

Fun in the midnight sun

From saunas and late-night dips in icy waters to superlative seafood, Bodø, one of this year's European Capitals of Culture, is a feast for the senses, finds **Margaret Hussey**



Bodø harbour, Norway
PICTURE: 1001 rom.no/Kathrine Sorgard

It's 10.30pm, still light and I've just plunged into teeth-chattering Arctic waters. Feeling wholly invigorated, it's back to the sauna for a case of sweat, plunge, freeze, repeat – and I quickly discover how addictive this ritual can be.

But it's not my only discovery about this beautiful part of Norway, as Bodø – pronounced 'Boo-da' – surpasses many expectations.

Sitting just above the Arctic Circle, this city of 55,000 people has breathtaking scenery, some of Scandinavia's best food and a thriving sense of community.

And thanks to being named a European Capital of Culture this year, plus boasting more capacity with Finnair this summer (flights from three UK airports via Helsinki will operate five times a week from June 17 to August 2), this gem is going to be discovered by many more.

I visit in June and experience the midnight sun, when perpetual daylight makes you lose all sense of time. It's a strange feeling to be sipping a Negroni at midnight at the Radisson Blu's cool Top 13 Bar while it's light outside. Down below, people are milling around, eating and drinking in the city's bars and restaurants as if it's 7pm.

It's easy to understand why. When long, dark winters give way to these incredible summer nights, and with so much on Bodø's doorstep, why stay indoors?

ROUND THE TWIST

An amazing phenomenon here is the Saltstraumen, the world's strongest maelstrom. I take a rib boat out, and as we approach, can feel the tug and pull on the boat. It's an incredible sight as the water spins in perfect circles, and more and more whirlpools and eddies appear. Meanwhile, overhead, eagles swoop past our heads to dive for fish, leaving me feeling privileged to see their majesty up close.

Back on dry land, I don my walking boots for a 1.5-mile hike to the city's mountain, Keiservarden, where you get wonderful views over the city and Norwegian Sea. Again, my body clock is confused: it's 10pm, but I can spot couples walking their dogs, as well as speed walkers and even some cyclists.

By now I've learnt the best thing is to just embrace this strange midnight sun madness. And the next day, I somehow agree to tackle the Rampen Via Ferrata, one ➤

DESTINATIONS

SHORT BREAKS | NORWAY



PLACES TO EAT IN BODØ

Lystpå in central Bodø showcases all that is brilliant about Norwegian cuisine. Its food is modern Nordic meets tradition – reindeer and dried cod from the nearby Lofoten Islands is on the menu, as is fish soup made with Norwegian shrimps, carrots, fennel, leek and the catch of the day. Attention is paid to presentation too, with beautiful bowls and stylish crockery. Plus, there's a large patio for hearty burgers and beers on a sunny afternoon.

lystpa.no

Craig Alibone Pâtisserie & Champagneria in the heart of Bodø is Scandi style meets French culinary passion. Craig, originally from Leicester, learnt his trade in France and makes the most delicious chocolates and macarons using local produce including seasonal berries and the Norwegian speciality *brunost* (brown cheese). He even has a brown-cheese ice cream, which tastes very much like caramel. It's the perfect place to sit with friends and sip a glass of his perfectly selected champagnes.

craigalibone.com

One of the big social hubs in Bodø is **Ohma**, right on the harbourfront and opposite the city's impressive Stormen library. It offers a huge range of Asian dishes intended for sharing, from gyoza (dumplings) to crispy duck and lobster tacos to sushi, making the most of the area's fresh fish. There's a real buzz and sense of occasion – the lively bar is a great place for people watching.

ohma-asian.no



top tip

P&O Cruises has added Bodø as a port of call on its northern lights sailings from 2025

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Music festival, Bodø; local fare; rib boat excursion

PICTURES: Visit Bodø/karalineoapettersen; Bjørn Erik Olsen; Kontrafei



of Bodø's newest attractions. Participants, kitted out with safety equipment and helmets, walk across a rope bridge over open water before scaling a rock face, from which they get incredible views of the Vest Fjord and Landegode island. No previous climbing experience is needed, but you will definitely need a good pair of boots and a strong stomach.

GLIMPSE OF A GOLDEN AGE

Bodø serves as a gateway to the Lofoten archipelago, and a trip to Kjerringøy gives us the chance to glimpse the islands in the distance, as well as prettily painted huts and boats gently swaying in the breeze. The charming Kjerringøy Trading Post provides an insight into Norway's golden age of fishing in the 19th century, when the nobility and fishermen worked side by side.

Back to the present day and there's a real sense of pride about being the 2024 European Capital of Culture, with celebrations having kicked off with a huge opening ceremony from a floating stage. About 1,000 events are planned throughout this year, including a light festival, a concert in a submerged cave and a celebration of Sámi culture.

Mike Mlynarczyk, from the restaurant Lystpå, tells us: "There is so much that we are looking forward to showing people – what we do here and what we are about."

Chocolatier Craig Alibone, who is originally from the UK but moved to Bodø with his Norwegian partner, says living so far north makes a difference to people's temperament and attitude to life – and it's one he relishes. "It's a community that really pulls together," he says. "We all help each other." **TW**



BOOK IT

Best Served Scandinavia offers a seven-day self-drive tailor-made trip to Bodø and the Lofoten Islands from £1,960, including accommodation, flights and a rental car. The trip can be personalised with activities such as a visit to the maelstrom at Saltstraumen and kayaking. best-served.co.uk

Return flights from Heathrow to Bodø (via Helsinki) with **Finnair** start at £379. Finnair also flies to Helsinki from Manchester and Edinburgh. finnair.com

For more about Bodø, go to visitbodo.com/en