



Bergen & the Southwestern Fjords

HIGHEST ELEV 1654M

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Why Go?

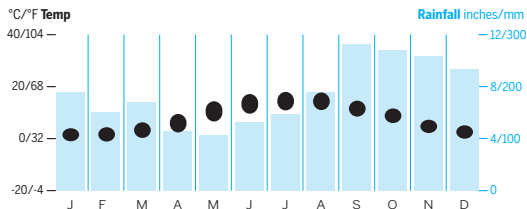
If you could visit only one region of Norway and still capture the essence of the country's appeal, this would probably be our choice.

Two of Norway's most engaging cities serve as gateways to dramatic fjord country. Dynamic Bergen is one of the world's most beautiful cities, arrayed around harbours and hillsides, and rich in history and architecture. It's also the ideal starting point for a journey into splendid Hardangerfjord, with its gorgeous fjord-side villages, or the vast Sognefjorden network; en route to the latter, Voss is Norway's destination of choice for thrill-seekers, while the Stalheim Hotel is the ultimate room with a view.

Away to the south, agreeable Stavanger, with its brilliant museums and beguiling old quarter, is an essential staging post for Lysefjord, home to two of Norway's most recognisable images, impossibly high above the ice-blue waters of the fjord: Preikestolen (Pulpit Rock) and Kjeragbolten.

When to Go

Bergen



June Extreme sports in Voss and the Bergen International Festival.

May Hardangerfjord's fruit farms bloom into gorgeous colours.

July & August Best conditions for hiking to Pulpit Rock, or through Hardangervidda.

BERGEN

POP 256,600

Surrounded by seven hills and seven fjords, Bergen is a beautiful, charming city. With the Unesco World Heritage-listed Bryggen and buzzing Vågen Harbour as its centrepiece, Bergen climbs the hillsides with hundreds of timber-clad houses, while cable cars offer stunning views from above. Throw in great museums, friendly locals and a dynamic cultural life and Bergen amply rewards as much time as you can give it.

History

During the 12th and 13th centuries, Bergen was Norway's capital and easily the country's most important city. By the 13th century, the city states of Germany allied themselves into trading leagues, most significantly the Hanseatic League with its centre in Lübeck. At its zenith, the league had over 150 member cities and was northern Europe's most powerful economic entity; the sheltered harbour of Bryggen drew the Hanseatic League's traders in droves. They established their first office here around 1360, transforming Bryggen into one of the league's four major headquarters abroad, accommodating up to 2000 mostly German resident traders who imported grain and exported dried fish, among other products.

For over 400 years, Bryggen was dominated by this tight-knit community of German merchants, who weren't permitted to mix with, marry or have families with local Norwegians. By the 15th century, competition from Dutch and English shipping companies, internal disputes and, especially, the Black Death (which wiped out 70% of Bergen's population) ensured the Hanseatic League's decline.

By the early 17th century Bergen was nonetheless the trading hub of Scandinavia, and Norway's most populous city with 15,000 people. During the 17th and 18th centuries, many Hanseatic traders opted to take Norwegian nationality and join the local community. Bryggen remained an important maritime trading centre until 1899, when the Hanseatic League's Bergen offices finally closed.

Sights

Bergen has lots of quaint cobblestone streets lined with timber-clad houses; apart from Bryggen, some of the most picturesque are the quiet lanes climbing the hill behind the Floibanen funicular station, as well as in Nordnes (the peninsula that runs northwest

of the centre, including along the southern shore of the main harbour) and Sandviken (the area north of Håkonshallen).



HISTORIC DISTRICT

Bergen's oldest and most enchanting quarter runs along the eastern shore of Vågen Harbour in long, parallel and often leaning rows of gabled buildings with stacked-stone or wooden foundations and reconstructed rough-plank construction.

The archaeological excavations of Bryggen (Map p158), whose name means 'the wharf', suggest that the quay was once 140m further inland than its present location. The current 58 buildings (25% of the original, although some claim there are now 61) cover 13,000 sq metres and date from after the 1702 fire, although the building pattern dates back to the 12th century.

In the early 14th century, there were about 30 wooden buildings on Bryggen, each of which was usually shared by several *stuer* (trading firms). They rose two or three storeys above the wharf and combined business premises with living quarters and warehouses. Each building had a crane for loading and unloading ships, as well as a *shotstue* (large assembly room) where employees met and ate. That atmosphere of an intimate waterfront community remains intact, and losing yourself in Bryggen is one of Bergen's great pleasures.

For an excellent summary of Bryggen's history and threats to its existence, look out for the *Bryggen Guide* (Nkr80), available from the Bryggens Museum and elsewhere, or *The Bryggen Companion* (Nkr60) by Siri Myrvoll, which is available from the Bryggen Visitors Centre.

Hanseatic Museum & Schøtstuene

(Map p158; www.museumvest.no; Finnegårdsgaten 1a & Øvregaten 50; adult/child mid-May–mid-Sep Nkr50/free, rest of yr Nkr30/free; ☉9am–5pm mid-May–mid-Sep, shorter hr rest of yr) The terrific Hanseatic Museum provides a window into the world of Hanseatic traders. Housed in a rough-timber building from 1704, it starkly reveals the contrast between the austere living and working conditions of Hanseatic merchant sailors and apprentices, and the lifestyle of the management. Highlights include the manager's office, quarters, private liquor cabinet and summer bedroom; the apprentices' quarters, where beds were shared by two men; the fish storage room, which pressed and processed over a million pounds (450,000kg) of fish a month; and