

Driven a Fjord Lately?

Road tripping in Norway offers unforgettable sightseeing opportunities



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Despite being known more for its spectacular fjords and scenic water vistas, Norway boasts some of the most hair-raising drives in the world, which also makes it an excellent road trip destination. In fact, the country has designated 18 National Tourist Routes that are particularly iconic. Many countries wouldn't try to conquer the harsh and steep terrain that Norway's forbidding cliffs offer. But the country takes it all in stride and has built some of the best roads anywhere.

For a Nordic road trip through the heart of the fjords region, start out with a 275-

mile drive northwest of Oslo to the town of Åndalsnes, which acts as a convenient starting point. Head south from Åndalsnes along the Trollstigen, or Troll's Road. Opened in 1936, it contains 11 hairpin turns crammed into a two-mile stretch and has become particularly popular with automotive adventurers. Often this leg of the journey will leave drivers motoring through, and then above, billowing white cloud cover. Breaking through the ground-hugging clouds reveals the cliff-top aerie of an observation platform, which is an engineering marvel of cantilevered architecture

that sticks out like an unsupported bronze thumb over the valley. From that height the road appears as if a basket of giant asphalt snakes was tossed onto the ground below.

Also known by the more prosaic Route 63, the Trollstigen winds along its serpentine route, seemingly giving no quarter to intrepid drivers giving their brakes a thorough workout as their engines growl and wheeze in protest on the 9 percent angled road. For the passenger looking out into the abyss over the guardrails, which in many spots are slabs of local stone gingerly placed on the precipice, it's an experience in itself,



Troll's Road, which opened in 1936, consists of 11 hairpin turns in a two-mile stretch.



Old American cars are a big deal in Norway—the American Car Club of Norway has a membership of nearly 18,000. Among the cars spotted on this visit to Oslo were a 1951 Buick Super Riviera (above) and a 1961 Ford Galaxie (opposite).



Geiranger Fjord is one of the most spectacular sights in Norway.

DRIVING TIPS FOR NORWAY

- ▶ The best time of year for a Norwegian road trip is May through September, to avoid roads being closed due to snow. Also, 20+ hours of daylight makes scheduling your drive much easier.
- ▶ We were in Norway for two weeks and didn't notice any stop signs. Drivers just slow down approaching intersections, even when they are on the primary road, and give the right-of-way to the right. We were almost t-boned a few times until we got into the rhythm of this driving technique.
- ▶ Although Norway is a major producer of oil, gasoline is heavily taxed and expensive. Budget about \$6.50 per gallon.
- ▶ Watch the speed limit. Norway uses cameras frequently to catch speeders.
- ▶ Fortunately, rental cars in Norway are usually equipped with a manual transmission, so you can truly enjoy the drive.
- ▶ Some country roads are only one car-width wide. If a car is coming from the other direction, look for a blue sign with a white "M" on it. This indicates a slight widening of the road where you can pull over and let the other car through.

as the road crosses over the frothy plume of several waterfalls.

If that's not enough winding roads for one day, the Trollstigen morphs into the Ørnevegen, or Eagle Road, another marvel of hairpin turns and switchbacks that offers postcard views at every curve as it descends into one of the most spectacular sights in Norway: Geiranger Fjord. This UNESCO World Heritage Site provides a unique feature of Norwegian road trips: a ride on a car ferry plying along the fjord to continue the journey. Ferries are so ingrained in the Norwegian road system that the route numbers continue for the ferry ride. Ferries also give the driver a chance to absorb the views of snow-capped mountains without worrying about what's coming around the next bend.

After disembarking from the ferry in Hellesylt, drivers continue a loop through fjord country that touches the Atlantic coast at the Art Nouveau town of Åle-

sund, where a stop for the night provides a respite from all the white-knuckle driving. Afterwards, drivers can head north along the coast to take in the colorfully painted and weathered homes of old fishing villages, which would not look out of place in Maine. Part of this journey takes place on the Atlantic Road, a 20-mile stretch of highway that connects small islets and keys. During a major storm, this road becomes almost impassable as giant waves sweep it clear. But summertime yields a pleasant coastal drive, with the only seeming hazard a bridge that twists away at its summit, giving the driver a feeling that he may take flight. After finishing the Atlantic Road, return to Åndalsnes for the drive back to Oslo.

The Norwegian capital is home to a surprising number of classic American car fans who like showing off their Detroit metal on sunny summer days. Many of their cars

sport "AMCAR" stickers on the rear windows. This is a club in Norway for fans of American cars. At one intersection, a 1951 Buick Super Riviera and a 1931 Ford Model A truck crossed paths in an almost choreographed display. Periodically, a bright orange 1971 Mustang Mach 1 appeared elusively off in the distance, like the white Thunderbird driven by Suzanne Somers in *American Graffiti*. Compared to the diminutive "Euro cars" plying the cobblestoned streets, a 1969 Cadillac de Ville Convertible looked like it could have stood in for one of the car ferries sailing the fjords. Now there's a car for another road trip in Norway.

For more information on Norway's National Tourist Routes, go to: www.nasjonaleturistveger.no/en/routes. 🇳🇴

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