



GOOD LIFE
TRAVEL

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

Norwegians practice what we preach.





NORWEGIANS ARE KNOWN for their love of the outdoors. Less familiar to people who've never been there is their allegiance to *Allemansrätten*. Literally, “everyman’s right,” it guarantees public access to land. I like to think of it as freedom to roam and camp almost anywhere you want, when you want, for free. It makes a camping vacation – the perfect way to pinch your *krone* in one of the world’s most expensive countries – a very attractive prospect.

So last summer my French boyfriend, Damien, and I met in the northern town of Bodø, the gateway to the Lofoten Islands, an archipelago of colorful fishing villages and peaky islands that looks a lot like Tahiti transplanted to the Arctic Circle.

For the first week, everything went swimmingly. At night, the sun bobbed about aimlessly in the sky. We spent our days tossing fishing lines into lakes and rivers (with no luck), then we’d end up buying a hunk of salmon at the local market, cooking it over our little camp stove at some forgotten cove and still feeling like the luckiest anglers in the world.

We ogled the world’s fastest moving tidal current, the Saltstraumen – a force of nature that sends masses of seawater coursing through a narrow strait at speeds of up to 22 knots. The sea churned and boiled into visible whirlpools that looked capable of swallowing a small boat. We watched fish-



Clockwise from left: Camping at the Munkebu Hut, a three-hour hike from Sorvagen. An Icelandic horse gives a visitor a tour of the bluffs outside Hov. The fishing village of Reine.





Above: The harbor in Svolvær. Left: A dock in the town of Nusfjord, one of Norway's oldest fishing villages.

ermen reel in fish after fish as our lines, again, went unnoticed.

The edges of the strait can be dived when the tide is slack. I struggled into my thickest wetsuit (the Swedish dive guide from Saltstraumen Dyk-kecamp was duly impressed with the Florida girl) and braved the waters. It was like riding an underwater conveyor belt through a fantasy world, its walls carpeted with giant white and orange anemones, waving kelp forests and slack-jawed wolf eels leering from the depths.

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“Make sure you go to Tranøy” a Norwegian friend had emailed me before the trip. “You’ll understand why when you get there.”

On the road to the tiny seaside hamlet, we stopped at a lighthouse reached by a footbridge that yawned over water so blue it could have been Bahamian. We peeled shrimp as pink and tiny as a baby’s toes at a dockside restaurant, gobbled them atop bread slathered with mayonnaise, then drove the last few miles to Tranøy, which seemed nothing more than a handful of red wooden houses and shops. We followed a path to the sea, passing through boggy marshes carpeted with berries and purple flowers. Then we noticed the *rorbuers*, traditional fishermen’s cottages, along the water’s edge. They had been painted with street-style murals. As if this weren’t surreal enough, stone sculptures materialized along the path. Someone had created an art park where you’d least expect it – and there wasn’t a soul in sight. We pitched our tent where we pleased and tossed out a few fishing lines, which the fish here

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also ignored. So we hit our reserves for a can of soup to heat over the fire, and squeezed cod caviar atop crackers from a tube.

In the morning we watched a sea otter slip into the water. Channeling our inner Scandinavians, we braced for the cold and plunged in too.

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A few days later, at a beautiful beach in the tiny surf town of Unstad, a wind storm flattened our tent. Poles snapped, cooking pots barreled down the beach like tumbleweeds, and spirits ran low as Damien and I drove onward in the archipelago, pretending not to notice all the pretty places to camp along the way.

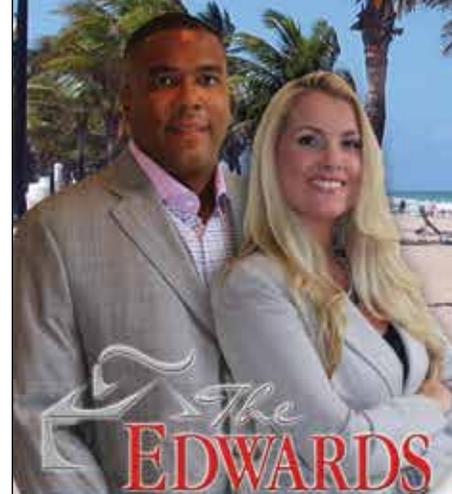
We pulled off the road in Henningsvær, a cod fishing village of just 500 year-round residents surrounded by the peaky Vågakallen mountains. We looked for a *rorbuer* to rent for the night, but everything was full.

“Try Heimgårdsbrygga,” a woman on the street suggested. And that’s where we met Hanna, the woman who would save our vacation – and make me see that the tent’s demise had been a hidden stroke of good road-tripping luck.

Heimgårdsbrygga, Hanna’s home and guesthouse, was a red wooden building where cod was once processed. It fronted Henningsvær’s working harbor. Her four guest rooms were full, she told us. “Summer is my social season,” she said. But we relayed the harrowing tale of our tent in a pity plea. Well, there was one “very special” room in the basement that we probably wouldn’t like, she allowed, saying she normally didn’t rent it out.



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We followed Hanna through a storage area full of boating equipment and fishing gear to a small room with two twin beds, a tiny window high on the wall and floorboards that let in the sounds of the sea slurping at the pilings under the house. It was ours if we wanted it, she said. We asked how much and she shrugged. Thirty dollars a night? We told her it was perfect.

We spent the last days of our vacation enjoying the home life and hanging out with Hanna. We'd rise late like the locals. (When the sun never sets, the Arctic summertime tendency is to stay up late and sleep in.) We'd hike to a mountaintop lake or brave a dip in the sea, then return to Heimgårdsbrygga for waffles with strawberry jam in the sun on the patio with Hanna and her neighbor, a Thai who spoke English with a sing-song accent that sounded part Asian/part Arctic.

One morning, Hanna's daughter, Ragnhild, invited us to come fishing with her in the fjord. We motored out about 200 yards in a tiny wooden boat. And there our fishing woes ended, as cod after cod latched onto our lines. I had never seen such large fish put up so little fight.

We cooked up the cod in Hanna's kitchen and fed the other guests: two Italians from Naples, a French concert pianist and an NGO worker from Oslo. The Frenchman offered to make a pie from a thermos of fresh blueberries he'd collected in the surrounding hills as Hanna sliced thin rounds of whale sausage for everyone. We sipped wine and swapped stories, then ventured to the deck for the evening's main attraction: hurling fish bones into the sea to a flock of fat seagulls. Life felt as wholesome and uncomplicated as the impromptu feast.

On our last evening, Hanna led us on a sunset walk. It was nearing midnight and the sun dipped just under the horizon – a sign that summer was on its way out. We noticed large wooden racks built onto the rocks by the sea. They would be heavy with drying cod come winter, Hanna said, but for now they were still warming their bones, like the rest of us, in the midnight sun.

Hanna pointed to a home by the water. The previous winter, she told us, an enormous storm had pushed a boulder the size of a tractor right through the living room. Nobody was hurt, but it had been the talk of the town.

"Bad weather," she said smiling, "is an attraction here, too." ☺

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IF YOU GO:

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For general information about Norway, check: visitnorway.com

For more information about the places in this article, check: heimgardsbrygga.nosalsttraumen-dykkecamp.no