

NORWAY JUNE 2019

Our trip to Norway was fabulous. We love the Scandinavian countries but hadn't had the opportunity to visit Norway before. Opportunity knocked when we decided to take a group of runners to the Midnight Sun Marathon. If you're going to go all that way, you may as well see a bit of the country.

We are 100% certain we are not 'cruisers' but drifting up the west coast of Norway, with the shoreline in sight and having full view of the magnificent vistas from the ship was a temptation we felt too good to miss and cruise we did. Got that out of our system!

The experience of cruising into the Trollfjord Fjord was extraordinary – the quietness of midnight, in full daylight, the engines cut as we drift around this beautiful fjord. Not a breath of wind. Just nothing.

Our timing for the trip turned out well – mid June, on the turn of summer and all that sunlight. By the time we got to Tromsø, there was no sunset and the sun remained above the horizon permanently. It dips but never quite sets.

Norway is another expensive country and you know that before you get there. Nothing left to do but enjoy. It is a beautiful country, with lovely people, great cuisine and a weird 24hr daylight thing happening.

MON – DAY 1

The flight is a long one – Sydney – Singapore – Moscow – Stockholm – Oslo. There's a day you're never going to get back!

We have an early arrival in Moscow, have a coffee in the lounge (nothing else worth having) and are on our way to Stockholm in a near empty plane. We have a quick transfer in Stockholm and the customs process is long. We make it to the gate just as the flight is called and we are off to Oslo, a quick flight of just under an hour.



We take the train into the city. It takes 19mins and has lift access from the arrival's hall. Too easy.

Our hotel, the **Amerikalinjen** is across the road from the Sentral Stasjon – handy. The hotel is the original building of a shipping line and quite grand. The reception, dining and bar area are quite fabulous! Our check in is friendly and we are off to our room in no time.



The room is spacious and looks over a side street. We settle in and decide we will keep going while we can. It is around 1:30 when we arrived so we have plenty of afternoon left.

The day is lovely and warm and the hotel staff recommend that we go up to the lookout. The subway is also in the train station so easy to get to.

We enjoy a lovely train trip, through impressive suburbs, to **Holmenkollveien**, which is a ski park with a sensational view of the city.





We have an easy walk up from the train stop to the park which has a very impressive ski jump. If you're into ski jumps. We walk around and soak up the view back over Oslo. The park is very pretty and there are walking and mountain bike trails all through the forest. The day is 20 degrees and really pleasant.

We take the train back down and walk through the station, which is also a shopping arcade and host to a couple of hotels.

Outside the sun is still warm but there is a bit of a wind. It is getting towards 5pm and we decide it could be time to sit down and have some dinner. **Olivia** is part of the station complex and we take a seat in the sun to watch the world go by. We order a couple of pizzas and a glass of red each and settle in. There is plenty of action in the street. Dave has figured out it is a public holiday as there isn't a worker or a tie to be seen (he is correct).



After dinner we walk out and around the new Opera House. It is a stunning building, built to look like a ship on the foreshore of the harbour. There are people lying flat out on the cement, soaking up the rays.

As we come down the other side of the building we spot a platform in the water and people are jumping in. Crazy. I'm sure the water isn't that warm.

The sunset here is at 10:37 and sunrise is 3:54 so there is not a lot of dark time. Thankfully we have blackout blinds and they do the trick.

TUESDAY – DAY 2

We have a fabulous breakfast - the fruit is really fresh (not refrigerated) and the bagels are the best I've had. We have a lovely table next to the window and can watch the world go by.

Oslo has turned on another beautiful day, heading for 22 degrees. The staff suggest that we should go to **Vigeland Park**, the Statue Park. We take the tram and are there in about 12 mins.

The park is stunning with a tree lined entrance and bright green lawns. There are statues along the bridge and all through the park. It is the most beautiful place and the sun has again brought out many people.



There is a group of statues together, depicting people in various poses. They are exquisite. In the middle there is a totem pole with bodies writhing all around it. The park is a sculpture gallery.



We catch the train back to **Aker Brygge** and walk around the foreshore. It has been redeveloped and has many restaurants (most of them of the chain kind) and lovely waterfront apartments.



We decide we will sit and enjoy for a while and take a place at **Lektern**, which is a floating restaurant. We have a table next to the water.

We order mussels done two ways - one with chilli and coriander and the other with shallots and cream, both superb.

We are holding up spectacularly well and walk into the city. We go to the **Royal Palace** which sits up high at one end of a very long street. The view is gorgeous, similar to the Mall in London. We walk through the city, which is really beautiful. We stop and go to a "Northern Lights Spectacular" which is enjoyable but a bit of a tourist trap.

Oslo has lovely architecture and the city is alive with people. There is very little traffic in the city and an excellent public transportation system. Restaurants, cafes and tables line the street. What a lovely walk!





Back at the hotel we sit in the bar, once again looking out, and have a cocktail. The barman explains their cocktail menu as referring to the fact that the hotel (building) is 100 years old so they have a cocktail for each decade.

I have a gin concoction, First Man on the Moon, which is a bit of fun and Dave has a Central Station. Once delivered we get quite the run down on each drink.



The weather is closing in and the rain starts. So glad we have had two such beautiful days of weather.

We return to the room and then head straight back out for dinner. We jump a tram and go to the **San Francisco Bread Bowl**, which we passed today and I'd also read about.

I have the Baja Chilli Bowl and Dave the Seafood Chowder Bowl and we both order a Big Wave beer. Both bowls are super yummy.



The rain is fairly constant by the time we leave. A quick ride home and we head back into the hotel.

WEDNESDAY – DAY 3

Another fabulous breakfast. We are off to Bergen today but not until midday so we decide we'll ride around the town by tram and see some more of the city. The rain continues as we leave the hotel but only lightly.

We head in one direction, out past the University and then back the other way. The other side of the city presents us with expansive views over the harbour and the city centre. Great way to fill in a bit of time.

We return to the hotel, grab our gear and check out. It has been an exceptional stay - the room was lovely, the breakfast as good as you'd get anywhere and the staff wonderful.

Today we are travelling on the **Bergen Railway (Bergensbanen)**. The journey from Oslo to Bergen is renowned as one of the most beautiful train trips in the world. The trip takes us over the Hardangervidda plateau and is Northern Europe's highest railway.

The scenery is enjoyable along the way with towns, forests and lakes. The standard of housing here is high and the wooden houses quite delightful.





The scenery is stunning.... we travel through gorges, alongside rivers, through high and barren snow areas. The trip is a real treat.

We get to Bergen and taxi it to the hotel, the **No 13 Hotel**, in the centre of the town. Our room is a reasonable size and the bathroom big. We dump and run as it's 9:30 - we go across the road and enjoy a fish soup. There is not a lot of it but it's tasty. We also have sweet potato chips.

We decide to go for a walk about town as there is plenty of life around. The harbour is only a couple of blocks away and it is beautiful. Boats abound, both leisure craft and the big cruise ships a bit further out. We walk around, admiring the craft.



There are lots of open air bars about and a swell of people come through. There is a Music Festival here at present and obviously one of the concerts has just finished.

The sunset is extraordinary as the sky burns orange across the harbour.



It's past 11:30 and we decide to head home. Although it is still light, that in itself is not a good enough reason to stay out!

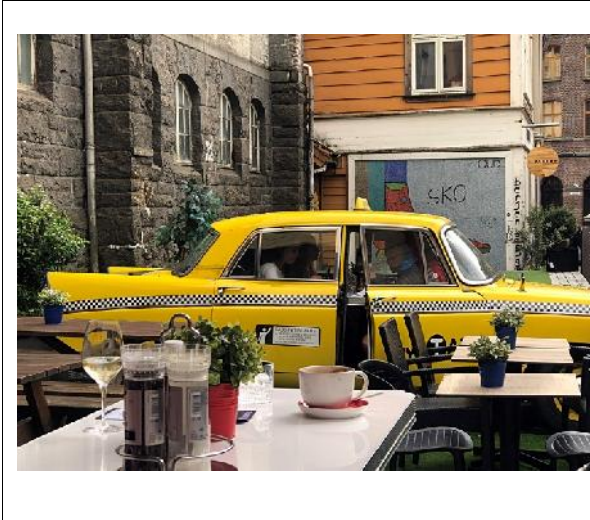
THURSDAY – DAY 4

After brekkie we are off walking, first stop is the tourist information centre. I've never seen better tourism centres than here in Norway. Oslo was lovely and so is this one. The information is abundant and the staff extreme helpful.

We do a walk along the foreshore and through the park. Today is cold and I have a snug jumper on (16 degrees). We find a gorgeous little arty spot with a few lovely shops - glass blowing, jewellery, ceramics - all tucked away on a wharf.

We walk into the Hurtigruten terminal, which is an easy walk from the city, and check out details for Saturday. The lady we speak to is most helpful and we now understand how it works.

Back through the city we wander around, in behind the harbour. The streets are quaint and we come across an area full of bars, cafes and restaurants. We take a seat at the **Rock and Roll** cafe which is more Midwest USA than backstreet Bergen. We have a beer and watch the world go by. This is a fun street with lots going on.



We wander off to the fish market for dinner. There are tents along the harbour and we settle into a place we saw earlier that we thought looked a bit better than some of the others. I want to try the huge crab claws - she weighs one up and tells us it's NOK 500+, so just under \$100 for one claw. You have to be kidding me.



We settle for a starter of smoked fish - there is salmon 3-ways, and some other fish. There is also Minke whale which is fantastic (afraid to say). The platter is superb. We also have a skewer of prawns and scallops.

For seconds, Dave has monkfish and I have mussels..... yummo. It wasn't cheap but it was sensational seafood!

We walk along the waterfront and it is another beautiful evening, people everywhere, bars jumping.

FRIDAY – DAY 5

We walk along the harbour where there are alleyways into gorgeous little clusters of shops. The weather is threatening and we have a few drops of rain here and there.

We walk into the back streets and wind our way up the hill, past the most gorgeous wooden houses. The view is lovely and we enjoy sitting for a while. We make our way back down and wind through the streets.





We decide to get off our feet at the R&R.... which turns out to be a good idea as it belts down rain. We sit and enjoy again.

Off to dinner and I have a restaurant in mind. Can't find it though and didn't keep it on my phone! We pass by a Thai restaurant which is packed and decide this is a good option.

Siam Ratre Thai Restaurant proves to be a great choice. We have rice paper rolls, beef red curry and crispy fried fish with coconut and lemongrass. Yummo! Lovely evening.



We walk back to the harbour and... there is the restaurant I was looking for. It's huge. Looks a bit posh so very pleased with our choice.

We have had another wonderful day in Bergen, not doing anything other than relaxing and enjoying this beautiful city.



SATURDAY – DAY 6

We wake to a cracker of a day.

After brekkie we pack and deliver our bags downstairs. We walk down to the funicular station there's a lonnnnggg queue and we join it. Up we go to **Mt Floyen**. The view is spectacular and we soak it up.



We walk to the lake which is beautiful. They have canoes in summer but 'summer' starts on 22 June. We walk along Fyhr Lake and back to the viewing station. We find a couple of tree stumps and sit... and watch.... and enjoy.



We go to the cafe and find a table right on the edge with an uninterrupted view. Dave grabs a couple of beers and we sit.... again.... for ages. It is just beautiful. There are four girls playing classical music on their strings and the music drifts around the viewing station. We have nowhere to be, so just sit. Temp 23 degrees.

Note: our bus driver on Sunday tells us that Bergen gets 5 days a year like today. Done good!

Eventually we drag ourselves away. We have a salmon soup at the fish market and another walk in the sunshine. There is a little market set up on the harbour and we browse the goods.

We walk back to the hotel, grab our bags and walk down to the **Hurtigruten** terminal. No queues, we check in and board. Our boat is vintage 1983 and take 519 passengers.

It's just shy of 5pm and we take off at 9:30. We have a bit of a walk around and locate our room - 306 on level C. We work our way to the back of the boat and take a seat on the deck with a view back over Bergen. It is still quite warm and we enjoy some time reading and relaxing.

Dinner tonight is a buffet, starting at 6pm. We have access to our rooms from 6pm also but, as it was being cleaned when we came earlier, we figure we can probably have access early. And we can.

The room is a lot bigger than I was expecting. Downside is we have bunks - the top one folds up into the wall. The bathroom is fine and also a bit bigger than I expected. We unpack our things - we have adequate hanging space and a couple of drawers. There is a shelf under our porthole window and a few hooks around the room. All in all, plenty of space.

We have dinner which is another pleasant surprise. We find the nightly menu on the table which shows the nightly menu for the next week. The buffet is varied with nice looking dishes. We start with Bergen fish soup which I think I could live on. We order a glass of French Chablis. When I initially looked at the wine list, I commented that the prices weren't too bad. My error was that I thought it was the bottle price when it is the per glass price. Anyway, the wine is lovely.

I have salmon with boiled potatoes and a few bits of salad. The salad is really cold, which I don't enjoy in the least. The salmon is yummy. We have some blue cheese and crackers..... the blue is way too mild for our liking.

We move up to the Panorama deck, up top of the boat. Huge windows provide a lovely panorama which will be useful when we depart but, for now, we are looking at the harbour!

There is an announcement to advise us we should attend a briefing at 8:45. We oblige and find it very helpful as they go through the itinerary as well as the safety information. There is a trip through the Geiranger Fjord tomorrow and we book on the way out. At NOK 2290 pp it's not cheap but it looks like a great way to spend an afternoon/evening.

We return to the lounge for our departure and cruise out into the beyond, enjoying a beer as we do so. The going is very smooth.

SUNDAY – DAY 7

We have brekkie just before 8:30. Some of the same salads appear. There is fabulous bread though, which I toast up and have with grilled tomato, spuds and baked beans. English breakfast tea accompanies and breakfast is a pleasant experience.

We go up to the lounge for some views, then head to the outer deck as we approach **Alesund** - an art nouveau town which burnt down in 1904 and was completely rebuilt. We are only here for 30mins so we jump off, walk quickly around town and get back on board.

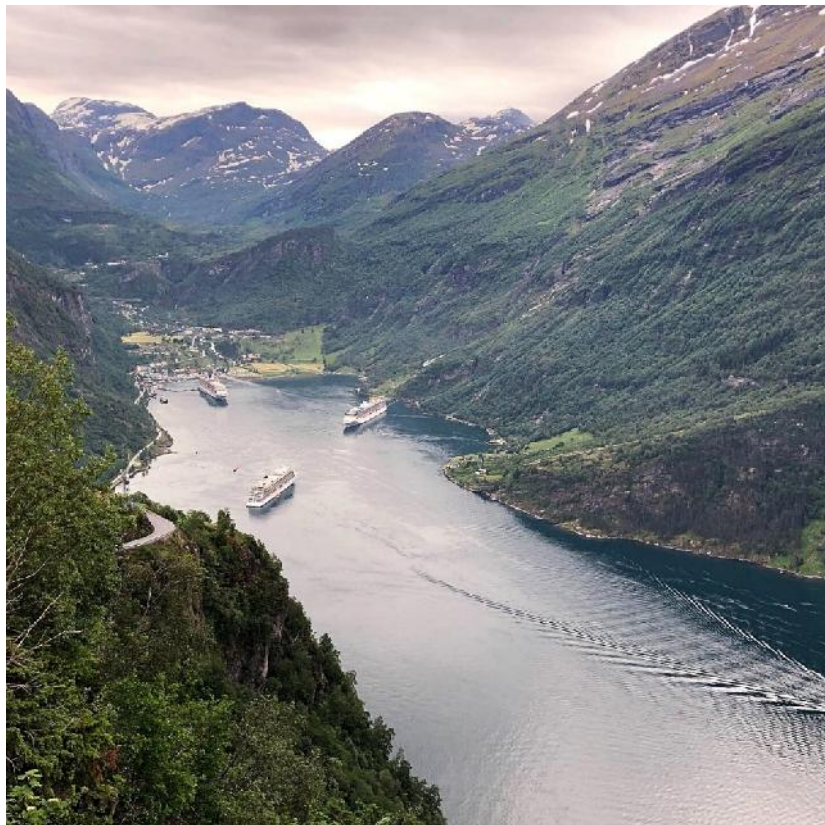


Back to the lounge. We cruise past the **Hjorundfjorden Fjord** which has snow covered peaks.

We stand up front of the boat coming into **Geirangerfjord** it was blowing a gale but it calms down once we got further into the fjord. The trip is stunning.

The rain is holding off and getting a bit brighter. The forecast isn't good but remains bright. So far, so good.

We off load onto a boat and go to shore where we are met by our tour guide Harry (who is German). Our first stop is the viewing platform above the fjord. Unbelievably beautiful.



Geiranger to Molde - 85km - 3hrs by road which is windy and slow.

We have a ferry crossing about 30 mins into the trip, having driven through a gorgeous valley.



We stop again at the **Trolls Ladder**, a winding, switchback road down the mountain. The view is spectacular, the drive down in the bus even more so. Our driver is fabulous... a very gentle man, quietly spoken and superb driver.



We stop roadside at a troll cafe for waffles and coffee. It's 6pm! The waffles are cold but surprisingly delicious - cool and stuffed with pretend cream. Somehow it works.



Back on the bus and we make another ferry crossing at 8pm.

We arrive in **Molde** where we have dinner at the **Alexander hotel**. We enjoy a pleasant meal and sit with two Canadians who are great company.

The boat meets us at 10:15 and we go to the Panorama bar for a panoramic view for a while.

That's when we discover this guy is on the boat.... Robert Plant!



We look up the schedule of concerts and he was playing in Bergen... next gig Iceland!

MONDAY – DAY 8

We stop at **Trondheim** for 3hrs and walk around town. It is yet another gorgeous place with a lovely canal, lined with traditional houses. The weather holds and occasionally the sun comes out.





By the time we return to the boat it has turned into a glorious day. We relax in the Panorama lounge.



We have a *Coastal Tasting* of mussels at 2:15pm on the aft deck (outdoors). It's pretty windy but lovely in the sunshine. Nothing like free food to bring out the hoards and we all get a sample of mussels in a cup. They are fresh but I can't really detect any particular flavour.

We have an 8pm second seating for dinner, which suits us. We are seated with a lovely Aussie couple from Melbourne and have an enjoyable evening.

Back to the Panorama lounge for more views.

TUESDAY – DAY 9

We cross the Arctic Circle just before 8am.

We go to the aft deck where we will meet Neptune, as a celebration of crossing the Arctic Circle. Quite the ceremony as there are free drinks but to get one Neptune has to put a ladle of ice down your back! I'm pretty sure I won't like whatever they are drinking and more certain I don't want ice down my back. But there are plenty of takers and it's a funny show. The rain starts so we exit.



We stop at **Stamsund** for 30mins at 7pm. We go for a quick walk as that's all it takes in a place of 1500 or so.



Next stop **Svolvær** for 1hr. We hoof it off the boat and walk around the town. It's quite pretty but 30mins pretty much kills it.





This is a fabulous sculpture on exiting the harbour - the Fisherman's Wife.



Back on the boat and heading for **Trollfjord**, which is special as it is very narrow. Can we stay awake until 11:15pm to see it?

Yes we can! We cruised through the fjord at 11:30pm at the front of the boat. The silence of it all was mesmerising. The engines are cut and we drift. No one on deck makes a sound. Just us and the fjord and the night. Brilliant.



Finally we returned to our room around midnight. Time for sleep.

WEDNESDAY – DAY 10

Morning spent drifting and admiring the views.

At lunch we linger long time and chat with a few of the people we've met. A very pleasant last couple of hours on board.



2:15 and we disembark in **Tromsø**. Our hotel, the **Scandic Ishavshotel** is very close by and we are checked in quickly. We have a room overlooking the water and it is reasonably roomy in a paired down sort of way.

We go out for a walk around town. There is an occasional spot of rain but otherwise dry. The Main Street is a mall with very pretty wooden shops.





We meet some of our early arrivals downstairs in the bar. Dinner time and the five of us head off to **Cous** - an Italian in the Main Street. The pasta is great, the red wine very quaffable and the service excellent. A great night.

THURSDAY – DAY 11

Great breakfast. The day is a cracker with lovely blue skies.

The same five of us head off Husky Hiking - departure across the road at the Radisson. We have others in the group as well. The Husky house is about 30mins out of town.

We don gumboots as the ground is marshy and wet. The dogs are on a chain about 40m from the main office and are very keen to get out walking. We have a harness around our waist with long leads attached.

I have a lovely dog named Savi and he is well behaved. They are all excited as we set off but well behaved also, for the best part. Dave's dog is a maniac.





We hike for an hour or so and the scenery is staggeringly beautiful. Mountains, snow caps, fjords and warm weather - T-shirt only required.

We stop for lunch and the guides lay out reindeer skins for us to sit on. They have flasks of baccala and it is divine. We have hot fruit flavoured tea served in wooden cups and enjoy chocolate cake as well. Quite the picnic feast.

Once back we chain up the dogs and make our way up to the main area. There are a few hundred huskies here and we are free to roam around and pat them. They sound like the hounds of the Baskerville but are super friendly and just want attention. I go up and am shown the puppy house with many wee doggies that I am allowed cuddle. Could not be cuter!



Once back at the hotel we dump and run - taking a taxi to the gondola or Fjellheisen. The taxi is outrageously expensive - NOK 160 - but there is no queue and we are ticketed and in the gondola in no time at all.

The view is magnificent, across the city to the snow-capped mountains beyond. The vista stretches from left to right and is unbelievably beautiful. We take it in and soak up the beauty.





We call into the church on the walk home. It is an architectural feature of the town and popular with the tourists.



We head back to Cous for dinner - just the two of us and one of the runners. We have another fabulous meal and a great night.

FRIDAY – DAY 12

Not such a great day weather wise. I think we've had the best of it when it comes to the weather. The morning is ok but the weather is closing in fast.

We wander up to the expo early afternoon for a look around mid-afternoon and have a 4pm meeting with the mayor and others. The Mayor, Kristin, is a delight and full of humour.

As for the weather, it is rainy and fairly miserable.

The Marathon Torch is in Tromso, having been escorted there by the Mayor of the Marathon Flame, and other Greek dignitaries. We join the torch ceremony, which goes well and the flame is 'ignited' remotely from Athens.... or by the guy near me with the remote in his hand. The ceremony is beautifully executed and warmly received by all in attendance.



The flame is handed to Nils, the Race Director of the Midnight Sun Marathon, who delivers it to the first runner of the relay.

We scoot back to the hotel as we have a 6pm departure for our welcome cruise. We have two catamarans which are moored directly behind the hotel. We split into two groups and are given a briefing by Francois, our French boatie. The weather is drizzling but we have big waterproofs we can don to keep dry.

The scenery is lovely and the cruise very smooth.



We stop and Francois serves up fish soup with bread. After dinner we motor on a bit and then stop to do a spot of fishing. I catch the first fish and Jeff catches the biggest fish! We have a lot of fun.

SATURDAY – DAY 13

At 10am we take the runners to the expo. We return to the start/finish area to watch the kid's races. It is raining solidly. We are lucky in that we are taken to the announcer's stand which is the perfect location right on the finish line. Much warmer too!

At 7:00pm we take the marathon runners to the start line for their 7:30 gun. The rain stops but only long enough for them to get a few kms into the race.

We walk to **Cous** and have a lovely dinner. Back to the hotel, then we take the half marathon runners to their 10:30pm start.



We make our way to the finish line. Still raining. And cold. We cheer the runners as they come in until after 12:30am when we call it quits for the day. and this whole 24hr sun is disruptive to sleep at best.

SUNDAY – DAY 14

We have a get together at 5pm and all the runners show up. It is a really enjoyable evening and everyone gels really well.

MONDAY – DAY 15

We have a 9am tour of the Fjords. Fjord tour - 14 of us in a Ford minibus, plus Debbie, our guide, plus driver. Our first stop is looking down a fjord and it is magic. Again.



We visit **Sommaroy** where the residents voted to do away with time and have attached their watches to the bridge. How the logistics of that might work is anyone's guess.



It is cold and windy but we manage to get off the bus for a walk around.

Next stop is some rock carvings. The rain has been consistent but stops long enough for us to get off and have a picnic. We have a really enjoyable wrap, a Kit Kat and hot chocolate. Yum.

Back on the bus and back to town. They drop us at the hotel and we farewell our new found friends.

We go to **Lotus** for lunch/dinner. The restaurant is local, Asian (some mixed cuisine), close to the hotel and very good.

We go back to the hotel, gather up our things and take the flybussen to the airport. Stops out front of the hotel and works a treat.

Not so at the airport as once we are in the lounge the departure time for our flight is delayed from 6:45 to 7:50. Missed connection to Stockholm, missed flight home. Our plane arrives in Tromso and as the last person disembarks they call boarding. There is an indication that we may make our connection. Here we go! We are on, up and away quickly. During the flight there is an announcement that the flight to Stockholm will depart at 10:10 from D7. So they've held it.

We arrive in Oslo, deplane and sprint to D7. We are on board and wondering if our bags will make it. I can hear them thumping and crashing underneath us, so fingers crossed the ports are with us. Can't stand to think of the flight home in stinky clothes. Yuk!!!!

We arrive in Stockholm, along with our luggage. Alleluia. We make our way to the **Clarion Hotel**, which is connected to the airport (as is the Radisson Blu).

Our room is lovely, the bathroom roomy and the pillows hideously small, like cushion size. The night is getting late and sleep beckons.

TUESDAY – DAY 16

We rise just after 6:20am, showered and down to brekkie which is extensive but overly complicated. The hotel is a bit too punked up for me.... eg to get a glass of water at the breakfast bar you have to select it from an iPad.

Our flight out is delayed but we knew that was going to be the case as SQ has already allocated us to a later flight out of SIN.

We are off.....

SUMMING IT UP....

Our trip to Norway has been fabulous. Oslo is a vibrant city and turned on some super weather for us. Bergen is just beautiful and again treated us to spectacular weather.

Our cruise was enjoyable but 4nts was long enough for both of us. Probably forever!

Tromso.... ahhh Tromso. What an enchanting city and the MSM is a real destination marathon. Our runners were the best group ever. One of them even asked me today if all our groups are this good.... yes!