

Travels – Part 2: Poisonous Aussies in Norway

The unfortunate part about taking the night train from Oslo to Trondheim is that the ride which is supposed to be spectacular was just a blur. Norway is a simply beautiful country with unspoiled scenery and quaint little towns and villages. My companions and I traveled to Norway to see the beauty despite doing so after the tourist season. It actually worked out well because places were not crowded (except for the trains which were booked) and we could relax and enjoy the beauty around us. The unfortunate part is that Norway closes after August as does much of Scandinavia. Youth hostels, museums and parks close or go on limited hours which means that you can not go in October and expect to see many of those things. Even in Denmark, amusement parks, castles and even the Tivoli close for most of the year. The closures along with the booked trains became a sort of joke in our group as we continued our adventures.

We arrived at Trondheim early Sunday morning much to our surprise because no one announced the arrival or turned on the lights in the train. The train just silently slid into the station and if I had not seen the station name through the window, I would have gone back to sleep. After lingering like lost sheep in the train station for some obscure reason we headed for our hostel. Geographically, Trondheim is a little south of Reykjavik or Fairbanks, Alaska and is the furthest north that I have ever been. The city is small and nestled in a valley where a river meets one of the fjords as it cuts through the mountains. A lot of the architecture is difficult to describe other than that it is European. The builders of Trondheim used a lot of brick and stone in bright yellows or reds and the downtown is just cute. The hills around the city are home to houses nestled amongst the yellow leaves of fall. The city is also home to the largest technical university in Norway and has a definite commercial side with wharfs and industry by the waterfront.

Trondheim boasts a beautiful cathedral which is home to the crown jewels (closed) as well as other museums (also closed). We would spend Sunday and Monday in Trondheim before catching the night train to Oslo and then Bergen. We stayed in a youth hostel that was up the side of a hill, about a 20 minute hike from the train station. It was pricey, but worked out well with free breakfasts and a kitchen where we cooked our first group dinner of pasta. Biscuits were also a constant friend and everyone was excited to lessen the weight of their packs, especially those who had been carrying bottles of wine.

The days in Trondheim were a bit shorter with the sun rising around 8 something and setting around 17:30 after just hovering on the horizon for the day. We spent the days walking around the city and taking it all in. On Sunday we had a picnic in a park by the river that offered great views. On Monday, we hiked up a 380m hill near the city to get better views of the city and fjord. Actually, the Norwegians have the hiking thing down with the maps showing the locations of coffee shops in the woods where you could grab a drink and a bite to eat (all closed). Instead we found a little site with a fire pit and ate sandwiches as we sat around our fire and chatted. It was really nice, but also cold.

As I have mentioned before, my traveling companions were really neat and I learned a lot about each of their countries as I will mention in these emails. I have already mentioned

food, but there is one more thing that struck me as we traveled. In the US, I am all about putting meat and cheese in the fridge until I eat it. But, my companions would pull cheese, lunch meat or even liver pate that they had bought the day before out of their packs and eat it in their sandwiches. People just look at things differently. Just like how in England or China, eggs are kept in a cabinet until you eat them, but in Denmark or the US, you only keep your eggs in the refrigerator.

I want to make a BIG divergence from Trondheim at this moment to talk about my friend Kat from Australia. Kat attends Uni (university) in Sydney, but grew up about four hours north of the city. As we hiked through the woods, Kat told us all sorts of things about Australia that just amazed the group and so I am going to share them with you. And you thought that these emails would just be about Denmark.

I remember watching a program on Australian animals on the Discovery channel and being so amazed that practically every animal was poisonous. Even the cute duck-billed platypus has a poison barb. But, I had not considered what having so many poisonous animals about to those who live in Australia. So, I am going to give you the shortened version of a several hour conversation about the animals of Australia. Lets start with a day at the beach in Australia. Swimming there can be sporting due to the sharks and crocodiles. But, you are far more likely to be stung by a jellyfish than to be bitten by one of those predators. There are the harmless jellyfish, but there is also the box jellyfish which produces a poison that can kill the person that it stings. There is also the blue bottle jellyfish which can sting, but is not lethal. Kat has been stung by one of these and she says that it just hurts terribly for a while. So when you are sitting on the beach, every now and then you just see someone come running out of the water screaming after being stung by a blue bottle. But, don't think that playing in the tidal pools is any safer than going into the water. As a child, Kat was taught to always check a tidal pool for octopuses before she put her hands into the water. There is a little octopus that hides in the tidal pools and is one of the 3 minute animals. You have 3 minutes to live after it stings you. But, don't be afraid of the animals on the beach, Kat explained. Far more tourists are killed by the dangerous undertows than the animals.

Growing up, Kat was also taught never to put her hands into dark, dusty places. There are numerous poison spiders around Sydney. Kat remembers once finding a red backed spider (3 minute variety) on her see-saw when she was growing up. All of this sounds awful to people who did not grow up with it, but for Kat and other Australians, it is just what you must be careful of and you just live your life otherwise.

That includes carrying a branch or wearing an empty ice-cream box with eyes painted on it on your head for three months of the year. These three months are the time that the magpies have their nests and they protect them by swooping down on people and pecking at their heads. The eyes on the box are to scare the bird off. I think that Kat wore the ice-cream box reluctantly because she explained that it was embarrassing. Other Australians that I know just carried tennis rackets with them to fend off the birds. The magpies are just defending their nests, but there is also a rarer bird that will hunt humans. These attacks are infrequent and occur in the bush, but the birds really go after people.

We would leave Trondheim on Monday night on the night train to Oslo. This time, however the two Germans and I splurged the extra 120 Krone (\$12) to book a sleeper car. (Our Scanrail passes paid for the tickets, but we had to pay to reserve our seats or beds on the trains.) All of the trains that we were on were very nice, even in 2nd class where we always sat. I couldn't imagine how much nicer 1st class could be. The sleeper car had three beds on one wall with a sink in the room and a bath down the hall. The door to the hallway could be shut and locked, but the room was too narrow for three people to maneuver once it was shut. Linen was provided.

We arrived in Oslo and attempted to make the connection that we wanted to Flån when we planned to spend the night. Flån is the first stop along the Norway in a Nutshell tour that we all wanted to take. However, due to heavy rains, the special railroad that went to Flån was closed due to fears of landslides. Rails closed. So, instead we took a Signature train to Bergen from which we would be able to do the Nutshell tour backwards later on. The Signature train was one of the new, sleek trains and was really nice. We had seats in the cafe car. Our seating section was separated from the cafe and from other sections by sliding glass doors. I was a little apprehensive about our seats because smoking was allowed in the cafe. However, I would discover that this meant that smokers could sit in a special glass room which was vented to the outside.

The country side that glided by during our second 8 hour train ride of the day was spectacular. We slid through long tunnels as we crossed through the mountains to arrive on the coast of Norway and our destination: Bergen.

 [Previous](#) | [Next](#)  | [Return to Main Page](#)

Copyright © 2001 Jeffrey Mahn. All rights reserved. This or any other written materials from this web site may not be used in part or in whole without the prior permission from Jeffrey Mahn.