. The road skirted some fiords and crossed others, via daily car ferry.

Eventually we reached the mighty Sognefjord, 112 miles long and 4,000 feet at its deepest point.

Though many a far-flung village boasts that Grieg ate there, slept there or taught lessons there, the town of Lofthus, on the Hardanger Fiord, makes an honest claim to his presence. The composer spent several vacations there, staying in



Visitors wander amid the many log buildings in Maihaugen, near Lillehammer. Many structures were brought in from other sites.

the Ullensvang Hotel, breathing the fresh air and hiking the mountain trails. Later he stayed for a year to compose, retiring to a hut on the hotel grounds in search of the inspiration that so often failed to come. The hotel owner, Mr. Utne, the great great-grandson of the first Mr. Utne to befriend the composer, guided us through the cabin and pointed out Grieg's desk and chair.

Bergen, (www.visitbergen.com/en) historically separated from eastern Norway by the mountains, is a waterfront town, built by Hanseatic traders and shipping merchants. To learn more about its origins, we joined a tour at the Bryggen Museum, built above the excavated foundations of the town's first waterfront dwellings. Stay for both portions of the tour. The second half, the most interesting, we thought, goes through the excavated portions of the

town's 16th century row houses to show how the merchants lived and worked.

Don't miss the other attractions: the waterside fish and vegetable market, the restored Berghus Fortress and King Hakon's Hall, with relics dating from about 1250; and the waterfront houses and shops.

If a half-day tour includes a ride up the mountain for an aerial view of the town and bay, jump on it.

At the urging of friends, we saved time for a farewell pilgrimage to Trolldhaugen ("the Trolls House"), Grieg's country retreat. This spacious house, where he and his wife, a singer, spent their last years, overlooks a lake outside Bergen, surrounded by a green lawn and quiet garden. The piano, which Grieg played when the couple entertained, is touted as the highlight of the tour.