

36 Hours in Bergen, Norway

By INGRID K. WILLIAMS JUNE 29, 2017

Before setting off for nearby fjords and waterfalls, explore the cultural scene and Nordic cuisine of this beguiling coastal city.



BERGEN SEEN FROM ATOP ULRIKEN.

Many come to Bergen in pursuit of nearby nature, to see the dramatic fjords and waterfalls and misty mountain peaks of Norway's southwestern coast. But before you are whisked away on a cruise ship or hiking tour, it's worth exploring the city itself, Norway's second largest. Although visitors typically head straight for the historic harbor, locals have been busy elsewhere, developing an all-are-welcome cultural scene where black-metal bands reign, New Nordic cuisine rules, and the number of excellent art museums befits a city where rain is almost always in the forecast. So pack an umbrella, and save the fjords for later



Friday

1) 2 P.M. NORWEGIAN WOOD

The city center may sit at sea level, but Bergen's attractions extend up onto Mount Floyen, which rises over a thousand feet from the edge of town. First ride the Floibanen funicular (90 Norwegian kroner, or about \$10.60, round trip) to the glass-walled viewing platform with sweeping vistas of the city below. Then venture deeper into the Norwegian woods to find Tubakuba, a cliffside cabin designed by local architecture students in 2014. It's only a five-minute walk to the hut's fantastical entrance: a curved wooden orifice resembling a giant tuba's bell. The tiny cabin is rented to families to encourage exposure to the outdoors, but it can't hurt to clamber into the horn and knock to see if someone will let you peek in.

2) 4 P.M. STREET-ART SURPRISES

One antidote to the omnipresent gray skies is the city's impressive street art, a genre that has evolved here way beyond spray paint. In the city center, there's a legal graffiti wall in constant flux at Sentralbadet, but more interesting is the optimistic neon-light installation — "There are a lot of good people around" — by Svein Moxvold on Domkirkegaten. For the highest concentration of street art, explore the Skostredet area, where colorful murals large and small were joined last year by an auditory artwork, a seating nook with embedded speakers playing hypnotic melodies, installed by Lydgalleriet, a sound-art gallery across the street.



ALL MUSICAL TASTES ARE WELCOME AT APOLLON, A RECORD STORE AND BAR.

3) 7:30 P.M. NORDIC TAPAS

Norwegian tapas sounds like a joke — “like small plates?” — but the conceit works at Bare Vestland, a two-year-old restaurant specializing in appetizer-size portions of creative Nordic cuisine. The cozy space, down a half-flight of stairs, has a cabin-in-the-woods atmosphere with low beamed ceilings and rustic furnishings. A recent meal began with torn hunks of sourdough smeared with bright-green lovage butter, and progressed to a deliciously funky plate of cured whitefish with curls of carrot, pickled turnips and spicy mustard seeds. But the highlight was pork rib so tender that it could be eaten with a spoon, paired with sweet pea purée and brown butter. Dinner for two, about 1,000 kroner.

4) 10 P.M. TUNES AND TAPS

The local music scene is small but mighty, supporting diverse genres from black metal to indie folk-pop. And all tastes are welcome at Apollon, a record store and bar where local bands often stage performances in the backyard or wedged between crates of LPs and box sets. If the music isn’t live, turn your attention to what’s behind the bar: 35 taps, many pouring Norwegian craft beers, including original collaboration brews like the Tropical House Beer, a pineapple-scented pale ale made at Voss Bryggeri, a microbrewery northeast of Bergen.



Two children take a break at Kode 4, one of Bergen's many art museums in the city center.

Saturday

5) 10 A.M. WALK THROUGH HISTORY

The postcard image of the city is of Bryggen, a row of gabled wooden buildings along the harbor that was the epicenter of Bergen's fishing and trade industry in the 14th to 18th centuries. For a different perspective of the historic area, stroll through the labyrinth of creaky houses, today occupied mostly by souvenir shops, to Bryggen's hidden backyard park along Ovregeaten. Then continue to the [Hanseatic Museum](#) to see what Bryggen life was like for the German merchants who worked here for the Hanseatic League (admission, 160 kroner). In a drafty 18th-century wood tenement, the museum has preserved the haunting furnishings, including the migrant workers' eerily small bunk beds.

6) NOON; LITERARY LUNCH

Leave Bryggen behind for lunch at Litteraturhuset, a cultural and literary institution opened in 2013 whose spacious first floor is home to [Colonialen Kafé & Brasserie](#). At lunchtime, the cafe offers a seasonal menu of warming dishes that recently included creamy cauliflower soup drizzled with olive oil and Spanish almonds (95 kroner) and a hearty plate of homemade sausages with crackly skin atop mashed potatoes, roasted onions and whole-grain mustard (175 kroner). Ask the friendly staff for by-the-glass wine suggestions, or scan the chalkboard menu for a local beer, like Lervig's Rye IPA from nearby Stavanger.

7) 2 P.M. BAD WEATHER, GOOD CLOTHING

Scandinavians claim that there's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing. So when the rain (or sleet or hail) starts to fall, as it inevitably will in this wet city, find solutions at [T-Michael & Norwegian Rain](#). The sophisticated shop, which opened this new flagship location last September, is stocked with Norwegian Rain's unisex outerwear —

sculptural ponchos lined in cashmere, elegant capes with shearling collars — along with water-resistant wingtips and tailored men's wear from the local designer T-Michael.



Folk og Røvere, a popular hangout.

8) 3 P.M. ART ROW

Bergen's top fine-art institutions are conveniently aligned in a row, like ducklings, alongside a large pond. Begin at [Kode 4](#), where the permanent collection includes mesmerizing naturalist paintings by the beloved Norwegian artist Nikolai Astrup from the early 1900s, and an eye-opening exploration of Bergen's 1960s avant-garde movement. Continue next door at [Kode 3](#), which exhibits works from the art collector Rasmus Meyer, including many paintings signed Edvard Munch (admission 100 kroner; valid for two days at Kode 1, 3 and 4). Finish with contemporary art at [Bergen Kunsthall](#), currently showing austere drawings, sculptures and tapestry by the Norwegian artist Jan Groth (through Aug. 13; admission, 50 kroner).

9) 7 P.M. NEW NORDIC NOSH

When the chef Christopher Haatuft returned to open a restaurant in his native Bergen, he brought a résumé brandishing experience at some of the world's top restaurants: Per Se, Alinea, Blue Hill at Stone Barns. His restaurant, [Lysverket](#), opened in 2013 serving multicourse menus of New Nordic cuisine — think of North Atlantic clams with cabbage and smoked buttermilk. The large space, with exposed industrial ceilings and elegant Scandinavian décor, also contains a bar area with flickering tealights and fur-draped banquettes. Curl up here with the à la carte menu, which recently offered fried cod's head (165 kroner) and funky Norwegian cheeses with jam and tangy sourdough (225 kroner).

10) 11 P.M. DRINKING DENS

There's a watering hole to suit every resident in Bergen, from the excitable university students to the world-weary intelligentsia. For a party with Ping-Pong, popcorn and dangerously delicious raspberry-daiquiri slushes, go to [Vaskeriet](#), an excellent cocktail bar

near the university. Looking for the sort of dive bar that the prolific writer and former resident Karl Ove Knausgaard might have frequented? Then drop by [Folk og Rovere](#), a hangout with well-worn couches, Norwegian beers on tap and eccentric regulars young and old. Or follow the hip crowd to [Ujevnt](#), a retro-style bar where creative drinks are mixed with aquavit — the bracing spirit called the gin of the Nordics — as in the Aquatonic (aquavit, tonic and cucumber, 112 kroner).



Signe Bakke in a performance of the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg at Troidhaugen, Grieg's villa, where lunchtime concerts take place all summer.

Sunday

11) 11 A.M. MORNING ROAST

Compared with the acclaimed coffee scene in Oslo, Bergen is still playing catch-up. Leading the local charge is the newly opened [Bergen Kaffebrønneri Vagen](#), the first city-center cafe from a cult coffee roaster known by its BKB logo. Here, attention is paid to every detail, from house-made baked goods to the various brewing methods — see the shiny Marzocco espresso machine and multiple hand-brew options. For breakfast, keep things simple with a sandwich — the Brie with peppery greens on chewy walnut bread is superb (86 kroner) — and a cup of filter coffee.

12) 1 P.M. PIANO MAN

The beauty of Norwegian nature was a constant inspiration for Edvard Grieg, the Romantic-era composer and Bergen native revered for his classical concerto and soulful piano compositions. And it's easy to see why on a visit to Troidhaugen, Grieg's longtime summer home. Built in 1885, the waterside villa is now part of the [Edvard Grieg Museum](#), filled with mementos like the composer's Steinway piano. In season (May through September), time a tour to coincide with a lunchtime concert in the music hall, where pianists perform by a picture window overlooking the garden hut where Grieg once worked on his masterpieces (admission with concert, 160 kroner).

Lodging

On a tree-lined plaza in the center of the city, the **Hotel Oleana** (Ovre Ole Bulls Plass 5; 47-552-158-70; hoteloleana.com; from about 1,400 kroner) opened in 2015 with 98 comfortable rooms, jewel-toned furnishings and curiously suggestive décor. Room rates include breakfast and afternoon tea with waffles.

Between the train station and Bergen's art museum row is the 368-room **Scandic Ornen** (Lars Hillesgate 18; 47-553-750-00; scandichotels.com/ornen; from about 1,100 kroner), which opened in 2014 with stylish Scandinavian décor, generous daily breakfast buffets and views across the city from the 12th-floor bar and restaurant.