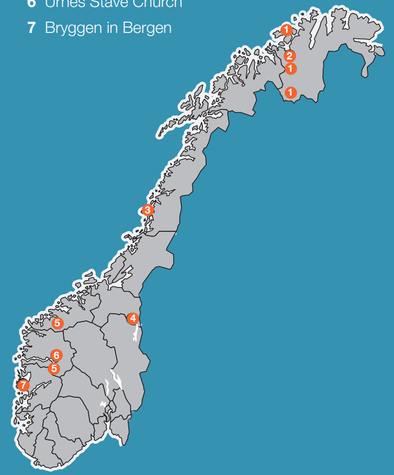
World Heritage Sites in Norway

1 Struve Geodetic Arc
2 The Rock Carvings in Alta
3 Vega Archipelago
4 Røros Mining Town
5 The West Norwegian Fjords
6 Urnes Stave Church
7 Bryggen in Bergen



BENNETT

Directorate for Cultural Heritage
Dronningensgt. 13
Pb. 8196 Dep. NO-0034 Oslo – Norway
Phone: +47 22 94 04 00
Telefax: +47 22 94 04 04
www.ra.no

Directorate for
Nature Management
Tungasletta 2
NO-7485 Trondheim – Norway
Phone: +47 73 58 05 00
Telefax +47 73 58 05 01
www.dirnat.no

Plants and animals

The short distances between fjords and high mountains, added to extremely favourable local climatic conditions, mean that alpine plants may grow side by side with species associated with southerly latitudes. The diversity of plant species is great and varied in the steep fjord landscape. Rare species that require grazing and haymaking to survive are dispersed on former agricultural land.

The World Heritage Area contains a variety of mammals, birds, fish and insects. Several are on the Red List, including species for which Norway has special responsibility to protect, such as wild reindeer, arctic foxes, lynx, otters, lemmings, white-backed woodpeckers and common porpoises. The bird life embraces everything from seabirds and waders on the fjords to woodland birds on valley slopes and species that typify alpine areas in Norway. About one hundred species breed in the World Heritage Area.



Stigen. Photo: Lars Lofdahl

Cultural history

The fjord areas contain relics in the landscape showing the use of the area by man ever since the ice retreated 10,000 years ago. Pitfalls and stonewall hides high in the mountains testify to the importance of wild reindeer for people inhabiting the fjords as early as the Stone Age.

Close on twenty small fjord and mountainside farms are found along the fjords, some perched on small rocky ledges; most are now abandoned. These farms occupy sites where snow avalanches and rock falls could not destroy them. The settlements demonstrate the frugal lifestyle of the farmers, adapted to a hazardous, but rich environment. Several upland valleys have transhumance summer dairy farms. Some farms along the fjords and in the valleys have been restored and can be visited.



Clouded apollo. Photo: Dag Holtan

Beautiful landscape

These areas are famous for having some of the most beautiful, impressive scenery in Europe. For 150 years, scientists, artists and tourists have been visiting the fjords to enjoy their outstandingly dramatic landscape that is so full of contrasts. Despite countless numbers of visitors, the region retains the ability to inspire and benefit everyone living in or visiting it.

The Geirangerfjord area

Close to the main watershed dividing Norway, Storfjord branches into three magnificent fjords. Tafjord, Sunnylvsfjord and the winding Geirangerfjord form the heart of the northern sub-area. Here, the interplay between ice, bedrock and cascading water forms a fjord landscape with unique qualities. The alpine tracts separating the fjords have lush valleys with summer dairy farms, and perched on ledges on the precipitous sides of the fjords, protected from avalanches, are old farms that have exceptional value in terms of cultural history. Many screes, as well as groves of broad-leaved deciduous woodland, are examples of distinctive and rare types of habitat abounding in interesting plants. The rare clouded apollo butterfly is the best known insect here. All four species of deer that occur naturally in Norway, elk, red deer, wild reindeer and roe deer, can be seen in the area.



Sub-species of arctic poppy. Photo: Johannes Aronsky

The Nærøyfjord area

The Nærøyfjord area has a great variety of landscape, ranging from naked peaks around the Fresvik glacier to sheltered bays with broad-leaved deciduous woodland by the fjord. Flanked by mountains towering to 1760 m above sea level, Nærøyfjord is 17 km long and only 250 m broad at its narrowest point. Hanging valleys, waterfalls, narrow canyons and long screes are dramatic features on the precipitous mountainsides. The mountaintops are not jagged and are remnants of the ancient plains that existed before rivers and ice began to excavate the deep valleys. The magnificent scree slopes that stretch down from Bleia, a peak at the head of Sognefjord, show that the fjord landscape is still evolving. A rare sub-species of the arctic poppy grows there. Several small settlements occupy sites around the fjord that are safe from avalanches, and farming is the most important occupation there.



View of Nærøyfjord from Kalvenosi. Photo: Tom Dybvad



A summer dairy farm, Hendelsæter. Photo: Lars Lofdahl

The West Norwegian Fjords in brief

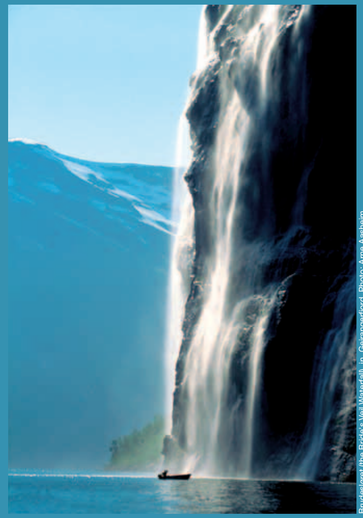
Geirangerfjord: Norddal and Stranda municipalities in Møre & Romsdal county.
Nærøyfjord: Aurland, Vik and Lærdal municipalities in Sogn & Fjordane county and Voss municipality in Hordaland county.

Areal:
Total 1227 km², incl. 107 km² of sea (the Geirangerfjord area measures 519 km² and the Nærøyfjord area 709 km²).

Information on overnight accommodation and other services:
The Geirangerfjord area:
Destination Geirangerfjord Trollstigen – www.visitgeirangerfjorden.com
Geiranger Tourist Information Office – tel. +47 70 26 30 99, www.geiranger.no
Hellesylt Tourist Information Office – tel. +47 70 26 38 80, www.hellesylt.no
Stranda Tourist Information Office – tel. +47 70 26 14 50
Norddal Tourist Association – tel. +47 70 25 77 67, www.visitnorddal.com
The Nærøyfjord area:
Flåm Tourist Information Office – tel. +47 57 63 21 06, www.alr.no
Aurland Tourist Information Office – tel. +47 57 63 33 13, www.alr.no
Lærdal Tourist Information Office – tel. +47 57 64 12 07, www.alr.no
Voss Tourist Information Office – tel. +47 56 51 94 00, www.visitvoss.no
Vik Tourist Information Office – tel. +47 57 69 12 55

Additional information:
The County Offices in Møre & Romsdal, the offices of the County Governors of Sogn & Fjordane and Hordaland
Web sites:
www.verdensarv.com
www.fylkesmannen.no
www.nwhf.no

THE WEST NORWEGIAN *Fjords*



Brudesløret (the Bride's Veil Waterfall) in Geirangerfjord. Photo: Arne Aasheim

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The West Norwegian Fjords were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005

UNESCO

UNESCO is the abbreviation for the "United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization". UNESCO's goal is to contribute to peace and safety through international cooperation within these areas. The organisation was established in 1945, and Norway became a member in 1946.

The UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

The Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was approved in 1972 after cultural heritage and natural areas had become increasingly under threat from war, natural disasters, pollution, tourism or just simply neglect.

The Convention encourages all nations to promote the protection of cultural and natural heritage of both local and international significance. The most important goal of the Convention is to identify cultural and natural heritage of universal value. The need for a coordinated effort, both human and economic, was demonstrated by the international rescue of cultural heritage monuments in Egypt and The Sudan, when the Aswan Dam was built in the 1960s. Sixty countries, including Norway, participated.

Cultural and natural heritage can include monuments, single buildings or groups of buildings, cultural landscapes or natural areas. World Heritage sites may be completely natural, or partly or wholly a result of the work of man. They may be buildings that represent important historic developments, or natural phenomena of exceptional aesthetic or scientific value.

Norway ratified the Convention on 12 May 1977. The World Heritage Committee has so far approved seven Norwegian nominations to the World Heritage List: Bryggen in Bergen (1979), Urnes Stave Church (1979), Røros Mining Town (1980), the Rock Carvings in Alta (1985), the Vega Archipelago (2004), the West Norwegian Fjords (2005) and the Struve Geodetic Arc (2005).

Further information concerning the world's cultural and natural heritage:

UNESCOs web site, whc.unesco.org

The Norwegian Directorate of Cultural Heritage's web site, www.ra.no



The West Norwegian Fjords

Photo: Arne Aasheim



The Rock Carvings in Alta

Photo: Riksantikvaren/Arve Kjersheim



Vega Archipelago

Photo: Lars Løfaldli



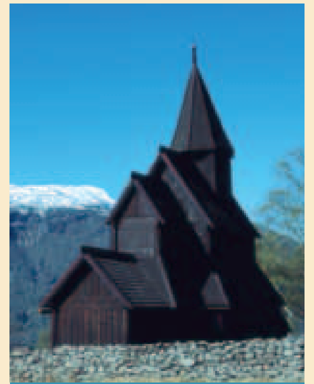
Røros Mining Town

Photo:Trond Taugbøl



Struve Geodetic Arc

Photo: Trond Taugbøl



Urnes Stave Church

Photo: Harald Ibenholt



Bryggen in Bergen

Photo: Riksantikvaren/Andreas Dreyer

The West Norwegian Fjords



The Geirangerfjord area



The Nærøyfjord area

Legend

World Heritage Area

Nature Protection Areas

Tourist Information



The West Norwegian Fjords

Fjords are among the most dramatic and spectacular landscapes on the planet. The World Heritage Area, the West Norwegian Fjords, embraces some of the longest, deepest, narrowest and most beautiful fjords in the world. Their scenery and cultural heritage have spellbound visitors down the ages. Many people consider the fjords the very symbol of Norway, the foremost nation of fjords in the world. It is through no mere chance that the Norwegian word "fjord" has entered the international vocabulary. The World Heritage Area comprises two sub-areas, Geirangerfjord and Nærøyfjord. Together with their surroundings, the entire area covers 1227 km², 107 km² of which are sea.



Skageflå, Geirangerfjord. Photo: Per Eide, Fjord Norway

Scientists have regarded these areas as classic examples of fjord landscape. Great differences in altitude and short distances between sea and mountaintop create a great diversity of scenery and natural history. Both sub-areas lack major, man-made infrastructures. Natural geological processes linked with the formation and evolution of the fjords are not affected by the works of man. Together, these areas have qualities that resulted in them being inscribed on the UNESCO list of the world's cultural and natural heritage after fulfilling two of the scientific criteria in the Convention. When justifying the inscription, the committee stated that:

The West Norwegian Fjords are classic, superbly developed fjords, considered as the type locality for fjord landscapes in the world. They are comparable in scale and quality to other existing fjords on the World Heritage List and are distinguished by the climate and geological setting. The property displays a full range of the inner segments of two of the world's longest and deepest fjords.

The Nærøyfjord and Geirangerfjord areas are considered to be among the most scenically outstanding fjord areas on the planet. Their outstanding natural beauty is derived from their narrow and steep-sided crystalline rock walls that rise up to 1400 m direct from the Norwegian Sea and extend 500 m below sea level. Along the sheer walls of the fjords are numerous waterfalls while free-flowing rivers rise up through deciduous and coniferous forest to glacial lakes, glaciers and rugged mountains. There is a great range of supporting natural phenomena, both terrestrial and marine such as submarine moraines and marine mammals. Remnants of old and now mostly abandoned transhumant farms add a cultural aspect to the dramatic natural landscape that complements and adds human interest to the area.



An avalanche slope in Nærøyfjord. Photo: Lars Løfaldli

Geology and landforms

The area is situated in the innermost parts of two fjord systems that reach into the very heart of the central mountain massif separating eastern and western Norway. Between 55 and 2.5 million years ago, in the Tertiary period, the Norwegian landmass was repeatedly uplifted to form a mountainous area parallel to the western coast. River systems were continually rejuvenated to form deeply incised, V-shaped valleys. Several glaciations during the succeeding Quaternary era resulted in many valleys being deepened and re-shaped by glaciers streaming towards the sea, creating U-shaped valleys and generally narrow, deep, steep-sided fjords. This landscape is still being shaped by erosion and deposition, as shown by numerous screes, avalanche deposits and sand and gravel bars along rivers. The area has been considered an extremely valuable "scientific laboratory" because it can enhance our knowledge of the formation of landscape and the effects of climatic changes.



Nærøyfjord. Photo: Frithjof Fure, Fjord Norway