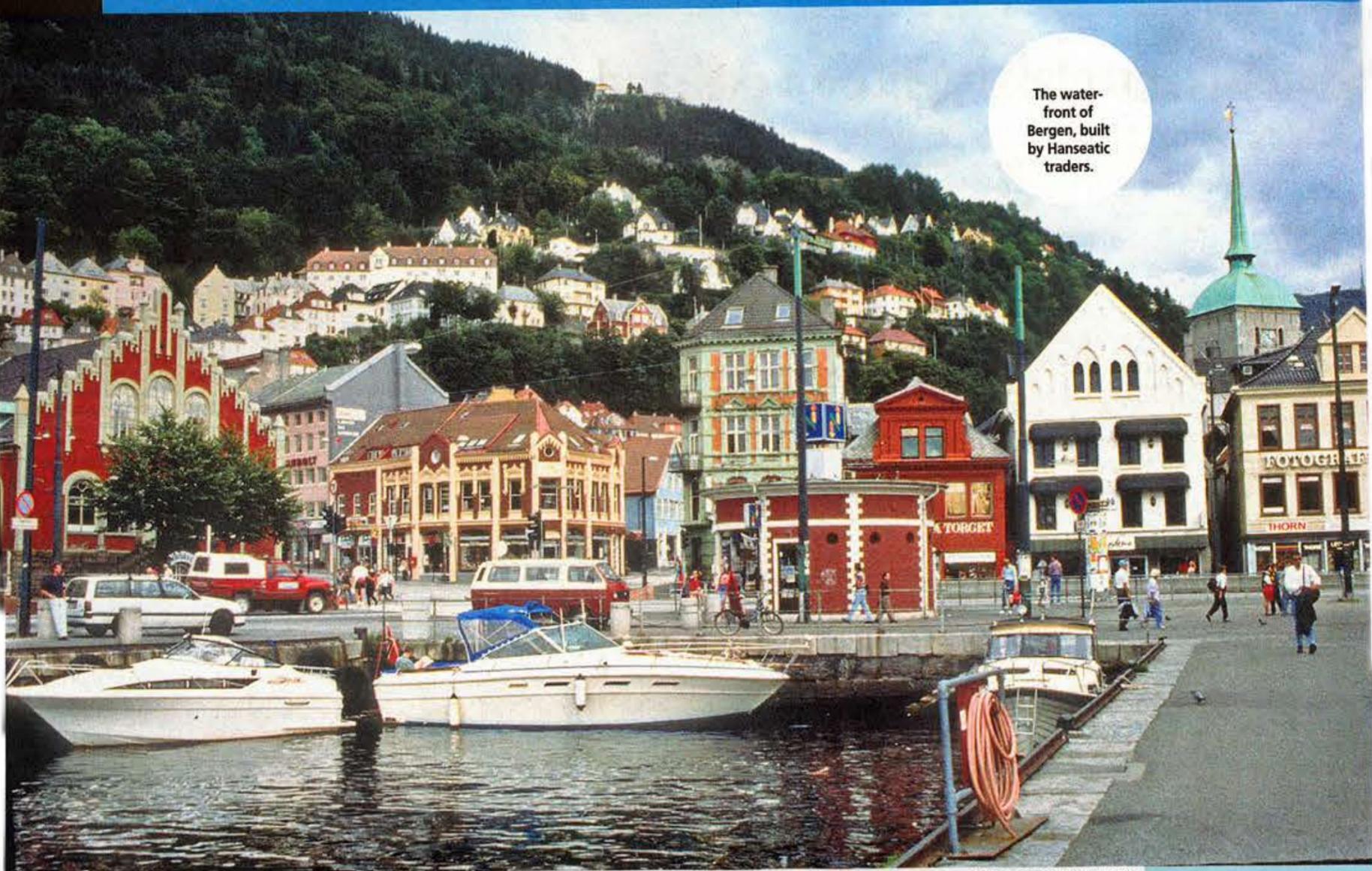


## Travel



The waterfront of Bergen, built by Hanseatic traders.

STEVE HAGGERTY/COLORWORLD

# Destination Norway

Seeing the physical landscape helps understand its cultural heritage

By Anne Z. Cooke  
McClatchy-Tribune News Service

LILLEHAMMER, Norway — The visitors touring Maihaugen Heritage Village were itching with curiosity. They'd wandered the site's narrow lanes and peered inside the 200-year-old log cabins. They'd explored the craft shops and traditional hand-hewn barns brought from far-flung farms and forests and reassembled here, under the trees. Now they wanted to know if any of Norway's leading figures — statesmen, filmmakers, painters or artists — had their roots in these humble huts.

"What about Thor Heyerdahl, who wrote 'Kon-Tiki'?" asked a bearded man in a brown sweater. "Is there a connection with Henrik Ibsen or Edvard Grieg?" said a woman with two teenagers.

Elsa, our guide, tall and blond, paused to think. "Grieg was here!" she told us. "He vacationed in Lillehammer in summer. The Gudbrandsdalen Valley folk tunes were an important influence on his music." She adjusted her red-and-blue embroidered skirt and smiled. A half-dozen cameras clicked.

Plainly, getting to know Norway was the key to understanding the fertile genius of so many moody and eccentric prodigies. So we rented a car for 10 days and, after touring Oslo, headed north from the capital city through sunny farm country, eventually



A replica of the Gol Stave Church, originally built in 1212 in the mountain town. All surviving stave churches except one are in Norway.

turning west across Norway's mountain spine. Descending beside blue-green fjords, we ended our trip in Bergen, on the coast.

Dark and brooding in winter, Norway awakens to the midnight sun. Snow-clad peaks feed rushing rivers. Swollen waterfalls careen over spongy tundra and trickle down steep ravines. Roses bloom. To the west, the coastline climbs out of the North Sea like a polar bear on the hunt, cold fjords probing the cliffs with slippery fingers.

And from May through September? Norwegians — and visitors — take to the outdoors, to pick blueberries, lie in the sun, tour manor houses and gardens and take in outdoor concerts and craft fairs.

In Oslo, we strolled through Frogner Park to see sculptor Gustav Vigeland's modernist works, more than 200 in the one park. Nearby was the Edvard Munch Museum, with many versions of the painter's famous work, the "Scream."

Heading north to Lillehammer we stopped briefly to see the long jump facility, where Olympic-bound skiers practice during the winter. But we spent most of the day at Maihaugen, exploring its more than 140 timbered houses, barns, craft shops and even a stave church. Farther north, we stopped in Lom to tour another stave church, this one a 12th-Century relic, and like its kin, built entirely of wood. The gloomy nave and massive beams offered a glimpse of darker days; fierce dragon heads topped a half dozen peaked, wood-shingled gables.

Crossing over Norway's snowy spine (the roads are plowed), we paused to snap photos, then continued down winding twists and turns on the last leg to Bergen. The road skirted some fjords and crossed others via daily car ferry service. Eventually we reached the mighty Sognefjord, 112 miles long and 4,000 feet at its deepest point.

Though many a far-flung village boasts that Grieg ate there, slept there or taught lessons there, the town of Lofthus, on the Hardangerfjord, makes an honest claim to his presence. The composer spent several vacations here, staying in the Ullensvang Hotel, breathing the fresh air and hiking the mountain trails. Later he stayed for a year to compose, retiring to a hut on the hotel grounds in search of the inspiration that so often failed to come. The hotel owner, Mr. Utne, the great-greatson of the first Mr. Utne to befriend the composer, guided us through the cabin and pointed out Grieg's desk and chair.

Bergen, separated from eastern Norway by the mountains, is a waterfront town, built by Hanseatic traders and shipping merchants. To learn more about its origins, we joined a tour at the Bryggen Museum, built above the excavated foundations of the town's first waterfront dwellings.

Don't miss the other attractions: the waterside fish and vegetable market, the restored Berghus Fortress and King Hakon's Hall, with relics dating from about 1250; and the waterfront houses and shops. If a tour includes a ride up the mountain for an aerial view of the town and bay, jump on it.

We saved time for a farewell pilgrimage to Trolldaugen ("the Trolls House"), Grieg's country retreat. This spacious house, where he and his wife, a singer, spent their last years, overlooks a lake outside Bergen, surrounded by a green lawn and quiet garden. The piano, which Grieg played when the couple entertained, is touted as the highlight of the tour. But it was their everyday things — the Victorian sofas, lace dresser covers, mixing bowls, plates, thumbed music on the piano and the family photographs — that gave me a sense of a man finally at rest.



Guides in period costumes show visitors around Maihaugen, a re-created heritage village.

## IF YOU GO

Fly direct from New York to Oslo on Continental Airlines and SAS. Other airlines connect through Copenhagen, London, Zurich, Frankfurt, Rome and most large European cities. Ferry service is available from Denmark and Sweden.

**Touring by car:** Reserve a car with Hertz, Avis or Budget before you leave home. All have offices in Oslo and Bergen. Norway requires an international drivers' license, usually available through your auto club.

**Travel information:** For events, festivals, tickets and discounts, contact the Norway Tourism Board, 655 Third Ave., New York, NY 10017. Call 212-885-9751, or see [www.visitnorway.com](http://www.visitnorway.com).



A statue in Bergen of Edvard Grieg, the composer whose plaintive melodies were born in the northern forests.