



travel more than 700 nautical miles. *Nikita* was negotiating the narrow channel into the harbor. Her skipper deftly backed the vessel up to a bulkhead and I hurriedly tossed my bags aboard and stepped onto the swim platform, where I was met by her owner, Michael, along with Captain Magnus and mate Ida. After a short run, we arrived in the fishing port of Thyborøn, where we had dinner aboard and spent the night.

The following day, *Nikita* set off across the Skagerrak for a half-day's run to the Norwegian coast. Among our first stops was the port Rekefjord. It would be a stretch to call this a village; there's no bank, hardware or drug store. Rekefjord is simply a series of homes, docks and countless small boats surrounding a bowl-shaped depression, in the middle of which is an extremely well-protected harbor that is reached via a narrow passage. As we entered the harbor we passed, both to port and starboard, a large quarry operation, where granite hills were being systematically dismantled and turned into gravel. Two 300-foot ships were docked, along with a few barges, which were being loaded with gravel. While the picture one imagines is of dirt, dust and industrial grit, nothing could be further from the truth. It helps that it was drizzling, however, even if it wasn't, somehow I don't think there would be any dust. It's the neatest, most squared-away quarry I'd ever seen; no

After spending a few days in Copenhagen, I hopped a train for a four-hour ride north across Jutland, the peninsula that makes up much of Denmark and separates the North and Baltic Seas, to Holstebro. From there I took a short bus ride to the 750-year-old far northern seaport of Lemvig; the famed WWI Battle of Jutland took place not far from its shores.

When I left Copenhagen,

it was a warm sun-drenched spring day. When I arrived in Lemvig, however, I was greeted by a chill wind laden with moisture. The North Sea is not far away, and its effects were noticeable. After a 30-minute walk through the village and along the shoreline, past fields planted with swaying golden canola flowers, I arrived at the marina. Within minutes I saw *Nikita*, the Fleming 75 aboard which I was to spend the next few weeks, during which I'd

The Fleming 75 *Nikita* in the Geirangerfjorden. This fjord, with its snow-capped mountains and many waterfalls, is acknowledged as one of Norway's most picturesque.

rust streaks the equipment, no trash litters the roads, nothing appears to be out of place. The harbor's history is rooted in mining — iron ore was first mined here around the same time the Union and Confederacy went to war.

The village guest dock was unoccupied, and it was a good thing because *Nikita* occupied its entire length. After making our lines fast, we plugged in our twin shore power cords using one of the many adapters Magnus had made up. We were afforded a luxurious twin 16-amp supply (8 amps isn't unusual in this region). While this might appear inadequate for a vessel of *Nikita's* size, her electrical system is atypical in that her loads are simultaneously shared by the shore power and inverters, which in turn are carried by her 2,000 amp-hour lithium-ion battery bank. On its own, the bank can supply all of *Nikita's* electrical needs

for nearly a full day, including use of the galley range. When onboard loads exceed what the shore power can supply, the inverters make up the difference, and when onboard loads diminish (at night for instance), some of the shore power is used to recharge the batteries.

Sør-Hidle: An "oasis" at sea

Here lies the horticultural marvel Flor & Fjære, which translates to "high and low tide," a jewel in the midst of a sea of stone and sand.

In 1965, Åsmund and Else Marie Bryn bought the farmstead Mangela, which was located on this island, where they built a small cottage as a retreat from the bustle of Stavanger. Åsmund owned and operated a busy commercial nursery in the city, and the island provided a welcome retreat. During the family's summer residences on the



Above, *Nikita* crossed the Skagerrak and explored Norway. Below, the village of Geiringer.

island, Åsmund and his children planted trees (one summer they planted 2,000 of them) in order to give the cottage a refuge from the unrelenting northerly wind.

Ultimately, due to Åsmund's failing health, he and Else Marie decided in 1975 to move to the island permanently. After being here for a few months, Åsmund needed something to occupy his time, and thus he planted a garden, the harvest from which was sent to the nursery back in Stavanger. Strangely enough, Åsmund's health began to improve. By 1995, the barren, wind-swept island retreat had been transformed into a veritable Garden of Eden with its own microclimate. In this year, Åsmund's son Olav Bryn opened the gardens to the public, hosting tours and receptions. Much to the family's sur-





prise, in the first summer more than 7,000 guests ferried to the island to drink in its splendor, and the word spread. Today, visits to the island's gardens and gourmet restaurant, which is overseen by 20-year veteran Dutch chef Andre Mulder, exceed 30,000. Visitors have included all three houses of Norway's royal family, and the location has hosted the Norwegian Chess Tournament.

I'll confess, when Michael inquired as to whether I'd like to visit Flor & Fjære, a garden that included an entrance fee, not wanting to be the stick in the mud I reluctantly agreed. The sojourn turned out to be an especially memorable feast for the eyes, lens and palate. While the day dawned cloudy,

as we began our sojourn through the gardens the sun appeared and remained our companion for the rest of the day.

The garden has continued to grow under the watchful eyes of Olav Bryn and his wife Siri, who acted as our guide. The variety of plants and trees, not to mention koi, was nothing less than astonishing, particularly when one considers the latitude at which it resides — about the same as Northern Labrador. The plants range from roses and bonsai trees to cacti and windmill palms, and each garden contains exotic plants from the world over, punctuated by small lakes, stone bridges and waterfalls. Thanks to the shelter created

Above, the panoramic view of Lysefjord as seen from Preikestolen, or Pulpit Rock. Below, *Nikita's* first mate scans the helm station's nav instruments as the vessel makes its way through Lysefjord.

by the many perimeter trees planted by Åsmund and his family decades ago, it offers a warm environment, literally and figuratively, one that supports semi-tropical fauna, while offering an inviting haven to those who visit.

Traditional villages

Located on the southernmost tip of the island of Karmøy, the charming fishing and ship repair village of Skudeneshavn is home to just 3,000 people, making it one of Norway's smallest towns. In 1990, it won second prize for Norway's "Best Preserved Small Town," and its 225 immaculately kept wooden houses, many of which date back to the 1840s, are regarded as some of the best preserved in Europe.

When we arrived there it was gray, chilly and drizzling; however, the following day ranks as the best weather I encountered during my time aboard *Nikita*. The village's white homes gleamed in brilliant sunshine, and a steady procession of small power and sailing vessels ran out of the port all day, several of which





were crewed entirely by middle-school-age children as part of the town's sea education program. A traditional seafaring festival is held here in late June or early July. Known as Skudefestivalen, it runs for four days and is the largest gathering of coastal culture in the region, attracting both old and modern vessels of all kinds, including tall ships. Craftsmen demonstrate traditional boatbuilding skills and barrel and model making in addition to operating antique engines.

In addition to its picturesque setting, Skudeneshavn is also a center for ship repair, complete with a dry dock in which a steel fishing vessel was being repaired. I chatted with a local resident, long retired and in his 80s, who grew up here; when he was a young man, because "the town was too poor," he spent his career working around the world in the oil industry, and then returned to enjoy his retirement. He shared a few interesting stories and facts. He noted that when he was young, fishing was the only trade open to young men, many of whom emigrated to America. "Now of

course," he said, "the village is much different because of oil." He hesitated for a moment as he stared into the distance, conjuring up images of his youth, I imagine, and then said, "Much has changed, and Norway is now wealthy." He also noted,



with an element of pride, that one large oil support vessel, which was berthed nearby and towered over the village, was instrumental in capping the infamous *Deepwater Horizon* well.

Nikita cast off her lines and left Skudeneshavn in her wake. She cruised over a cobalt sea and under a virtually cloudless azure sky. Visibility was unlim-

ited; snow-capped mountain ranges 30 miles away were clearly visible. It was warm enough to eat lunch on the flybridge. We steamed for two hours to the island of Bjergøy, which is across a narrow strait from Ramsvig Handelsstad. A local guide we met at a previous port call insisted we must stop here for a meal — he guaran-

Left, with his "crush" cap and trimmed beard, the mate aboard the fishing vessel *MS Rapp* looks the part. Right, *MS Rogaland*, moored in Stavanger, was built in 1929 and played the part of the hospital ship in the recent film *Dunkirk*.





teed an unforgettable experience.

When we first contacted the Ramsvig Handelsstad Inn to make dinner reservations, they nearly hung up on us, thinking (as they later told us) we were telemarketers. When we arrived at their dock earlier in the day, they veritably kicked us off, claiming a function would take place shortly. We were simply not welcome.

An auspicious start it was not; however, the staff more than made up for this early rocky footing as they later welcomed us for a specially prepared dinner at which we were the only guests. The Icelandic chef presented and described each course as it was served, and proprietors Mette and Jostein Soland shared with us tales of the inn and island's past (the room in which we ate included a vintage shop counter, complete with goods from the '30s and '40s, including cigarettes rolled with Norwegian tobacco made during the war).

The former trading post, which was first constructed in the 16th century, has been transformed, renovated and

rebuilt by the current owners over the past 17 years into a luxury conference center, which, being not far from Stavanger, caters primarily to the world's oil industry and ensures absolute privacy by hosting only one group at a time. Buildings are made using slate roofs and heavy vintage timbers and planks, which house conference rooms, a dining room and 15 double suites along with a newly built art gallery. The former bakery has been transformed into a modern kitchen that is overseen by master chef Árnie Ívar Theodorsson.

After dinner, which included local crab and halibut, we were escorted to the subterranean bar where Jostein served aquavit and regaled us with tales of his worldwide wanderings and literary exploits (he is a former professor of Scandinavian literature and taught for a time at the University of Washington, living in Seattle's famed Ballard neighborhood where, surrounded by Scandinavian heritage, he says he felt very much at home). At one point he told me, pointing to

Nearly mid-night in Ålesund and the sun is only just setting. Ålesund played a pivotal role in WWII as a center for the transport of members of the resistance.

the sink, "A former CIA chief peeled potatoes right here with me," and then, seeming to not be able to hold it in, confided, "...it was Stansfield Turner." The guide could not have been more right: It was a memorable and enjoyable evening.

With a population of about 800, the tiny village of Rosendal, located on the southern shore of the Hardangerfjorden, is about six miles west of the sprawling Folgefonna glacier, which we visited and where we spent the morning skiing. One of the village's highlights revolves around the 17th century Barony Rosendal — a historic estate and gardens located within the village, classified as Scandinavia's smallest castle. Built in the 13th century and rebuilt in the 1820s, Kvinnherad Church is also located here. Rosendal is also known for its shipbuilders (in 1900 there were more than 300 registered shipbuilders within the municipality), including the famed Skaalurens Skipsbyggeri yard, which first began building wooden vessels here in 1855 and built Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen's *Gjoa*, for his

Northwest Passage expedition.

Before *Nikita* departed this port, I made the 25-minute trek from the waterfront to the Rosendal Barony, the “castle.” The grounds and gardens are among the most enchanting and well kept of any I’ve seen. Given the time, I could blissfully walk the paths that crisscross the estate all day long.

While there, I asked a woman working in one of the expansive vegetable gardens where I could find an example of the Norwegian Fjord Horse, the country’s own stout breed. She gave me directions to a riding club where two mares and a foal were corralled. I’m

Below left, the 99-year-old funicular in Bergen transports passengers to the top of Mount Fløyen. Below right, the manicured grounds of the Rosendal Barony, known to locals as “the castle.”



no equestrian, but in my high-latitude travels I’ve encountered and taken an interest in a number of unique breeds, including Newfoundland, Faroese and Icelandic ponies. I made my way there and was not disappointed: They were handsome examples, buff-colored with a distinctive clipped two-tone mane and a sturdy body. In the

town square, a bronze statue honors one of Rosendal’s own Fjord horses, the award-winning stallion Rosendalborken, which belonged to the owner of the Castle Rosendal in the mid-19th century.

Originally from the mountainous regions of western Norway, the Fjord horse is



said to be agile and of good temperament, and these were no exception. They quickly came to the fence as I walked up and nibbled on my hand, camera and coat. One of the world’s oldest breeds, believed to have first migrated to Norway more than 4,000 years ago, they were selectively bred by Vikings at least 2,000 years ago and because of their isolation in Western Norway, they remained a pure breed. The Fjord horse has been used for centuries as a working farm horse in Norway.

Adjacent to the stable was a working, vintage water-powered sawmill. The shop was open and I walked through. For those who love things

mechanical, it was a veritable nirvana. In addition to the traditional large circular rotating blade, a second machine was also present; it uses a series of reciprocating blades and powered feed rollers that are capable of simultaneously cutting a large log into several planks. It’s an ingenious piece of machin-

ery that, given the time, I’d pore over for hours while investigating its inner workings.

The final port call

At 11 p.m., the sun was seemingly fixed in setting mode, and the sky was a mixture of yellow, blue and orange hues. A couple was silhouetted on a distant jetty as they, too, took in the ever-so-slowly unfolding spectacle. What’s fleeting in the middle latitudes can last for hours when one ventures to the far northern or southern regions. As a photographer, high-latitude lighting has an ethereal quality all its own, and the extended sunrises and sunsets are especially gratifying.

In addition to being the



home of Rollo, the 10th-century founder of the dynasty of the dukes of Normandy, Ålesund was also known as “Little London” during WWII, both because of resistance activity that took place in and around it, as well as the frequent small boat crossings known as the “Shetland Bus” made between it and Scotland’s Shetland Islands. The exploits of those who ran the Shetland Bus are the stuff of legend. Early in the war, all of the crossings — carrying resistance fighters, saboteurs and agents, as well as supplies in and refugees out — were made using local

Mountains, waterfalls and isolated farmsteads serve as a backdrop as a sailboat ghosts through one of the many channels between the mainland and Norway’s countless barrier islands.

fishing boats known as Møre Cutters that were unique to the Ålesund area. The boats were timber and between 50 and 70 feet with twin masts and a single-cylinder semi-diesel engine. Most crossings were made during the winter, which afforded the Shetland Bus the camouflage of long dark nights while also subjecting it to notorious North Sea gales. A number of these vessels and their crews were lost through enemy action or in bad weather. A respite arrived, thanks to the U.S. Navy, which in 1943 provided the Shetland Bus with four steel, 110-foot former

submarine chasers, which were faster and safer than the fishing vessels — all of which survived the war.

With a heavy heart, I bade farewell to *Nikita* and my shipmates, Michael, Ida and Magnus. When I arrived aboard two and a half weeks prior, I was a complete stranger. I was, however, immediately adopted and made to feel welcomed and a part of the family and crew by all from the very first day. ■

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The inspirational Pulpit Rock

Lysefjord, nearly 2,000 feet below, carved its way through the granite landscape; its smooth waters looked as if they’d been cast in obsidian. The vista was simply jaw-dropping, and hours could be spent absorbing its many nuances. I shared the granite plateau, called

Preikestolen or “the Pulpit Rock,” with my shipmates and just half a dozen other hikers who had also made the early morning hike. There were no guardrails, no warning signs, no restrooms or water fountains — it was unadulterated beauty. In fact, although visited by thou-

sands every year, there was nothing to indicate that anyone had ever stood here before. The closer I stood, kneeled and then crawled up to the sheer drop-off, attempting to gain the ideal vantage point for photos, the better it felt. It was spiritual.

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