

Sylvia:

Monday 25 May

This morning we woke in the Lofoten Islands. We stopped at the abandoned town of Mastad on Vaeroya. Unfortunately Joel was feeling unwell with a cold so sensibly opted to stay on board and rest for the morning. Roger and I took the “Long” 4-mile hike option over an old wagon track that the villagers used to use to go to the next town to church. It was an easy walk with fabulous views back over the ocean. There are amazing mountains around here with different shaped jagged, snow-covered tops.



After the hike we were able to do a short zodiac cruise around the bay. We had hoped to see puffins but unfortunately none were around – we did see guillemots, cormorants and many nesting gulls as well as a harbour seal.





After lunch back on board we arrived at the small, picturesque village of Reine. Here there were rows upon rows of cod (stock fish) hung out on racks to dry, all with their heads cut off. The heads were hanging separately for sale to Africa. It was slightly pungent but much less than I had anticipated. We wandered around the village and Joel and Roger made good use of the free Wi-Fi.





Shortly after leaving the village we came across two humpback whales and followed them south for some time before turning back to our intended northerly path towards Trollfjord.



After dinner we arrived at Trollfjord, a spectacular and fairly narrow fjord. The captain guided the ship right to the end of the fjord with all of us out on the front deck admiring the views. At the end he turned the ship around and nosed her right into the cliff. One of the young cadet officers on board was given the task of plucking a branch from a tree on shore and she was so excited. The videographer and ship photographer had taken off in a zodiac to capture the passage and it was hard to stop Joel from mooning them every time they went past! Given that we were on the bow of the ship in full view of the captain and all the passengers I didn't think it was a great idea but there were plenty who disagreed and egged him on!





Roger:

Tuesday 26 May

Sleeping with the blinds open I woke with a start thinking "it's late - what are we missing?" A check of the time - it was 3:30am.

After breakfast 13 of us embarked on the long walk. Landing at a jetty at the end of Tysfjorden, at Hellemobotn there are a few houses belonging to the local Sami Tribe but only occupied as summer houses. Heading up a small hill "long walk guide" Carl gave us a run down on the local plant life. Further up the track at a rock shelter he explained the three log fire. Two logs laid side by side a foot or so apart sticks are laid across the third log on top with a long fire underneath this burns all night making a heat curtain and puts the bears off coming in for a night time snack.

This is a really pretty valley with large waterfalls and a stream running through the center. Just after crossing a foot bridge over the stream we came across three reindeer stags in velvet. They hung around long enough for us to get a few photos.





Further up the valley the ground gets a bit steeper, Carl suggests a few people might like to turn back. A few did including 84 year old Phil, a real credit to him to have made it this far. Eight of continued on - apparently we are close to the Swedish boarder. The track is maintained by the Norwegian trekking club. During WW2 the Germans had a camp up here to try and stop the resistance fighters escaping to Sweden.



Back on the ship we headed to the bridge. As we were cruising down the fjord I noted the depth was over 400m. The pilot informed us that the water in these fjords never freezes as the currants are to strong and water too deep. Four hours later we arrived at Leiknes where Sylvia went ashore to look at some 9000 year old petroglyphs. I stayed on board for a massage.





Sylvia:

Wednesday 27 May

We woke this morning in Tromsø, which must be one of the largest cities in the Arctic Circle and has historically been the starting point for many Arctic Expeditions. Tromsø is a city of about 90,000 inhabitants with a large university and a large military base. It spreads over an island and the mainland of Norway and is surrounded by snow covered mountains but (in my opinion) is not as charming as Bergen.

After breakfast we loaded on to buses and proceeded around the city with three stops – the first at the Arctic Cathedral, a large, visually impressive, architecturally designed church that has become a symbol for the city.





Our next stop was the Polar museum with great displays of some of the polar expeditions and some very good taxidermy of arctic animals, followed by the Tromsø museum, which had some very interesting displays about the Northern Lights and Sami culture. The Sami are the local indigenous people who live in the northern areas of Norway, Sweden and Finland. They have become synonymous with reindeer herding although only a small percentage actually did this with others living as fishermen etc. Both museums had good free WiFi coverage and at one point I walked into an exhibit set up as a traditional Sami hut to see Roger sitting on a bench talking on the phone. I went around the corner and there was Joel talking on the phone... I guess you could term it as resourceful!

One of the things we have noticed is that by far the majority of the houses in Norway are either red, white or occasionally yellow. It turns out that red paint was traditionally the cheapest paint as it could be made locally with cod liver oil (which also protected the wood) and rust from metal so was used by all fishermen, farmers and labourers etc for their homes. The wealthy imported white paint from the Mediterranean – not so practical in the Norwegian climate as the white was designed in the Mediterranean to reflect heat. Government buildings etc tended to be painted in yellow to differentiate them from the other two.

After lunch back on board the ship we wandered around the town for a bit then headed to the gym as we sailed out of Tromsø. The gym is quite high up towards the stern and it is great to work out with stunning views back over the ocean to the snowy mountains.

Just before dinner we sailed close to Fugloya Island which is home to thousands of seabirds and saw puffins, razorbills, guillemots and even some huge white tailed eagles.



We had been invited to a private dinner in the Chartroom with a couple of the naturalists on board and enjoyed a very pleasant meal. By this stage we had reached the open sea and the motion caused a few challenges for some – two of the dinner guests had to leave the table early but luckily none of us seemed to be affected. Particularly lucky for Joel who is facing a long night as he frantically works to finish an assignment that must be sent off by 7am tomorrow morning at the latest.

