



# THE UNDISCOVERED ISLES

Other than Scandinavians, few visitors venture to what might be the most spectacular archipelago on Earth – the Faroes. By **Terry Ward**



Main picture: rugged coast of Gásadalur on the island of Vágur

Above, from left to right: an archetypal lighthouse on southeast Nólsoy; geese, a common sight around the isles; a fisherman at sea

The roughly 2.5-hour flight from Copenhagen to the Faroe Islands – an autonomous part of Denmark that feels a world away from Europe – is deceptively short. For this archipelago of 18 islands, home to roughly 50,000 people and situated between Norway, Scotland and Iceland, is surely one of the world’s last unspoilt places. And once you’ve caught aerial views of what awaits on landing, it certainly seems like getting to the Faroes should entail more than a comfortably quick hop from one of Europe’s main airports.

Places tend to remind us of other locations, and in some ways the Faroes are no different. Mountains with deep emerald cliff edges that could have been sculpted by the Viking god Thor’s serrated knife conjure Hawaii and French Polynesia. The glacier-formed fjords and undulating treeless hillsides, invariably dotted with some of the 70,000 sheep that call these islands home, are reminiscent of New Zealand. But then you spot a red farmhouse perched impossibly alongside a deep gash in a mountainside or watch the clouds lift over ▶

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an island with basalt peaks as fine as tufts of meringue, and you decide that this place occupies a landscape league of its own.

You'll hardly be able to discover all of the 18 islands here on a single visit, thanks in no small part to the mercurial weather, but there is much joy in the chase. "Fog might prevent you from seeing the marvelous cliffs and hammering seas might keep you from reaching the remote islands here," says Andreas Backer Heide, a Norwegian who has sailed his boat, *Barba*, to the Faroes on several occasions. "You will witness some of the beauty of this place, but not all. It's one of the reasons I keep coming back."

**TÓRSHAVN'S TREATS**

The largest island in the Faroes, Streymoy, is home to Tórshavn, one of the world's smallest capital cities and the main population centre. The feel is far from metropolitan, with a fascinating mix of traditional grass-topped homes and more modern timbered buildings that are decidedly Danish in style. Base yourself on the outskirts of town at the finest hotel in the islands, **Hotel Føroyar** ([hotelforoyar.com](http://hotelforoyar.com)), a typically minimalist Scandinavian affair where all rooms face the ocean. The hotel's restaurant, **Koks** ([koks.fo](http://koks.fo)), has been compared to Copenhagen's Noma for its flawless take on New Nordic cuisine. Prix-fixe meals spotlight iconic Faroes ingredients such as air-dried lamb, seaweed and wild-harvested cod.

Tórshavn's crowdless streets host some interesting finds. Shop for hand-knit sweaters made from mostly undyed and organic fine Faroese wool (wool is Faroes' gold, as the saying goes) at **Guðrun og Guðrun** (☎ [gudrungudrun.com](http://gudrungudrun.com)) boutique, where the islands' deep knitting traditions take a fashionable slant. Visit **Mikkalina** (☎ [mikkalina.com](http://mikkalina.com)) workshop to browse Mikkalina Norðberg's collection of luminous handmade glass bowls. Also stop by **Østrøm** (☎ +298 260 560), a late-19th-century warehouse that has been retooled as a café and design shop home to a lithographic atelier and a recording studio, Studio Bloch, that attracts primarily Scandinavian bands to harness their creativity in one of the world's most removed-from-it-all locales.

**BEYOND THE CAPITAL**

Urban sights seen, it's the Faroes' nature that truly calls. A series of subsea tunnels and small ferries connects most of the islands, so touring beyond Tórshavn is easy with a hire car. It takes about 40 minutes to drive to **Saksun**, on the northwestern part of the island, where a narrow stream leading from the sea pools into a lagoon with a handful of houses and a church that dates to 1858. The surrounding mountains are awash in waterfalls. "It feels like you are far away in dramatic nature but at the same time you're very close to the main

**Getting there**

Faroese carrier Atlantic Airways is the only airline to provide year-round service to the islands, with flights originating from Copenhagen, Reykjavik and Bergen. In summer, visitors can fly to the Faroes from London, Milan and Barcelona.



From top: comfort and style at Koks; chef Áki Herálvsson at work in the restaurant's kitchen



**ØSTRØM**  
A brikolasj table from the design store



**GUDRUN OG GUDRUN**  
A traditional hand-knitted cardigan



**KOKS**  
Rillettes from leg of duck served with dark berry aspic, mushrooms and quail egg

highway system," says Jón Falkvard, a pilot with Atlantic Airways who recommends a long walk on the beach when the tide is out.

And while much is accessible by road or on foot in the Faroes, a few of the most spectacular experiences require a boat ride. A cruise through narrow sounds and grottoes to **Vestmannabjörgini**, on Streymoy, brings you alongside cliffs towering nearly 600 metres overhead that serve as a summertime nesting habitat for guillemots, kittewakes and various other seabirds. Also during the summer months, the gaff-rigged Faroese schooner, **Norðlýsið** ([captain.nordlysid.com](http://captain.nordlysid.com)), sails from Tórshavn to the nearby island of Nólsoy for concerts inside sea caves shielded from the midnight sun, battered by the whoosh of the waves and boasting cathedral-like acoustics. The melancholic sounds of horns and vocals seem to rise from all directions in the darkness.

Perhaps most awe-inspiring of all, the westernmost Faroese island of **Mykines**, reached by boat or helicopter from nearby Vágur, is a wonderland of spiky basalt sea stacks and plunging hillsides home to thousands of puffins. Follow a trail across a narrow suspension bridge to the islet of **Mykineshólmur**, just west of Mykines, to snap what may at first seem like the obligatory lighthouse photo. Only it's not. Because there's no place on the planet like here. ◀

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