Tour Code
MCNF

ADVENTURESABROAD

NORWAY & FINLAND

featuring Coastal Cruising & Lapland

19 days

Created on: 19 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrival in Oslo, Norway

Nestled between the forest hills and the Oslo fjord lays the Norwegian capital, with its special combination of city life and easy access to the great outdoors. Oslo, the oldest of the Scandinavian capitals, was founded by Harald Hadrade in the 11th Century. This is an easy-going city where history meets modernity with an eclectic architectural mix of old and new. Oslo is certainly the cosmopolitan heart of Norway. This is one of Europe's largest capitals in terms of area but smallest population-wise. Situated in an amphitheatre-like setting, with the city centre in the bottom, the residential areas stretch uphill in all directions. About a quarter of the 650,000 population are of non-Norwegian origin, making Oslo an ethnically and culturally diverse city. Accompanied by a large influx of people from all around Norway, Oslo is thus often referred to as the "melting pot" of Norway.

Overnight in Olso.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Oslo Sightseeing

Today we will discover the major sights of Oslo, such as the Vigeland Park, the Town Hall, the Opera House, the Akershus Fortress, the National Gallery* and the Holmenkollen Ski Museum & Jump Tower.

Our day will start with a visit to the Opera House. Officially opened in 2008, the Norwegian National Opera & Ballet is Norway's largest performing arts institution and has received many awards. Situated in the old harbour area of Bjorvika, it quickly became a landmark in Oslo. This is the first opera house in the world to let visitors walk on the roof!

Covering over 80 acres (320,000 sq m), the Vigeland Sculpture Park is located northwest of the city centre. This park features 212 bronze and granite sculptures created by Gustav Vigeland, who personally sculpted every figure out of clay. Individual craftsmen were later contracted to fabricate the pieces into what they are today. The National Gallery houses Norway's largest public collection of paintings, drawings and sculptures. The museum's central attractions include Edvard Munch's The Scream and Madonna.

The Holmenkollen Ski Museum & Tower is a historic landmark in the Norwegian consciousness. Inside the ski jump is the Holmenkollen Ski Museum, the oldest of its kind in the world, presenting over 4,000 years of skiing history, as well as Norwegian polar exploration artifacts.

The Akershus Fortress, located in the city centre by the Oslo Fjord, is a great place to discover Oslo's history. The construction of the medieval castle and fortress was completed in the 1300s. With a strategic location at the very end of the headland, it withstood a number of sieges throughout the ages.

During our time in the city we will wander through Kvadraturen, an area nearby the Akershus fortress This was King Christian IV's town from the Renaissance, and today a few buildings from the 17th and 18th century can still be seen.

Today we will also enjoy a fjord cruise. This visit to the busy harbor and excursion on the Oslo Fjord is an essential part of any stay in Oslo; both for views back at the city and to be reminded of Norway's many links to the sea. We will pass idyllic bays and a maze of islands with small summer houses. Oslo, with its superb location, offers unique opportunities on and around its fjord, which stretches almost into the city center.

* Due to construction of a new facility, there is a good chance that the Gallery will be closed through 2019, reopening in 2020 (exact date TBA).

Overnight in Olso.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Oslo Area Sightseeing

Today we will travel by local boat to the Bygdøy Peninsula on the western side of Oslo -- home of several museums and estate homes.

This trip by local boat is an appropriate introduction to the series of museums that illustrate Norway's long relationship with the sea. Each museum illustrates some facet of this maritime past. We will visit the Viking Ship Museum, housing the 3 ships found buried along the Oslo fjord (the world's best-preserved wooden Viking ships). This museum presents great Viking ship discoveries from Gokstad, Oseberg and Tune as well as other finds from Viking tombs around the Oslo Fjord. One can hardly visit Oslo without at least a nod to the Vikings, and this museum is as good as it gets. This is the premier Viking collection in Scandinavia.

A short stroll brings us to the Norwegian Folk Museum. Here we will see a collection of city homes, farm buildings, and one of the famous Stave Churches giving us a unique peek into the history of Norway. Further along the Peninsula we come to the Kon-Tiki Museum, housing the balsa raft used by Thor Heyerdal. Even those who have never heard of Thor Heyerdahl's 1947 voyage across the Pacific Ocean on the reed raft Kon-Tiki will find this museum -- and the theories of human migration that Heyerdahl set out to prove -- fascinating. The museum houses the original boat, designed by Heyerdahl based on historic reed boats. After his successful Pacific crossing on Kon Tiki, Heyerdahl made further expeditions on the reed boats Ra and Tigris in his efforts to prove that prehistoric people could have mastered sailing the high seas.

Today we will also visit the Fram Exploration Museum. The Polar Ship Fram is the strongest wooden ship ever built and still holds the records for sailing farthest north and farthest south. At the Fram Museum we can board the ship and see how the crew managed to survive in the coldest and most dangerous places on earth -- the Arctic and the Antarctic.

Overnight in Olso.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Oslo - Flam - Gudvangen - Stalheim

We depart early this morning for Oslo's train station where we will board our train to Flam via Myrdal where we connect to the Famous Flamsbana, the Flam Railway. The Flamsbana is considered by many to be one of the world's most spectacular rail journeys.

In 1923 work was started on this railway line from Myrdal down the sheer cliffs to Flam. Since the tunnels were excavated by hand, the first of the tracks were not put down until autumn 1936. By 1940 the line was opened and run first by steam engines. Electric engines took over in 1944. It takes about an hour to cover 20 km (12 miles) of track on the Flamsbana train. Eighteen of the 20 tunnels were chiseled out by hand, and it took one month of hard labour for each meter excavated. In order to avoid risk from avalanches, the railway criss-crosses the river and the bottom of the valley three times. Then, instead of building bridges, the river was routed through a tunnel under the railway line. Nowhere else in the world do adhesion rail cars on normal tracks have a steeper journey. Almost 80% of the railway line has a gradient of 5.5% (1:18).

At the bottom we will enjoy the scenic landscape of the Flam valley and admire the lovely Aurlandfjord. This is an offshoot of the Sognefjord, the longest in the world.

After a break for lunch in Flam we will board a leisurely 2-hour cruise along the narrowest arm of the Sognefjord and Aurland Fjord. Here we are surrounded by the dramatic West Coast fjord landscape of steep snow-capped mountains (up to 1800 m / 6,000 ft) and tumbling waterfalls, sheltered hamlets and high mountain farms. At the end of this journey we board a bus at Gudvangen and continue on to Stalheim, located at the very heart of Western Norway's beautiful fjord region.

Overnight in Stalheim.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Stalheim - Bergen

We will start our morning with a visit the Stalheim Folk Museum. Here we get a glimpse of everyday life on a Norwegian farm and manor house, from the Middle Ages to today. We later depart from Stalheim by bus and travel along a windy mountain road to the train station at Voss. From Voss we journey by rail once again via the famous Bergen/Oslo railway line arriving in Bergen. Once in Bergen we will transfer to our hotel.

Bergen is widely regarded as one of the most beautiful cities of Norway, and is an ancient city that looms large in Viking sagas. Until the 14th century, it was the seat of the medieval kingdom of Norway. Later the Hanseatic merchants established a major trading post here, holding

sway until the 18th century when the locals reclaimed their trading rights. Bergen has survived many disasters, including several fires and the explosion of a Nazi ship during World War II. It is a town with important traditions in shipping, banking, and insurance, and its modern industries are expanding rapidly. Today Bergen is a central point for Norwegian travel, and has retained a great deal of local character and history.

The oldest part of town overlooks the busy harbour; along the harbour's edge are myriad shops, boutiques and the famous open-air fish market. You will have a bit of free time for wandering on your own this afternoon after our arrival. We then enjoy 2 days in this lovely Norwegian city by the sea.

Overnight in Bergen.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Bergen Sightseeing: Fish Market, Bryggen & Edvard Grieg Museum

This world heritage city was Norway's capital city between the 12th and 13th century, and we will start our day with a walking tour that takes in the most important sights. We will stroll through the Fish Market and the old UNESCO protected Bryggen Hanseatic Wharf. The Fish Market is the true heart of Bergen's waterfront, with its abundance of fish, flowers, fruits, vegetables, handicrafts and souvenirs. The market takes on the personality of the people of the city in interesting and personal ways. From eating raw oysters at a nearby stand, to conversing with merchants along the rows of shops, here we get a glimpse of the way the city has always been.

The first buildings of Bergen were built alongside the harbor called Bryggen (The Bryggen Hanseatic Wharf). Bryggen has thus been the center of the city, offering a stunning silhouette of its ancient gables against the harbor and surrounding mountains. In 1360 the Hansas (a German guild of merchants) was set up and dominated trade here for the next 400 years. The area is on UNESCO's World Heritage List, and comprises the remains of the old harbour buildings. This is one of the best-known medieval city settlements in Norway. Walking through the narrow alleyways is like travelling back in time, and a visit to the Bryggen Museum presents us with an in-depth look into the city’s interesting past.

During our sightseeing we will take the Floibanen Funicular to the top of Floyen, one of the mountains surrounding Bergen! A trip on this famous funicular provides us with the best panoramic view of Bergen's city, harbor and islands. After absorbing the views an easy and leisurely walk through narrow streets and alleyways will lead us back down into the hustle and bustle of Bergen. The old wooden houses that still survive and happily snuggle into the hillside, make wandering along the narrow passageways called "smau", a truly Bergen experience.

During our walking tour we will also see the Royal Residence and banqueting hall (Hakon's Hall), built by King Hakon Hakonsson from 1247 and 1261. Nearby is Rosenkrantz Tower, which dates from the 1270s. This is a significant Renaissance monument for Norwegians and one of the most interesting in all Norway.

In the afternoon we will travel by bus to the Edvard Grieg Museum, home of Norway's most famous composer. Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) lived here for 22 years, and composed many of his best-known works in the little garden hut by the shore of Lake Nordas. Today the house is a museum filled with mementos of the composer's life, and its interior is still as Grieg knew it in 1907.

Overnight in Bergen.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Free Day in Bergen / Evening Boarding of our Coastal Cruise

Today you will have a free day to explore the city of Bergen, the cultural gateway to the fjords. Maybe visit one of the local museums, take a scenic boat ride, or simply walk around town. Bergen is a lovely city, and you can easily enjoy exploring on your own. Perhaps simply spend some time in one of the outdoor cafés in the Bryggen district! Set off and explore this charming port, stroll through the narrow medieval streets and take it all in. As you walk along the Bryggen quayside you will discover buildings with seaward-facing gables dating back to the fourteenth century.

In the late afternoon we board our Hurtigruten ship, and in the evening our voyage sets off through the Hjeltefjord, following in the wake of the Vikings who sailed from here to the Shetland Islands and beyond.

The coastline between Bergen and Kirkenes is over 2400km long, and in the 19th Century almost all of it was home to rich fishing grounds.

The maritime maps were unreliable and there were only a few lighthouses, especially in the north. This important seaway was lined with perilous reefs, small islands and narrow inlets, and it was essential that a safe trade route be established to link the southern and northern regions of Norway. When the Norwegian government decided to create a connection between the north and the south, Richard With and his friend Anders Holthe took on the challenge of thoroughly mapping the seas along the coastline. In 1893, Captain Richard With's steamer, DS Vesteraalen, was brought into regular service along the coast of Norway, and Hurtigruten (the fast route) was established. 120 years later, the ships still carry freight and passengers and are a part of Norwegian coastal life.

Your shore excursions will not be exclusive to your group; other English-speaking passengers may join at the discretion of the tour operator. That said, the overall size of these groups is not great.

Overnight on board M/S Kong Herald.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Molde / Iconic Architecture and Fantastic Fjords

Enjoy early morning in the breathtaking Nordfjord near Torvik. We then sail past West Cape for our approach to Alesund.

Art Nouveau city: Alesund is renowned for its beautiful Art Nouveau architecture and Atlanterhavsparken, one of Northern Europe's largest saltwater aquariums. If you're travelling with us in spring or winter, you'll have most of the day to explore this picturesque town.
In autumn, we explore Hjørundfjord, hidden away in the Sunnmøre Alps. There'll also be a call at the scenic village of Urke to gaze at the view of thousand-year-old farms, the fjord, and the lush mountainsides.

Mountains and roses: The last port of the day is Molde. In summer, there might just be enough daylight to see the amazing view of 222 mountain peaks across the fjord, called 'the Molde Panorama'.

Included Excursions:
A Taste Of Norway (Urke, Hjørundfjord) - Hjørundfjorden, 12:45 PM (2 hours 15 minutes)
Sailing into The Hjørundfjord, you'll board a tender boat from the ship to travel to Norangsfjord, an arm of Hjørundfjord. You'll disembark at the village of Urke, nestled amidst the scenic Sunnmøre Alps.

From here, a bus brings you through one of Norway's narrowest valleys, Norangsdalen. Along the way, we'll see Lyngstølvatnet Lake, created when a natural landslide dammed part of nearby Norang River and flooded the area. On days when the weather is calm, you can still see the ruins of a submerged farmstead from the surface of the water. We also pass though the village of Øye to see the distinctive Hotel Union Øye. Some of history's most famous kings, queens, writers, composers, and explorers have all stayed here. We'll then stop off at a small shieling where you'll get to taste typical Norwegian lefse cake with coffee. The tour ends back in Urke, after browsing the goods of the local grocer.

Art Nouveau Walk (Ålesund) - Ålesund, 6:15 PM (1 hour 30 minutes)
Dating back to the Viking Age, Ålesund is now renowned throughout Norway and beyond for its architecture. After a devastating fire in 1904 that brought a large portion of the town to ashes, it was rebuilt in the popular style at the time; Art Nouveau. The town proudly boasts a myriad of turrets, spires, and medieval ornamentation that details and distinguishes the pastel-hued buildings.

Our trip begins as we meet our guide at the pier who leads us through the enchanting streets of Ålesund. Along the way, you'll pass the picturesque fishing port of Brosundet and Apotekertorget Square. There's a photo opportunity at the bronze statue monument of a fisher boy, sculpted by prolific 20th century Norwegian artist Knut Skinnarland. Strolling through the town, your guide will be highlighting Art Nouveau features on buildings and other points of interest. Enjoy learning about the rich history and culture of the area as you go.

Overnight on board M/S Kong Herald.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Kristiansund - RÃ¸rvik / City of Kings and Palaces

This section of the voyage lets us enter the Trøndelag region of Norway, marked by crumpled hills, fields dotted with farmsteads, and low-loying coastal settlements. Magical, medieval, and modern: Founded by Viking king Olav Tryggvason in 997, Trondheim today is Norway's third largest city and a mix of historic buildings and a buzzing student population.

You'll have three hours to explore Trondheim and its array of highlights, either by yourself or on one of the optional excursions we offer.

A must-see site of the city is Nidaros Cathedral, nicknamed "Norway's Notre Dame" for its Gothic style and considered the most sacred building in all of Norway. Next door to the cathedral is the Archbishop's Palace where Norway's crown jewels are on display.

Nearby, the old city bridge Gamle Bybro sits over Nid River, marking the entrance to the old Hanseatic district of Bakklandet. The neighbourhood's colourful wooden wharves propped up on stilts by the river's edge now house trendy eateries. Up from Bakklandet is Kristiansten Fort which affords beautiful panoramas of the city and fjord.

In the afternoon, the ship sails northwest, passing the ochre-coloured Kjeungskjær Lighthouse, islets, and rocky reefs. After that, we head towards charming Rorvik.

Included Excursion: Trondheim City Walk - Trondheim, 9:50 AM (3 hours)

Enjoy a guided walk through Trondheim and learn all about this historical city. We'll begin at the harbour which was developed during the second half of the 19th century, before walking up to Stiftsgården, the royal residence in Trondheim. Continuing on to the market square, you'll be able to take a closer look at the towering statue of the city's founder, Viking King Olav Tryggvason.
From here, we'll walk to Nidaros Cathedral, where you'll get a chance to step inside Norway's national shrine, and the world's northernmost cathedral. Get your camera ready as we pass the old city bridge Gamle Bybro, with its red, pointed archways. The bridge is known to the locals as "The Portal of Happiness", a nickname coined in a popular waltz by 20th century Norwegian singer and composer Kristian Hoddø. Enjoy the view of the colourful wharves along the river Nid before we make our way back to the pier.

Overnight on board M/S Nordnorge or or M/S Kong Herald.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 BrÃ¸nnÃ¸ysund - SvolvÃ¦r / Into the Arctic

We cross the Arctic Circle early in the morning, beginning your Arctic tour of Norway. We mark the moment with a traditional ceremony that's sure to wake you up!

Above the Arctic Circle, you can see the sun 24 hours a day in summer, while in winter, your chances of seeing the Northern Lights greatly improve.

Forces of nature: At 10am, we call into Ørnes, near to Norway's second-largest glacier, Svartisen. The pier here is popular for the Love Bench where sweethearts have declared their lasting romance with a padlock. We then sail to Bodø, the second largest city in Northern Norway, overlooked by the Børvass peaks. Admire fabulous street art or join an optional boat excursion to Saltstraumen, the world's most powerful maelstrom.

Welcome to Lofoten: That afternoon, the ship enters the Lofoten archipelago. The 1,000 metre-high Lofoten Wall is a stunning sight on the horizon, as if there to welcome us.

Stamsund is home to one of the largest fishing fleets in the islands and busiest between January and April when Arctic cod, known locally as skrei, swim from the Barents Sea in the north down to Vestfjord to spawn. Come evening, when you see rows of traditional fisherman's huts on stilts, known as rorbuer, you've arrived in the pretty harbour of Svolvær, the main town of the Lofoten Islands.

Included Excursion: Experience Bodø and Saltstraumen - Bodø, 1:05 PM (2 hours 10 minutes)

Today's tour begins in the town of Bodø, just north of the Arctic Circle. With around 50,000 inhabitants, this is the second-largest town in Northern Norway. From there, we'll continue on to Saltstraumen, passing fantastic scenery on the way. Saltstraumen has existed for about three thousand years and has never failed to amaze its visitors. Here, the water speeds reach up to 20 knots, and up to 400 million cubic meters of seawater forces its way through the 150 metre-wide strait every six hours. After you've admired the strongest tidal current in the world, you'll be given a box of salt flakes produced here. It takes 48 hours to separate the unique minerals from the water. Just like snow crystals, salt crystals are unique, shaped by the combination of water temperature, season, and humidity at Saltstraumen. Take the salt back home with you and impress your friends with an Arctic addition to your cooking.

Overnight on board M/S Nordnorge or M/S Kong Herald.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Stokmarknes - SkjervÃ¸y / Capital of the Arctic

We dock into Harstad just after 7am. You can go for a peaceful early morning stroll around town. The ship will then continue to Finnsnes which connects the beautiful island of Senja via the impressive Gisund Bridge. Keep on the lookout for a variety of seabirds with several colonies nearby, including puffins. Whales can also be spotted in the waters here, especially during the winter season.

Gateway to the Arctic: We then sail to the historic Arctic exploration capital of Tromsø.

You'll find Polaria, the world's northernmost aquarium, on the waterfront. Take your pick from the many shops and restaurants in the city centre, including Mack Brewery and favourite local watering hole Ølhallen pub. There are also trendy cafés plying delicious cinnamon buns and where baristas create innovative coffee art. Across the fjord from where the ship docks, you should be able to see the iconic Arctic Cathedral with its beautiful stained-glass mosaic.

Leaving Tromsø in the early evening, we head north for the trading post of Skjervøy, founded in 1622. On our way, we'll pass the Lyngen Alps which rise majestically from the sea.

Included Excursion: The Arctic Capital Tromsø - Tromsø, 2:30 PM (3 hours 30 minutes)

The base for many Arctic expeditions of old, Tromsø is rich in both culture and history. As part of this excursion, you'll get to see some of the main attractions of this the third largest city north of the Arctic Circle. First, we'll go for an exciting cable-car ride up to the mountain ledge Storsteinen, sitting 421 metres above sea level. From the viewing platform at the cable car's upper station, you can enjoy stunning panoramic views over the city, as well as the surrounding islands, mountains, and fjords. After descending via cable car, the tour continues to the Arctic Cathedral, the city's most recognisable landmark, and a true architectural masterpiece. We'll also visit Polaria, where you'll find an arctic aquarium, seal pool, and an immersive 21-metre-wide cinema screen, along with many educational displays. Here, you'll enjoy a polar-themed movie, and get to watch the seals being fed.

Overnight on board M/S Nordnorge or M/S Kong Herald.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Ã˜ksfjord - BerlevÃ¥g / Norwayâ€™s Northern Frontier

The ship reaches the town of Hammerfest on the island of Kvaløya early in the morning. You'll know we've reached Havøysund when you see the wind turbines of the landmark Havøyglaven wind farm which produces enough electricity to power 6,000 local homes.

At the top of Europe: We arrive at Honningsvåg mid-morning, portal to the North Cape where a globe monument marks the top of continental Europe.

Sámi heartlands: Near the entrance of Kjøllefjord village, look out for the striking, building-like rock formation Finnkirka, an ancient sacrificial site once used by the indigenous Sámi. Continuing north: We reach our northernmost port of call, Mehamn, in the evening.

The ship then sets off for Berlevåg. On the way, we pass the tall Slettnes Lighthouse, the northernmost mainland lighthouse on Earth.

Included Excursion: The North Cape - Honningsvåg, 11:15 AM (3 hours)

We'll travel by bus above the 71st parallel to North Cape that rises 307 metres from the ocean, right at the top of Europe. Gaze in awe at the stark yet beautiful scenery as you stand at continental Europe's most northerly point, casting your eyes over the sea towards the North Pole.

In wintertime, the unspoilt white plains and snow-capped mountains will reflect the soft Arctic light. Don't forget the obligatory photo or that all-important selfie with the iconic globe sculpture that commemorates North Cape's significance. Making a stop at the visitor centre at North Cape Hall, we'll get to watch an impressive 180° panoramic film about the region through four seasons, learn more about the area's long history through exhibitions in the underground tunnel, and pop into the world's northernmost chapel. There's even a small museum.

Overnight on board M/S Nordnorge or M/S Kong Herald.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 BÃ¥tsfjord - BerlevÃ¥g / Where Norway Meets Russia

We call at Båtsfjord and Vardø in the night, before docking at Vadsø early in the morning.
Looking to the skies: The area around Vadsø is one of the most scenic and popular birdwatching spots in the Arctic, lying directly under the migration path of birds flying from east to west. Watch for hooded crows and sea eagles.

Benefiting from the warm currents of the Gulf Stream, this region is rich in sea life, and the coast is largely ice free in winter allowing ships access to most harbours. At Kirkenes we are just a few miles from the Russian border and the Sami communities of northern Scandinavia. At longitude 30 east, you are actually further east than Istanbul and St. Petersburg, and as far east as Cairo. You are also further east than most of Finland! Kirkenes is the only town in Norway where 'East meets West', and it is also the turning point of our Hurtigruten ship. Here we bid farewell to the ship and crew, and transfer tour our hotel.

Kirkenes is situated between two time zones; Helsinki and Moscow, and this small mining town has approximately 3,300 inhabitants. Here the people speak Norwegian, Sami, Finnish and Russian. This tiny, nondescript place has a distinct frontier feel. You'll see street signs in Norwegian and Cyrillic script and hear Russian spoken by trans-border visitors and fishermen. It was of course the Sami people who first knew of this place!

Today we will enjoy an excursion to the Pasvik Valley and a short tour of Kirkenes before going farther afield, travelling by bus through surprisingly fertile landscape. We will see charming green hills dotted with scrub, birch and pine that survive despite the harsh Arctic climate. The history of the region is truly stimulating and has been quite dramatic at times, so this is an educational morning as well. We later arrive at Storskog, the border station between Norway and Russia.

From here we will travel to the small mining community of Bjornevatn, before heading towards Pasvikdalen, a valley in Norway and Russia that defines the border between the two countries. This valley was traditionally inhabited by Sami people, and the river Pasvikelva runs through the valley (giving it the name). The southern part of the valley is also the location of the Treriksroysa, the point where the borders of Norway, Finland, and Russia meet.

Back at Kirkenes we will make a stop at the impressive Prestfjellet Mountain, which overlooks both the town and harbour. You may have some free time in the afternoon to wander the streets of Kirkenes on your own, sit in a café, explore the quay and enjoy the views of the fjord.

Overnight in Kirkenes.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 14 Kirkenes - Karasjok, Norway - Ivalo, Finland

After breakfast we will depart from Kirkenes to Karasjok, the cultural and political centre of the Norwegian Sami People. Karasjok is a bilingual municipality where 90% of the population speaks Sami. There are about 60,000 reindeer grazing in the area throughout the autumn and winter.

We will visit the Sapmi Park, presenting the Sami culture and history in an enthralling, informative and entertaining way. Our tour here will include the "Magical Theatre" which tells a story of the Sami pre-Christian beliefs about creation, life and death and how it is all connected. We then continue across the Finnish border and onwards towards Inari Lake. Once in Inari we will visit the Sami Museum & Northern Lapland Centre (SIIDA). The collections of the Sami Museum consist of artifact, photograph and archive collections, a reference library and an open-air museum.

We then continue with the short drive to the village of Ivalo where we spend the night.

Overnight in Ivalo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Ivalo - Rovaniemi

Today we will discover and explore the culture and history of this region. Our journey this morning takes us south via Sodankyla to Rovaniemi. Just north of Rovaniemi we will cross the Arctic Circle.

Rovaniemi is the administrative capital and commercial centre of Lapland (Finland's northernmost province). Here you are about 5 km south of the Arctic Circle. There has probably been continuous settlement in the Rovaniemi area since the Stone Age. Periodic clearance of new land for agriculture and the practice of slash-and-burn cultivation began around 750-530 B.C. Since Rovaniemi represents the capital of the Province of Lapland, many government institutions have their offices there. About 10,000 of the inhabitants are students. Rovaniemi is home to the University of Lapland.

After a break in Rovaniemi for lunch we will head out to visit a local reindeer farm. These semi-wild animals roam free in the woods and are collected only twice a year for reindeer 'round ups'. Selected reindeer and kept and trained for sledge pulling and reindeer racing.

We later return to Rovaniemi and visit the Arktikum, a museum and arctic science center. The Provincial Museum's permanent exhibition 'Northern Ways' leads guests into the history and culture of Finnish Lapland. The exhibition is a real experience that provides, for example, an introduction to the stories behind the houses of old Rovaniemi, popular beliefs and superstitions.

Overnight in Rovaniemi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Rovaniemi - Helsinki

You may have some free time this morning to explore and wander on your own before we transfer to the Rovaniemi Airport for our flight to Helsinki.

Helsinki is situated right at the arrowhead of a peninsula, surrounded by an archipelago of over 300 islands. Affectionately known as the 'Daughter of the Baltic', this city is perfectly placed between its two great trading cousins, Stockholm and Moscow. In a European perspective, Helsinki is relatively young (450 years), yet it is Finland's sixth-oldest town. The Swedes, who extended their empire into Finland in 1155, founded the city of 'Helsingfors' (the name still used by the Swedes) in 1550 when King Gustav Vasa needed a site for a strategic, competitively placed trading port. It languished as a coastal backwater until Imperialist Russia invaded in 1809.

Overnight in Helsinki.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Helsinki Sightseeing

Today we will enjoy a sightseeing tour of Helsinki, including a comprehensive walking tour taking in the most important and interesting parts of the city.

We will see the historical center and the diplomatic quarters, the Presidential Palace, City Hall, the Parliament building, Finlandia Hall and the Opera House. We will also be sure to stop at Senate Square, the Sibelius Monument and the Temppeliaukio Church (Church of the Rock). Helsinki's relatively young "Old Town" presents us with a tidy tangle of Art Nouveau and Neoclassical streets.

Senate Square is Helsinki's most historic and beautiful square -- designed in the early 1800s at the height of the Russian Empire's fascination with the architectural glories of ancient Greece and Rome. The designer was Berlin-born Carl Ludvig Engel, who created other public buildings in St. Petersburg.

Quarried out of the natural bedrock, Temppeliaukio Church is one of Helsinki's highlights. Designed by architects Timo and Tuomo Suomalainen, the church opened in 1969. The interior was excavated and built directly out of solid rock and is bathed in natural light that enters through the glazed dome. The church is used frequently as a concert venue due to its excellent acoustics.

In the Sibelius Park is the world famous composer Jean Sibelius's (1865-1957) monument by Eila Hiltunen. Unveiled in 1967, the Sibelius Monument, resembling organ pipes, is made of welded steel with the bust of the composer on one side. A smaller version of the monument is located at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

We will stop at the Kamppi Chapel, a Lutheran chapel located on the Narinkka Square. Also known as the "Chapel of Silence", this site is intended to be a place to calm down and have a moment of silence in one of the busiest areas in Finland.

Overnight in Helsinki.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Helsinki: Suomelinna Fortress & Free afternoon

This morning we will enjoy a boat excursion to the Suomelinna Fortress. Situated on a group of islands off Helsinki, Suomenlinna was built during the Swedish era as a maritime fortress and a base for the Archipelago Fleet. Work on the fortress was begun in the mid-18th century; today it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Suomenlinna has played a key role in many turning points in Finland's history, and the site has always been much more than just a part of Helsinki -- it is a town within the town. Nowadays there are about 900 permanent inhabitants on the islands, and 350 people work there all year round. This is one of the features that make Suomenlinna unique: the fortress is not simply a museum, but a living community.

After our tour we will return to the city by boat and the afternoon is yours free to enjoy before our farewell dinner. You may want to explore the National Museum or stroll along the pedestrian friendly Esplanade.

Overnight in Helsinki.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Departure from Helsinki

Today we say farewell to Helsinki.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast