

From North Cape to Kristiansand

By Travis Gill of viajarMOTO.com

NORWAY





It was raining. A heavy, cold, and grey kind of rain that sucks the enthusiasm out of motorcycling. We were staring out the window of our tiny cabin watching the endless rain pour from the menacing clouds that eroded our travel spirits drop by drop. The high cost of the cabin was also bleeding our budget at the exorbitant amount of 700 Norwegian kroner (73 US dollars) a night. We continued to wait out the storm.

One of the holy grails of motorcycle overlanding was just 12 km (7.5 miles) north of us – The famous globe monument of North Cape, marking the northernmost point of continental Europe. We had dreamed of taking pictures in front of this monument for years. Here we were, just a short ride away, but the heavy rains continued well throughout the day and into the next.

As another day was coming to an end, we contemplated spending a third day. However, just before going to bed, we checked the weather forecast and noticed a short break in the weather. This was our best opportunity – A two-hour gap from 2 - 4 AM in the morning! Normally we would not even consider a photo opportunity at these hours, but we were still enjoying the natural phenomenon known as the Midnight Sun. We excitedly set an alarm and fell asleep with the anticipation of capturing this iconic moment.

We woke at 1:30 AM and could see the low laying sun just breaking through the upper layer of clouds on the horizon. This was it! This was our chance! We excitedly put on our motorcycle gear, mounted the mules, and headed north. As we rode past a herd of reindeer trotting among the treeless expanse of northern tundra, I was tempted to pull over and capture the moment. Not this time. We've got a mission. We motored on.





After reaching the parking area of the North Cape Hall, we maneuvered our mules around the building to reach the iconic globe monument that stands elegantly on a massive cliff 307 m (1,000 ft) above sea level. Here we were! After more than 3,300 miles across Denmark and Sweden (**UPSHIFT Issues 71 and 72**) we had reached our destination! We quickly maneuvered the mules and snapped some memorable photographs before allowing others to capture their own photographic memories. Even at 2 AM, there was already a queue of other travelers waiting. These “instagram moments” are rarely free of crowds, especially in the summer months.

Incredible Natural Beauty

Norway is one of our favorite countries for its combination of stunning natural beauty and the communal idea that nature should be conserved and protected for all to enjoy. Norwegians take nature seriously: Laws prevent billboards from ruining the natural views from their highways. Incentive programs make driving electrical cars preferable, with more than 84 percent of new car purchases being fully electric. Most of the two-lane roads have a strict speed limit of 80 kmh (50 mph), which feels like a nice relaxing pace to relish in all the stunning natural beauty, which will undoubtedly be full of many “wow moments”. Tim Burke said it perfectly when he traveled through Norway in 2017 (**UPSHIFT Issue 27**), “Every day of riding in Norway introduces new mountain roads, multiple ferry crossings, and new views that will drain camera batteries and fill memory cards. If you’re not taking hundreds of pictures in this country, you must be blind!”

Although Norway is incredibly beautiful, there is a dark side. A sinister place of darkness, burning flames, and eternal torment.



NORWAY

Welcome to Hell

Have you ever wanted to ride a motorcycle in Hell? Perhaps ride on the Highway to Hell? Maybe even eat some ice cream in Hell? How about attending a church service in Hell? Fortunately you can do all these things in the small village of Hell, Norway. We made sure to top off our gas tank and walk the short path to the HOLLYWOOD-type sign that overlooks the village and highway. Although it makes for an interesting and fun story, hell in Norwegian translates to "luck". We felt pretty lucky to be riding through such a wonderful country, full of incredible natural beauty.

Taking Trash Seriously

Norway is one of the leading nations when it comes to the recycling of glass and plastics. Since 1972 the country has implemented an incentive-based deposit system which has resulted in a 97 percent recycle rate. A remarkable achievement, especially considering that worldwide 91 percent of plastic isn't recycled. We experienced the efficiency and ease of Norway's recycling program after performing the regular oil change maintenance on our two BMW G650GSs. Finding a place to dispose of the used oil was as easy as googling "waste management" and then riding to the hundreds of convenient drop-off points all throughout the country.







One of these recycle centers is just outside Bodø, a coastal city north of the Arctic Circle. As we rolled up to the entrance, we were surprised to see a bald eagle mural by Portuguese environmental artist Bordalo II. We first discovered his “trash animal” murals in Portugal, when we passed through Lisbon ([UPSHIFT Issue 54](#)), so we were excited to stumble upon another one of his impressive murals. Bordalo’s creations “depicts nature itself, in this case animals, out of the material that are responsible for its destruction.” This is especially true for ocean animals, where a large portion of our plastic waste ends up. Throughout our travels in Norway, we didn’t see a single plastic bottle polluting the shores of this trash conscious country.

A Famous Movie Location

As a child of the 80’s, one of the most memorable movies was Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back. The scenes from the ice planet Hoth, were truly an unforgettable moment of this exhilarating movie. When we discovered that most of the Hoth scenes were filmed at the Norwegian mountain village of Finse, we knew we had to experience this place for ourselves! Unfortunately there are no public roads to this remote village – the only access to Finse is via a railway. We parked our mules at the Voss railway station, 90 minutes east of Finse, purchased our train tickets, and scheduled a hiking tour of Hardangerjøkulen – Norway’s sixth largest glacier.



When the railroad carriage doors opened at Finse Station, we were half expecting to see Rebel Alliance soldiers riding Tauntauns, or at least a “Welcome to Hoth” sign. Instead we only found a couple of rebel stickers stuck to the back of a Finse sign, and a bright red Nordic hotel and resident cabins. We soon met our certified guide, who would be taking us on a six-hour hike to the summit of the glacier – 1,860 m (6,110 ft) above sea level. After getting issued our leather hiking boots, we were on our way to Echo Base, er, I mean the base of the glacier.







WALK
ON



After a 5 km (3.1 mile) hike, we reached the glacier and a metal lock box. Our guide issued us crampons, an expedition harness, and an ice axe for the next exciting part of our adventure – actually traversing across the face of a living glacier. It was quite exhilarating to be harnessed together and trekking along such an expanse of heavily packed ice and snow. We enjoyed traversing around labyrinths of ice and staring off dizzying cliffs that dropped hundreds of feet into glacier fed streams that trickled underneath us. The ice was so densely packed that it takes on a mesmerizing blue hue that looks like something from another planet. This experience of walking on a living glacier was memorable and definitely an adventure of a lifetime – even if we didn't get to see the twisted metal remains of an Imperial AT-AT Walker.

Hiking the Big Three

If you've followed our motorcycle travels, you'll understand when we say "sometimes you have to kick down the side-stand and park the bike to immerse yourself in the experiences of a region." This was definitely true for hiking what many refer to as "The Big Three" – Trolltunga Preikestolen, and Kjerag.





We started with Trolltunga (Troll's Tongue) – Easily one of the most awe-inspiring and instagrammable hikes in Norway. We parked our mules at the Skjeggedal parking area, and caught a bus to the trailhead and the start of a rather rigorous 20 km (12.4 mile) hike to the Troll's Tongue and back. Reaching the massive cliff-side and peering over the edge induces a dizzying vertigo that makes you think twice about descending the metal ladder and walking to the edge of the pinnacle that hovers 700 meters (2,300 ft) above Lake Ringedalsvatnet. It was exhilarating for sure!

After a five-hour ride from the Trolltunga parking area, we reached the trailhead for the second hike of the "Big Three" – Preikestolen (The Pulpit Rock). The shorter hiking distance of just 8 km (5 miles) makes Pulpit Rock one of Norway's most famous mountain hikes with an equally rewarding view of Lysefjord from the dizzying heights of 600 meters (2,000 ft) from the massive cliff-side. There is something magical about hiking these extraordinary regions of southern Norway.

What was supposed to be a three-hour ride from Preikestolen to our final hiking area of Kjerag, turned out to be an overnigher. As we reached the farming village of Oanes, we saw the last ferry of the day gently pulling away from the pier. Bummer. Fortunately there was a park and sleep area less than a mile up the road where we parked the mules and pitched our tent for a relaxing, quiet, and FREE night of sleep.

The three-hour ride from Oanes to Lysebotn was delightful, especially the finale of 27 stupendous serpentine curves that delivered us to the Kjerag parking area with huge smiles on our faces. A parking attendant gladly waved us in for free, and we changed into our hiking clothes for our final trek of Norway – Kjerag and the world-famous Kjeragbolten (Kjerag Bolt).

The often strenuous 5.5 km (3.4 mile) climb to the summit of Kjerag Boulder got our hearts racing, but it didn't compare to the elevated heart rate we experienced when we eased ourselves onto the narrow boulder, that is wedged precariously 980 meters (3,220 ft) above the frigid waters of Lysefjord below. It's definitely one of those heart-racing moments!

Over lunch we reflected on our travels through Norway. We had ridden over 2,500 miles from North Cape to the southern city of Kristiansand, snaking along the coast like the Norse sea serpent Jörmungandr, and delivering us through some of the most beautiful coastlines and mountain passes we've ever experienced. Norway has a certain magical beauty that is difficult to explain – We're just glad we got to experience a portion of it.

The 90-Day Hourglass of Schengen

After three months of riding through Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, our 90-day Schengen limit was quickly approaching. It was time to get out of the 26-country Schengen area, so we pointed our handlebars towards the English Channel, where we had a ferry scheduled from the Netherlands to England, and the other nations of Great Britain. More adventure awaits...

About viajarMOTO

Travis and Chantil Gill started full-time motorcycle overlanding in early 2020. They hope to experience as many different countries and cultures in their steady journey around this "pale blue dot" they call home. You can follow them on their website at www.viajarMOTO.com.

