

Cruising the Norwegian Fjords: Cruise Review

by Sabine Rautenberg, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

With the Disney Fantasy joining Disney's fleet of cruise ships this year, Disney Cruise Line now has two large ships that cater to the Bahamian and Caribbean markets.

That leaves the Disney Magic and the Disney Wonder to venture into more exotic waters. One of the new destinations that Disney Cruise Line has added in recent years is Alaska. This is hardly surprising, as Alaska cruises enjoy great popularity. Also, in 2010, the Disney Magic sailed in the Baltic Sea, offering a very limited number of 12-night cruises with ports of call such as Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm. With this in mind, one could wonder if sooner or later, Disney Cruise Line might try to combine those two experiences into a brand new itinerary. How's that possible, you ask? Simple, take the fjords that cruisers love to see in Alaska and mix them with the location of the Baltic cruises, i.e. Scandinavia. What you get is a cruise along the Norwegian fjords! I'd say that's reason enough to take a closer look.

□ Cruises that sail along the Norwegian coastline are rather popular among European cruisers. The classic way to see the fjords is aboard a Hurtigruten ship. While these ships have served as packet ships (or mailboats) for almost 120 years, they've always been passenger liners as well. They service 35 ports between Bergen in the south of Norway, and Kirkenes in the north, right by the Russian border. While stops at the smaller ports only last long enough to deliver mail and have people embark and disembark, the ships do linger long enough in major ports to allow for port excursions. A Hurtigruten ship departs from Bergen daily, and passengers can choose where they embark and disembark. Foreign visitors usually opt for a 7-night cruise from Bergen to Kirkenes or a 12-night roundtrip. As far as cruise ship convenience is concerned, it is fair to say that Hurtigruten ships are lacking in that area. In all honesty, they feel more like ferries than actual cruise ships. For those travelers who seek a true cruise ship atmosphere, cruise lines like Royal Caribbean or Norwegian Cruise Line are a better choice. Naturally, sailings aren't as frequent as with the Hurtigruten ships, but they're tailored exclusively to cruisers' needs.

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□ That's where Disney ships would fit in. As demand for Disney's itineraries in Alaska is high, there's no doubt that either of the older Disney ships would be suitable for a Norwegian fjords cruise, as it's a destination very similar to the part of Alaska that Disney Cruise Line

sails to. So, what ports of call would be interesting for a Disney Norwegian fjords cruise? First, Oslo seems like a good place to start from. As it is Norway's capitol, international travelers can reach it easily by plane. Also, it's worth an extra day or two to explore the city, either before or after the cruise.

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□ One of the first actual ports of call would have to be Bergen. Located in the southwestern part of the country, this picturesque town nestled in between seven mountains is Norway's second largest city. Especially the oldest part of Bergen, called Bryggen, enchants visitors with its narrow cobblestone streets and Hanseatic flair.

Arguably one of the most beautiful of its kind, Geirangerfjord is another must on any itinerary. Cruise ships can sail through this 12.4 mi./20 km-long fjord all the way to the small fishing village of Geiranger at the end.

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□ Way up north, the North Cape, or Nordkapp, as the Norwegians say, awaits. At latitude 71°10'21"N, it's the northernmost point of continental Europe. Ok, so technically, Knivskjelodden is the actual northernmost point, but since that place can only be reached by those willing to hike another 11 mi./18 km from North Cape, it's close enough. In fact, it is closer to the North Pole than to Oslo and farther north than most of Alaska. After crossing the Arctic Circle, you'd still have to drive at least another 9 hours to get there. Cruise ships dock at the quaint village of Honningsvåg (population: 2,500) to allow for port excursions to the North Cape, which is only a short 30-minute drive away.

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□ Along the way, Stavanger, Alesund and Tromsø are possible ports of call. These three coastal towns are all unique in their own way. Located in the south, Stavanger is a popular summer destination for Norwegians. In Alesund, near the Geirangerfjord, you'll find Art Nouveau architecture aplenty. Lastly, Tromsø has Norway's northernmost university and a distinctly lively and modern feel.

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□ While there is no evidence at this point that Disney Cruise Line is planning to sail the Norwegian fjords, it is definitely a possibility should one of the older ships continue to return to Europe. Just like Alaska, the Norwegian fjords are only accessible to cruise ships during the summer. Depending on how many ports of call itineraries would include, Norwegian fjords cruises could be anywhere from 7 to 12 nights long. Lastly, it's a safe bet that should Disney decide to go this way, we can expect a hefty price tag to come with it.

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