

Coastal calm

Find peace and quiet on a Norwegian route that recalls the country's seafaring heritage, writes **Lina Molloholli**

Picture the Norwegian coast of the late 1800s, peppered with remote fishing villages reliant on the ocean yet isolated by it, since travel between north and south was long and arduous.

That changed in 1893, when a new steamship began offering a speedy connection between these small coastal communities, carrying cargo, people and post. Named 'hurtig ruten' – meaning 'the fast route' – it gave rise to the cruise line we know today. Within a few years, the company was venturing as far as the remote island of Spitsbergen – and more than a century and a quarter later, The Svalbard Line has been relaunched as a flagship route of Hurtigruten's new Signature collection.

Our fam trip group of 11 agents and trade partners were among the first to get a glimpse of the premium voyages on refurbished ship *Trollfjord*, to see what clients can expect from this revamped route.

FRESH THINKING

The Signature voyages spend more time in each port of call and offer a Coastal Experience Team to provide in-depth guiding and destination insights. As we dock in Harstad, a town on Hinnøya – the largest island outside the Svalbard archipelago – the team's morning lecture sets the scene for the day's exploring. It also offers up a new Norwegian phrase, which soon becomes my mantra for the trip: 'frisk som en fisk' or 'fresh as a fish'.

We head north of Harstad's centre to Trondenes Church, a whitewashed medieval chapel with a colourful Catholic altar inside; its simple exterior belies the fact that this is Europe's northernmost medieval stone church.

At the Trondenes Historical Centre, we hear the region's Viking, medieval and Second World War stories. But it is the neighbouring Trondenes Middelaldergård that really brings its medieval history to life. This living museum is a faithful recreation of a 13th-century farm, complete with a cast of medieval characters including Frøydis, a female servant who hands us fresh leaves to feed the goats.

"Feeding animals and growing plants is my full-time job," says farmer's wife Jorunn, as she weaves together thin strands of jute, once used to make rope and other natural materials for the community's seafarers. "What else would I want in life?"

The question plays on my mind long after we set sail from Harstad along this rugged coastline.

TREADING AND TASTING

Venturing south of the Arctic Circle, we reach Brønnøysund, where the Signature excursion options range from sightseeing tours to active pursuits such as dog-sledding, kayaking and fishing. We opt for a guided hike around Torghatten, a granite dome with a hole through its centre that is said to have been created by a troll's arrow in an ill-fated quest for romance – one of many tales of ➤

DESTINATIONS

CRUISE | NORWAY



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The fam trip group; granite outcrop Torghatten on Brønnøysund; Ålesund

PICTURES: Hurtigruten/Oscar Farrera; Maren Bjørgum

trolls and mythical creatures once used to explain the jagged landscapes left by the last ice age.

After a walk around the base of the mountain, we come in from the cold with *lefse* (potato flatbread) and cloudberry tea, which leaves a sweet tingle in my mouth.

With shorter sailing distances along this section of the route, the next day brings a double helping of ports.



TROLLFJORD

The 500-passenger ship was built in 2002 and its 285 cabins – Polar Inside, Polar Outside and Arctic Superior cabins, plus 17 Expedition Suites – and public spaces were renovated in 2023. The cabins are compact but modern, with underfloor heating that clients will appreciate during winter northern lights-spotting voyages.

Menus feature locally sourced produce to reduce food miles. Clients can pick from main restaurant Flora

(for a Norwegian-inspired buffet), Brasserie Árran (which offers Sámi dishes such as bone marrow, baby goat and reindeer) and fine dining at Røst (inclusive for suite guests). Afternoon tea is served daily at the 1893 Bar, where passengers can sip Scandi ciders or invent cocktails based on Norwegian ingredients.

Wisdom and wellness are on the agenda too, with a library, lecture theatre, photography classes, yoga, gym and a panoramic sauna offering some of the best views at sea.



Ålesund is photogenic, with a city centre constructed in pastel-hued art nouveau buildings following a devastating fire in 1904. I opt for a leisurely walk and a cinnamon bun, rather than to climb the 418 steps to the Aksla viewpoint, which offers panoramic views over the town, nearby islands and Sunnmøre Alps.

A short sailing later, we reach Hjørundfjord, where we sample *rømmegrøt* ice cream, a sour cream-based treat dusted with cinnamon sugar.

FROM SEA TO CITY

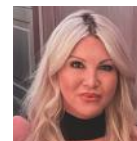
The Svalbard Line voyage comes to an end in Bergen, Norway's second-largest city. I squeeze in a stroll on the Unesco-listed Bryggen Wharf, with 62 colourful timber buildings hinting at the town's trading history, and a quick trip to the fish market for a taste of Arctic char and lumpfish – a chance to assess whether it is really as fresh as the Norwegian proverb claims.

Although there's plenty to see on shore, my thoughts are drawn again and again to *Trollfjord's* observation deck – a peaceful spot to wrap up warm and watch Norway's scenery unfold around you. The memory of such timeless sights is enough to make me wonder about swapping the noise of the city for fjords and fresh air – and maybe even a few goats of my own. **TW**

BOOK IT

Hurtigruten's 15-day The Svalbard Line voyage calls at 14 ports on a round-trip from Bergen. Prices start at £3,991 per person, based on two sharing a Polar Inside cabin on an all-inclusive basis. Includes flights from London on August 25. agentportal.hurtigruten.com

AGENTS' verdict



Claire Liptrot, branch manager, Hays Travel

"*Trollfjord's* cabins were spacious with a modern Scandinavian look. The food was fantastic, especially in fine-dining restaurant Røst. My favourite port was Brønnøysund – the excursion to Torghatten brought Norway's myths and tales to life."



Sara Park, marketing manager, Premier Travel Group

"Outdoor enthusiasts will love the summer midnight sun, while history lovers can explore fishing villages and Viking heritage. It's perfect for mature travellers seeking a scenic journey or younger adventurers after an expedition-style experience."



Kelly Virgo, branch manager, Fred Olsen Travel

"The cabin was luxurious with a great-sized window. Both inside cabins and suites were equally comfortable – the difference is size, with a separate seating and sleeping area plus a balcony in the suites. The bar staff brought some fun to their service, always willing to humour you in trying out new drink combinations."