



# Bergen & the Southwestern Fjords

HIGHEST ELEV 1654M

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## Why Go?

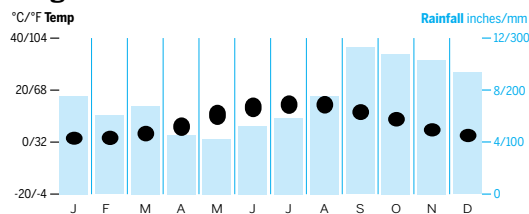
If you could visit only one region of Norway and hope to grasp the essence of the country's appeal, this would be our choice.

Cool, cultured Bergen is one of the world's most beautiful cities, with its streets of white-washed timber cottages climbing steep hillsides up from busy Vågen Harbour. It's a destination in itself but 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.

Down south, boom-town Stavanger is a diverting 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



**Jun** Bergen International Festival and Voss' Veko for extreme sports and music.

**May** Hardangerfjord's fruit farms spring into a riot of blossom.

**Jul & Aug** Perfect for hiking to Pulpit Rock.

## BERGEN

POP 258,496

Surrounded by seven hills and seven fjords, Bergen is an utterly beguiling city. The beautiful Unesco World Heritage-listed Bryggen is its centrepiece, and nature, be that mountains, fjords or sea, is never far away. But you'll also discover a dynamic cultural life, one that a city 10 times its size would be proud of. Dive into its booming local food and coffee scene, fascinating art collections and excellent music venues.

### History

During the 12th and 13th centuries, Bergen was Norway's capital and 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 or marry 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 again, 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

Making time just to wander Bergen's historic neighbourhoods is a must. Beyond Bryggen, the most picturesque are the quiet streets climbing the hill behind the Fløibanen funicular station, 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).

### 📍 Central Bergen

#### ★ Bryggen

HISTORIC SITE

(Map p160) Bergen's oldest quarter runs along the eastern shore of Vågen Harbour (the name simply translates to 'wharf') in long, parallel and often leaning rows of gabled buildings with stacked-stone or wooden foundations and reconstructed rough-plank construction. It's enchanting, no doubt about it, but can be exhausting if you hit a cruise ship and bus tour crush.

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 is from the 12th century. The archaeological excavations suggest that the quay was once 140m further inland than its present location.

In the early 14th century, there were about 30 wooden buildings, each usually shared by several *stuer* (trading firms). They rose two or three stories above the wharf and combined business premises with living quarters and **warehouses** (Map p160). Each building had a crane for loading and unloading ships, as well as a *schotstue* (large assembly room) where employees met and ate.

The wooden alleyways of Bryggen have become a haven for artists and craftspeople, and there are bijou shops and boutiques at every turn. The atmosphere of an intimate waterfront community remains intact, and losing yourself in Bryggen is one of Bergen's pleasures.

#### ➔ Hanseatisk Museum & Schotstue

(Map p160; [www.museumvest.no](http://www.museumvest.no); Finnegårdsgaten 1a & Øregaten 50; adult/child Nkr70/free; ☀ 9am-6pm Jul-Aug, 11am-2pm Tue-Sat, to 4pm Sun Sep-May) This interesting museum provides a window into the world of Hanseatic traders. Housed in a rough-timber building dating to 1704, it starkly reveals the contrast between the austere living and working conditions of the merchant sailors and apprentices, and the comfortable lifestyle of the trade partners.

Highlights include the manager's office, private liquor cabinet and summer bedroom; the apprentices' quarters, where