

# Traveldiary Brigitte & Heinz

**Once Again** - Scandinavia: no lockdown, no worries

Biennial Trip - Report 2020-22: fantastic nature and only few pandemic restrictions



**(long)  
Condensed  
travelogue:**

As we don't want to re-chew all visited places until we unconsciously start to moan and bemoan about all bits and bobs, we add some **core-themes** to our **"da capo"** travelogues, but keep them (relatively) **short and sweet** – exactly how also life should be – short and sweet, not long and boring...

## Chapter 37

March 2020 - April 2022

# Once Again - Scandinavia: no lockdown, no worries

## **Condensed travelogue: just short and sweet**

By mid-2022, more than 23 years have already gone by since we dropped-out at the “tender” age of 37 and 39 respectively. Though, we still have more travel plans, all of it may be, nothing must be... We were already privileged to see the world. Not all of it, but most parts that deem interesting to us. Therefore, we will concentrate on re-visiting particularly appealing places, where we can soak in with unlimited time. As we don't want to re-chew all visited places until we unconsciously repeat ourselves, we add some core-themes to our “da capo” travelogues but keep them (relatively) short and sweet – exactly how also life should be – short and sweet, not long and boring. Certainly, we hope that you still (or all the more) appreciate our travel-tales!



However, as we hadn't visited Finland during our last trip up north, our description about this country is a bit more comprehensive. The same applies to some regions of Norway, which hadn't been part of our past trip either.

## **Biennial Trip to Scandinavia March 2020 - April 2022: fantastic nature and only few pandemic restrictions**

At the turn of the year 2019/20, we've spontaneously decided that Scandinavia shall be our next mayor travel destination, while still arguing whether the upcoming trip should last 6, 9, or even 12 months. Back then, nobody outside of Asia worried about Corona, though, we were most probably already mingling with some infected tourists in Vienna downtown during January 2020. Possibly we even got infected, as Heinz had some mild, but unusual symptoms of a cold in Austria, and both of us later in southern Germany.



During our stage in the Bavarian Forest, it became obvious that the virus was spreading in Europe as well.

As the first measures were introduced in parts of Europe, we felt, it's probably smarter to pull up our socks and to travel across Germany, as long as we can do it unhindered. This was certainly the right decision. While Germany's western states already introduced some restrictions, life in Bavaria and in the eastern states, was still unaffected, apart from the appearance of hand sanitisers. We've exchanged farewell kisses with our landlords, in popular eateries, staff arranged space for us on tables shared with other guests, or in short: we had lots of fun, but no worries!

Soon after we've taken the ferry up to Sweden, most of Europe was condemned to Lockdowns. But in Sweden, as in most of Scandinavia, life went on without too many restrictions, apart from border closings. To anticipate it, despite spending two entire years in the Far North, we neither experienced a real lockdown, nor a mask-mandate; lucky buggers we are!



# Sweden: a nice introduction to Scandinavia

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, sailing from Rostock, our car ferry docked at the Swedish port-town of Trelleborg. Due to



Corona, there had been an ad hoc police checkpoint at the departing port in Germany. However, in Sweden, nobody bothered; we could drive off the ferry hassle free as usual. Back then, we were neither aware how long we would be staying in Scandinavia due to the pandemic, nor what a lucky decision it had been, to visit the far North now. All over Scandinavia, Corona measures remained all the time much more down to earth than in most parts of the world, which we appreciated very much.



For our first three nights, we've stayed at Skanör (med Falsterbo), where we had pre-booked a nice room, right above one of Sweden's best Restaurants. So, while most of Europe had decreed a lockdown, we could enjoy some great gourmet meals – which was a perfect introduction to Sweden. Skanör was also charming our pants off with its beautiful, well restored houses, its old, wooden windmill, the charming coastline with superb vista to the Øresund Bridge, and of



course, the many picturesque and colourful beach cottages.

After three days, we continued to delightful Helsingborg, where we celebrated Brigitte's birthday with some more gourmet meals, as well as with a daytrip to Mölle, on equally pleasant Kullen Peninsula.



## The Interior: Falun-red houses and uncountable lakes



On March 17<sup>th</sup>, we left the coast and continued to the interior. In the quaint hamlet of Åtterås, near Smålandsstenar, we had found a nice, well-equipped holiday cottage. Though, it was yellow, not in the typical Falu Rödfärg red found all over the country, the Småland-region is somehow a quintessence of Sweden.



During the next 4 weeks, we ventured out again and again, just to marvel at the beautiful landscapes with its many swamps, rivers, forests and island-dotted lakes. Some isles are connected with dams or bridges, others by free car-ferries.

An April 14<sup>th</sup>, we've continued northwards to Bjärlanda near Sollebrunn, where we moved into another temporary abode, this time a semidetached house. Again, we marvelled at the nearby countryside, and of



course, also at the locks in the outskirts of the beautiful town of Trollhättan.

One of the most rewarding days out was to the extraordinarily picturesque Bohuslän-Coast, with its many delightful fishing villages.



On May 9<sup>th</sup>, we changed houses and moved to a lovely cottage that was separated only by an arable from historic Göta-Canal. This holiday house was situated in Rogstorp, a bit outside of Lyrestad. The leisure boat



season had just started and so we could watch the boats directly from our cottage, or even closer while walking along the pretty channel. Seeing how the ships passed the many locks and pivoted bridges, was always interesting. Furthermore, it was a convenient excuse to interrupt our wanderings and bicycle excursions on the fine gravel path along the channel.

Nearby Sjötorp, a somehow touristy port-village and terminus of the Göta-Canal, is also a charmer. Here, the water level is brought back to the same level as Lake Vänern's by means of several locks. Göta Canal was a



true engineering marvel upon completion in 1832. Its total length measures 190km (passing 5 lakes), of which 87km have been excavated. 58 locks hurdle 91,5m in height. The Canal lead from the Baltic Sea in Mem (130km southwest of Stockholm) to the village of Sjötorp on Lake Vänern. Together with River Göta älv and the Trollhätte-Canal (82km), an inland-waterway of 390km length leads all the way to Gothenburg.



After three weeks on the canal, we continued to the other shore of lake Vänern, which is with 5.650 km<sup>2</sup>, Sweden's largest lake. In Säffle, we had pre-arranged another pleasant, well equipped holiday home, where we arrived on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. It was big, bright and cosy; with plenty of garden space. This suited well, as our friends Anita (whom we met in Australia 28 years ago) and her partner Helmuth decided to spontaneously join us in Sweden.



As a sizable rowing boat was on disposal, we took advantage of their favourite pastime as keen boatmen. We paddled to several lonely islets in Lake Vänern, where we enjoyed bathing and sunbathing au naturel. Surely, we also visited the nearby, lively town of Karlstad, quaint Svanskog with its draisines, Håverud aqueduct, and picturesque Köpmannebro.

## Midsummer in Sweden: naturism and fell tourism

Unfortunately, this year, no midsummer-celebrations were held, due to Corona. Nevertheless, peak season was coming to full swing. Therefore, budget minded, permanent globetrotters like us, find the choice of financially feasible top-notch shelters got scarce for the next two months. In Sweden, the most feasible peak-summer options are naturist club grounds, or holiday cottages in ski resorts. Being nude at nature, combined with 24 h of daylight, sounded tempting, so we opted for a stage at Gustavsbergs Naturistcamping in Nora, beautifully situated right on the namesake lake. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, we settled in to a small, simple cottage with kitchen, though no toilet, but lakeview. Due to the splendid warm weather during our first week, dozens of day-visitors flocked in regularly. Because of the allemansrätten (everyman's right), Gustavsberg's nudist-lawn and bathing-pier are open to everyone (for free).



Apart from walking regularly to the historic town of Nora, we also made some outings to the well restored historic mining villages of Pershyttan and Siggebohyttan.

As much as we liked it in Gustavsberg, the weather gods were sometimes a bit grumpy this summer. So, after 2 ½ weeks, we organised a brand new, weatherproof appartement in Lindvallen, Sälen's largest ski resort, to which we left on July 9<sup>th</sup>. The appartement was well heated and spoiled us even with a sauna. This came in handy, as it was substantially colder up here, as the village is situated



on 580 m above sea level. Though, only a fraction of Sälen's uncountable holiday-dwellings were let, some of the most popular hiking tracks around the (high and barren) fells, as well as the local supermarkets, were sometimes so crowded, it was almost impossible to tumble over. Due to Corona, there were certainly more summer holiday makers attracted to the mountains than usually. We were just wondering, how crowded it must be here during winter.



As the Norwegians meanwhile opened their borders for people who had been for at least 10 days in the neighbouring county "Värmland län", we decided for a holiday dwelling over there. July 27<sup>th</sup> was a very hot day



and that's when we changed to Branäs, another ski-resort. On the internet, we've smelled a lovely house-quarter, also complete with sauna and other luxuries. Here, we had now two more weeks to explore Sweden's mountainous area and its fells.

The Norwegian border was now only a bit more than half an hour away. However, an approaching heatwave tempted to have some more naturist life first. A forgotten triviality delivered the perfect excuse to drive the 220km back to Gustavsbergs Naturist Camping, where we enjoyed three days with perfect summer weather. Surely, now the forecast predicted 10 more sunny and warm days. Naturally, we would have loved to take advantage of this unexpected heat wave, to enjoy more life "au naturel". However, we urgently wanted to continue our trip around Scandinavia. During the Pa ndemic we've learned: "if a border opens, you have to cross it, as it might get closed again, more quickly than you can drive... So, on August 12<sup>th</sup>, we drove back to Branäs and from there onwards to Långflon, a tiny border settlement in the nil, but with a large shopping centre right at the border, aiming at Norwegian bargain hunters.



## Norway: 6 weeks across a stunning country



We arrived in Norway on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. It was really only a few days before the border closed again!!! Trysil, where we spent our first two days, offered a nice introduction to Norway. A bit outside of the village centre, we found a large camping cottage overlooking Klarälven River. The charming village of Trysil, nowadays also a popular ski resort, has many national supermarket- and non-food chains, where we browsed a bit to get an overview over the country-specific offerings, as ten years had gone by, since we've last visited Norway.

After two days, we continued to the world heritage listed mining town of Røros, with its many, well restored wooden buildings. The quite touristy town spoiled us also with an excellent gourmet meal and a nice coffee shop, both contradicting our prejudice about Norwegian gastronomy, we've gained years ago.

On our way to Trondheim, we've shunned the main road and did some detours, passing beautiful Aursunden, a large lake on 690 m. above sea level. In this area, we had our first reindeer sightings.



## From Trondheim to Nordland: a bustling town, small villages and grand landscapes

On August 15<sup>th</sup>, we've reached Trondheim, an exceptionally beautiful coastal town. During our visit here 10 years ago, we've unfortunately only had one day, as we had prebooked an appartement in the fjord-lands. This time, we arrived without fixed plans and checked-in to a nice room at a modern youth hostel with underground parking.



Already our daily wanderings to the city-centre were very pleasing. Furthermore, after five months in the countryside, we really enjoyed it all the more, mingling with the crowd of this lively, youthful town. Trondheim has ~208'000 inhabitants, among them more than 40'000 students. We loved the many wooden buildings, the charming townhouses along Nidelva River, as well as the waterfront along the river and the sea. Five days were barely enough to enjoy the attractive, bustling town





with its uncountable restaurants, offering specialities from around the globe. However, the weather forecast was tempting us to resume our travels.

On August 20<sup>th</sup>, we set about driving north, towards the Lofoten Islands. This time, we had decided to take the high way E6, after having travelled along the touristy more famous Kystriksveien along the coast, the last two times.



Also the “inland-route” spoiled us with equally breath-taking landscapes, fjord views, ferry crossings, moose sightings and spectacular mountains all the way up north. Overnighting was no problem, as even in the nil, all villages and almost every hamlet provide hotels and guesthouses, campgrounds, restaurants and supermarkets.

After detouring via Orkanger and Brekstad, we stayed the night in Namdalseid. Next, we went to the picturesque town of Mosjøen, where we were smitten by the charming old town, spoiled with more gastronomic meals and brainwashed several times by a bad-weather front. So, we supported the local economy while waiting for the rain to ease at a shopping centre! Continuing north, we visited Mo i Rana’s historic Moholmen-Quarter, crossed the arctic circle, before overnighting in pretty Rognan. Then, the journey went on to Mørsvikbotn and Ballangen, where we spent a last night before reaching the island-group of Lofoten.

## **Lofoten & Vesterålen: craggy islands and quaint fishing villages**

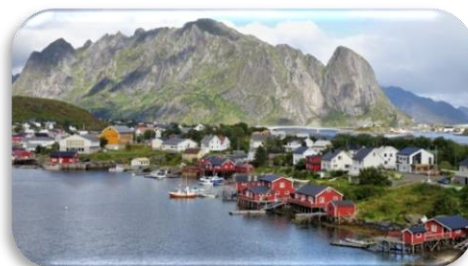
On August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020, we reached the famous Lofoten, an incredibly bizarre and beautiful island-chain with high craggy mountains. Causeways, sweeping elegantly curved bridges, underwater tunnels, and ferries



through pictures seascapes interconnect the beautiful isles. We've split our one-week stage on the Lofoten between a nice camping-cabin on the waterfront near Kabelvåg, and a brand new appartement above quaint Sørvågen.

Besides admiring the breath-taking landscapes again and again, we visited many picture-perfect fishing villages like Svolvær, Henningsvær, Stamsund, Leknes, Kvalnes, Austvågøya's Nordfjorden, Laukvik, Hamnøy, Sakrisøy, Reine, Tind and on the far-side; Å i Lofoten.

Among our highlights were also several sightings of orcas, or killer whales respectively. Twice, we were lucky to see a good dozen of those sweeping mammals frolicking only a few metres off the coast in Reine.



Due to the Corona-Pandemic, all accommodation owners moaned about the lack of visitors. Seeing how cramped it was on the most popular viewpoints, however, we could only too well imagine, how overcrowded it must be here in a normal summer. In defiance of Corona-related entry restrictions, many foreigners seemed to have managed to enter the country during one of the short border openings of summer 2020. ALL of them, seemed to rush up to the Lofoten-Islands (and probably to the North-Cape). Further south however, we had hardly noticed any other foreign tourists.

Now September had arrived. On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, we moved to a less famous, but nevertheless equally astonishing neighbouring island group: the Vesterålen.



There, we had a 2 week's booking at a nicely renovated holiday home in Hennes on Hinnøya Island. As the cottage was not connected to the sewage-system, the toilet had an integrated high-tech faecal incineration plant.

The weather gods were not always excessively gracious with us, though, we still had some days with stark blue sky. On such, we explored the Vesterålen's picturesque towns and fishing villages dotted over craggy, breath-taking islands like Langøya, Hadseløya or Andøya. Also, various towns are out of the ordinary, e.g. Sortland, which branded itself Blåby; the "blue town" as most buildings are painted blue. Rather big is also



Stokmarknes, which is, likewise Sortland, connected by an impressive, curved, cantilever road bridge, as can often be seen around Norway. Andenes on the island of Andøya, boasts a very tall lighthouse, and has, just like Myre on Langøya, a working fleet of fishing vessels.

## Hammerfest and the Far North: ever more beautiful

Meanwhile, we had learned that the Finnish border was due to open soon. Hence, on September 16<sup>th</sup>, we set off to drive further north across much of Troms og Finnmark to finally get to the north of Finland.



After a scenic drive to Grovfjord, we rented a lovely Fisherman's cottage built (for the sake of tourism) as pile dwelling right above the fjord. After three days, we continued along uncountable fjords and lakes that were often framed by fascinating mountain ridges and forested hills that already displayed their autumn colours. In Storslett, we got a room in a guesthouse, overlooking the small harbour. From here, the road leads along more fjords and often barren landscapes to Alta, where we admired the so-called Northern Lights Cathedral.

Next, we decided for a two day's stopover at the pretty seaport Hammerfest. For long, the town had made a living solely from fishing. Nowadays, there is also Norway's large gas industry present, which resulted in an interesting mix of old and new. Despite the contemporary manufacturing facilities, the area belongs to Norwegian Lapland, therefore it's Sami country up here. The Sami-People herd their reindeer even over the bridge, that serves as the only driveway to the Island of Kvaløya, on which Hammerfest town is situated. Until small, but over-touristy Honningsvåg (on the same Island as the North Cape) was awarded the status of a city, Hammerfest (~11'300 inhabitants) was considered the world's northernmost town.

On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, we continued over the ever more barren arctic landscape to Tana bru, coming along Olderfjord and Lakselv. That far north, the timberline is only about 300 meters above sea level. Now, the autumn colours were at their best, be it on trees or even on creepy bushes on the ground. So, we marvelled at them all along our way to the pretty port-town of Vardø. From there, we drove via Varangerbotn to Polmak on the Finnish border.

Our 6 weeks in Norway were by far and away not enough, but we felt hustled to Finland, before the border would close again. So, we had to leave some of Norway's natural wonders behind for another time...



# Finland: the country of uncountable trees



Our last stage to Scandinavia didn't bring us to Finland. This time, however, our intended 2 - 3 months finally resulted in an 8-months abode, as the Corona-Pandemic severely affected our ability to travel. As Finland isn't included into our last Scandinavian travel tales, we keep the Finnish section a bit more comprehensive.

## Lapland: where reindeer-herds (with transponders) roam freely

On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, we had to take advantage of the fact, that Finland re-opened its border to Norway a few days ago – actually, we just made it in time, as borders were being closed again after one week of “high life” only. To spark joy, Finland showed us its best side too, after we'd crossed the border north of Utsjoki. All the way southwards to Inari, Lapland's variation of the Indian-Summer, called Ruska hereabout, was gleaming in full magnificence.

The culmination of highlights continued in Inari. We got a reasonably priced room in exactly that hotel with the restaurant awarded Finland's best in 2020! The 5 course Menu (~€ 55) at Hotel Kultahovi, as well as the matching, non-alcoholic drinks packet (€ 17.50) prove to be highly creative sensations for our taste buds.

After two days of enjoying Ruska colours around Inari, we made a two-days outing to Sevettijärvi. The place is almost back on the Norwegian border, but east of where we entered. As we were driving there and back in plain sunshine, we could admire the landscape along the great Lake Inari (1.084km<sup>2</sup>) in the best of light.



Arriving at Sevettijärvi, we stayed at a simple room on a reindeer-farm. No ren to be seen, though, we were spoilt with northern lights; the most impressive ones for a long time. Furthermore, we got great home-style food – reindeer-meat is amazingly tender.

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, we returned for another night, plus another gourmet meal, to Inari before continuing to Kittilä in the heart of Lapland.



## Levi / Kittilä: where skiing starts early October

After five extremely eventful days, it was time to take it a bit more peaceful. So, we opted for a first holiday cottage, which we rented as of September 28<sup>th</sup>. It was a lovely, semidetached timber log-cabin, located at Finland's largest skiing-resort(-village) Levi, in the municipality of Kittilä.

It was a comfortable traditional block house, set among the woods. As it was the end of the Ruska-Season, the surrounding cottages were all very well occupied, though, due to Corona, we were the only foreigners.



When we had booked our cottage in Levi, we didn't expect to see any snow at all, but only autumn colours. Nevertheless, already on our first day, we've spotted both, despite temperatures in the plus 10° - 15°C range! Large trucks loaded with snow were regularly passing by our cottage. Soon we learned that the business minded owners of the ski-resort had found a way to store last springs (artificially produced) snow over summer to use it for a season start early October.

We could almost not believe our eyes seeing that not only two downhill skiing slopes, but also a cross country track was being prepared with the help of uncountable snow groomers. Despite temperatures around 14°C, Levi's skiing season was opened punctually on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, and this on an elevation of only ~200 meters above sea level at the lower terminus and ~500m on the summit! During the first half of October, the golf course was shared between golfers and cross-country skiers. Quite a unique sight indeed. However, by mid-October, it began snowing really, and slowly, Lapland turned into a winter-wonderland.

Apart from the peculiarities of an early skiing season start, Levi is quite Finnish, despite aiming for an international clientele. All of the thousands of holiday cottages are set up among the woods. All offer stunning, unhindered views to the next trees, some of them so close, you can touch them through the windows...

Without pandemic, Levi would be bustling with tourists from all over the world. Seeing the many British pubs and there like, the resort town must be especially popular with visitors from the UK. Well, Levi is not only marketed as a ski resort, but the resort village also boasts a golf course. Furthermore, tour operators capitalize on Levi's location only 170 km north of the Arctic Circle as a real bonanza.



## The arctic circle at Rovaniemi: where Santa Clauses separates fools and money

During our stage at Levi, we had regular reindeer sightings. Sometimes, a flock passed by our cottage, was free roaming around the village or grazed on the nearby golf-course. However, for most tourists to Lapland, seeing Reindeer or snow hare, seems just too boring. They go for the many "true Arctic experiences" on offer; like riding a snowmobile or tours with a dog-sledge.

According to guest-book entries, there is one ultimate thing to do: The 175 km tourist bus trip through the forest to visit exactly that section of the Arctic Circle, where Santa Clause's business minded advisers built an entire village just for the sake of tourism: the Santa Claus Village. Basically, this trip is a thrill packed day,

offering the unique opportunity to buy incredibly useful items like Moose dolls, dried Reindeer droppings or Santa-Clause buttons, to name just a few.

The more daring can also book one of Santa's adventures, like a sauna bath, ice fishing, sledding or merry-go-around on a frozen lake and much else. Surely, this makes you hungry. One of Santa's pizzas or burgers washed down with a drink served in a glass made of ice, is definitely much satisfying everybody. It doesn't matter, if it costs more than any gourmet meal or authentic Asian food in nearby Rovaniemi downtown.

We, however, had already that much fun browsing through the website of Santa Clause's village, visiting it would be going over the top! Instead, we've opted for a four-day stage in the wintery snowy town of Rovaniemi. For € 43.- a night, we've rented a brand new, fully equipped 40m<sup>2</sup> apartment. As common in Finland, it even had a sauna attached to the bathroom. Though, for the bargain-price we've paid, we had to sweat without Santa's advice.



On the other hand, the town of Rovaniemi has an excellent selection of shops, selling also useful, and economical items, like practical, convenient clothing, you won't find outside Scandinavia. What a stark contrast to our Vienna stage 8 months ago. There, we were bluntly told at several clothing shops: "You mean something comfy and functional? Sorry, we don't sell that, such is not in fashion now!" Luckily, Northerners tend to look for practical, rather than for fashionable clothing.

## Spending winter at Finnish holiday homes: luxury behind trees

After a month in Lapland, we continued on October 26<sup>th</sup> to the Gulf of Bothnia. On the outskirts of Oulu, we stayed at a brand new, very comfortable holiday-cottage in Haukipudas, some 20 km north of the city centre.



Here on the coast, it was much milder than in the interior, meaning: after two weeks among a winery landscape, everything here was still green. Ironically, exactly here, we had a carport. Haukipudas is a perfect location to go for long walks and also to visit the very appealing town centre of Oulu, which we enjoyed very much.

After two weeks, we moved on, only 150km to the north-east on Nov.12, 2020. Iso-Syöte, near Pudasjärvi was our next destination; again a ski resort on 200 meters above sea level. It is a rather small, self-proclaimed boutique-destination with 10 lifts. Yet, in 2019 Iso-Syöte was lucky to be awarded as Finland's best ski-resort for the third consecutive year.

Though, snow-cannons and snow-groomers were already at work, the skiing season was not meant to start before December. Also here, we had a contemporary modern and cosy holiday cottage – of course with splendid tree view.



We enjoyed a last autumn-week with hiking in the woods and up to the top of the mountain. Then we got a good load of snow and spent the second week re-discovering the area again. The landscape looked now so different with a white blanket of snow. At that time, we weren't aware that winter was to accompany us until end of May!



Even though the skiing season had started already at the beginning of October in Levi, most Finnish ski resorts were still in absolute pre-season-mode until Xmas. Therefore, meaning some of the best holiday cottages were still luring with bargain prices.

As we travel with more time than money, it was just apparent to go for another Ski-resort. On November 26, we moved on to Ukkohalla near Hyrnsalmi. We had pre-arranged a three week's stage at a large, modern, yet traditional two storeys holiday house in block house style. Just like our previous holiday home, it came with all the luxuries like dishwasher, front-loading washer, drying cabinet, internet-connection, and of course a Sauna, after all we're in Finland. Even Finns living on subsistence level, seem to have one!



We got the impression that holiday homes in Finland have in general a much higher standard than those in Sweden and Norway. Finnish holiday homes are usually purposely built as such. It's an exception to see converted, older homes. Actually, winterized houses are always well equipped, extremely well insulated and well heated, in most cases with underfloor heating.

No worries if it's 28°C BELOW frozen outside. The holiday-cottage temperature is pre-set to a cosy 28°C inside! Surely, if outside temperatures drop to MINUS 33°C or even worse, MINUS 44°C, you must bear it, that the inside temperature might drop one or two degrees, leaving holiday makers with a "chilly" 26°C - 27°C.

Luckily, there is always a sauna, and often a woodstove, helping on freezing cold days to reach the comfort level of also 40°C inside. On odd days with MINUS 40° outside, it's extremely important that your winter holiday at a Finnish holiday cottage does not get out of balance because inside & outside temperature do not only differ by an algebraic sign!

Sauna cabins, connected to the controlled ventilation, sophisticated heating systems, windows that can only be opened ajar, and high-class insulation all add up to the cosiness of a Mökki, how traditional Finnish holiday cottages are called.

Finnish holiday cottages do not only come extremely well equipped and with heating expenses included, but mostly also with an unobstructed view into the Finnish forests. Often, on the road access facing facades, there are barely any windows. Whatever for? There is hardly anything interesting worthwhile to see, as the closest trees can be more than 5 – 8 meters away.

Instead, the view out of the living-room windows is normally just astonishing: dense forest as far as the eye can reach. Some mispositioned, cheap Finnish holiday cottages have the closest trees sometimes 2 to 4 meters away. At top quality locations however, the closest trees are so close by, you could touch them, if you could open the windows.

Surely, cottages on top quality locations are situated on a lake-, sea-, or river-shore. Nevertheless, there will always be enough trees on your wooded site, just to make sure that those boating on the waterbody can't spoil your holiday by peering at your holiday idyll. In most cases, they won't even see a glimpse of your holiday cottage. All that keen leisure captains can see, is the unique beauty of the Finnish forests. Basically, occupant of Finnish holiday cottages have the privilege to enjoy the same phantastic views as those boating, but without taking the chance of getting seasick!



## Turn of the year in Finland: pilothouse near a canal

Meanwhile, it was already mid-December and the public holidays for the turn of the year were approaching, which is why the choice of high-quality holiday cottages offered for a budget price was limited. Never mind, near Heinävesi, we found a nicely renovated former pilothouse near the Taivallahden canal. It was also equipped with all contemporary amenities, including reverse-cycle air conditioning and underfloor heating in some rooms. Though here, it was not as extraordinarily well insulated, as modern houses are, so we had to support the heating with heat storing fireplaces, three in numbers.

The only problem was that the owners thought, it is not safe to light them up in the morning, and leave the house after breakfast. We were recommended to stay home until the embers were annealed! Hence, it always needed some careful planning, when to light the fire. If the sun was out, the fire had to be out too, so that we could go out....



Furthermore, going out for walks was a not that rewarding, but rather risky affair: the vista spoiled us with the same tree species, we could admire just outside the windows, only were there other trees! Moreover, winter had meanwhile tightened its grip and to go for a stroll felt sometimes like walking on glaze, covered by a whiff of snow. Under such conditions, only shoe spikes could make walking a safe experience, but unfortunately, they were sold out at the nearby town.

There were several lakes in the vicinity and witnessing how their freezing progressed, was an interesting sight. The canal behind our holiday house, links several waterbodies. The ice that formed on the canal evolved initially in an eerie greyish colour. Only later, when it got snow covered, the white-in-white diffused.



## Helsinki: The Finnish capital had whetted our appetite for more of Scandinavia

Heinävesi was as far south as we went this winter (~ 350km north of Helsinki). As the Finnish capital had less lax Corona rules than the rest of the country, we didn't feel the urge to go there this time. Yet, in 2017, whilst enroute to Singapore, Finnair had given us an economical chance for a four-day's stopover in Helsinki during midsummer. This was naturally a big contrast to wintery Finland!



From a central student residence, which functions as a hostel during summer months, we had explored the city afoot back then. To us, the Finnish capital was as beautiful as ever. We loved the contrast between the lively downtown area, the busy ferry port,

and the lovely Scandinavian coastal landscape with its countless islets only a short walk from the centre. We had enjoyed Finnish delicacies (salmon & reindeer) in some of the many "Ravintolas" (restaurants) and gone to the harbourside time and time again, to marvel at the giant ferry boats. We had gotten longing to spend more time up north, but as our flights to Singapore and the South Pacific were booked, it had to be postponed. Back in 2017, we would never ever have thought that only a few years later, a pandemic would force us to spend even more time in Scandinavia, than we had ever planned to...

## Holiday idyll near Kuopio: joy and sorrow of ice-cold winters



Back to the Finnish winter; to January 2021! The more we got sick of seeing trees only (Brigitte even more so), the more it became apparent that Corona travel-restrictions force us to prolong our stage in Finland. However, with some good luck, we got scent of a typical, though totally atypical Finnish Mökki (holiday cottage) in Karttula, 40km west of Kuopio. It was a traditional, superbly equipped blockhouse, again with more luxuries than needed. But the biggest asset was its location on a strawberry farm. No trees, just unobstructed view to a lake. What a luxury, unobstructable view plus a BBQ hut right on the lake, a private pier, and even a boat, basically everything visitors think is the essence of a cottage holiday in Scandinavia.

lake was solidly frozen and the with a meter of snow. Our communicative by Finnish clear the snow and shovel a (90 the BBQ hut. Unfortunately, it some physical exercise, but their hard work to nought within a from the holiday house over the marvellous.



Surely, now, mid-January, the sunbathing lawn was covered landlords, who were unusually standards, had felt obliged to cm deep) footpath ~30m down to was only good for them having extremely strong winds brought few hours! Nevertheless, the view island-dotted frozen lake was just

Surely, at such a privileged, almost treeless lakeside location, we had to extend our stage. It was just too good to be true. This was easier said, than done. Our landlord told us, during a normal, Corona-free winter,

extending would be no problem, as most of the regulars are Russians, who normally shun the time between New-Year and Easter. With more than 3 million visitors annually, Russians are the backbone of tourists to Finland. During a normal year, no sane Finn would voluntarily book a holiday cottage on a treeless yard either. But the Corona-Pandemic also forced the locals to accept some painful compromises, as the hot loved shopping weekends to London, Paris, Dubai or New-York became a pry of quarantine obligations.



As our landlord's five cottages offered exceptional value for money, young, budget-minded Finns booked them every weekend as an affordable alternative to their usual activities, if only for one to two days.

Well, changing every weekend to another cottage was not really what we wanted, but after some shifting around the other reservations, we agreed to change our cottage once only, and having a gap weekend at the nearby town of Kuopio in between. Wow, that was the right decision, even more so, as we had chosen a freezing cold, but very sunny weekend.



## **Kuopio: divine views over the Finnish lake-plateau**

The capital of the North Savo district showed itself in the best of light. Furthermore, the bombastic vistas from Kuopio tower over the Finnish lake-plateau were just awesome. Moreover, we had a great meal at a gourmet-restaurant, where we had gotten the last table, and another great meal at an Indian, where we had been the only guests dining in (since Corona, the clientele of cheaper places seemed to prefer take-away). Surely, we



also enjoyed a walk on frozen lake Kallavesi, where several kilometres long cross country skiing tracks, and an ice-skating track had been prepared on the ice-sheet in front of the town.

Almost too soon, we got back to Karttula, where we moved into an even bigger cottage upon return. During our all in all 5 weeks, we enjoyed the Finnish winter at its best. Whereas autumn had often been completely overcast and sometimes rainy, we were frequently spoiled with stark-blue skies as of February till Easter. Yet, temperatures were rather cold, several times they fell a few degrees below MINUS 30°C. Nevertheless, on wind calm days, leaving the well heated house for a walk was no biggie, only on windy days, it became rather unpleasant.

Contemporary cars, however, seem to be more sensitive to the extremely cold winter temperatures in the far north, than their predecessors. Especially, if you leave your vehicle without mercy outside, to bear deadly cold temperatures for a fortnight, without using it! Ten years ago, when we also overwintered in Scandinavia, our at the time car (also a Dacia), never ever had a problem, though it had to endure temperatures up (or down) to MINUS 43° C. Our current car however, got away with milder temperatures of only MINUS 33°C! Surely, our new car's engine runs much smother when we start it at freezing cold temperatures, only its modern electronics and advanced emission-control systems nibbled with the cold. Below MINUS 20°C, the Multi-Media system's screen was literally frozen, probably as a warning that you could harm your fingers, if you operate the

touchscreen at such low temperatures! However, after the car's heating system (actually, the car's climate control) did its part, the system was usable again.



A bit more cold-resistant proofed the car's SCR-catalyst, though if you're so heartless NOT to use the car for a longer period of time, several days with temperatures below MINUS 30°C seem enough that it's AdBlue heart freezes (even though it's getting heated).

Only a few years ago, the AdBlue emission control systems were commonly deactivated during extreme cold spells, but contemporary environment laws make this prosecutable. If a failing emission control system is detected, you must have it fixed at a workshop within the next 800km at the latest. Thereafter, the car stubbornly refuses to start the engine, eventually, it must observe the law. The friendly grease monkey we went to see, just said: "during Finnish winters, freezing AdBlue Systems are a cross-market problem, but don't worry about it, your car is still under warranty".

## Ice-rivers: a spectacular sight

Mid-February, we left the interior and moved (back) to the upper Gulf of Bothnia. Our next winter dwelling was a somehow special holiday cottage in Pyhäjoki. It was a kind of an old fashioned (but new) roundwood blockhouse with a contemporary modern interior finish. From there, we had uncountable options for walks.



Within only a few kilometres, we were at the Bothnian sea. With the days getting longer and warmer, many a Finn took to the frozen sea with long, often battery-operated Augers (drills); ice fishing was their thrill! There were sometimes hundreds of keen fishermen sitting in front of an ice hole, seeking the life of the hungry fish. Others opted for snowmobiling or went for walks on the ice. A cross-country track was laid on frozen Pyhäjoki-River, which surprised us - not far from the ski-track, a medium-sized waterfall was roaring ...

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, we moved on to Haukipudas, where we've had a temporary abode already last October. Now we've inhabited a different holiday cottage, a bit older, but still at least as modern and even a bit cosier. As expected, it was also placed among the woods, but through the trees, we could even see a glimpse of the



Bothnian sea. However, the difference to our October stage was striking. Then, the landscape had been lush and green. Now, everything was covered with a blanket of snow (they didn't have that much snow in 30 years, we were told) and here too, the Gulf of Bothnia was solidly frozen. Not only ice-fishing, also cross-country-skiing, racing around with snow scooters and walking proved very popular with all age groups on the huge sheet of ice covering the Bothnian sea.



After 2 weeks, we've moved some 60 km down the coast to Siikajoki, where we had a lovely, three storey cottage on the shore of the namesake river, which was solidly frozen when we arrived. On the first few sunny days, we got the impression that the ice was already thawing, but soon we realised, it was just an ultra-thin layer of water above a solid, still clearly more than half a meter thick icesheet.

However, just in front of our cottage, there was an island, dividing the wide river and causing some rapids, even below the ice. This got obvious when the catchment lake(s) upstream got regulated. Initially, the ice sheet got dotted with a few cracks, releasing a trickle of water.



However, after about two weeks, the upstream water regulation caused the giant icesheet in front of our cottage to crack and to move away within minutes.

Giant, up to one-meter-thick ice sheets rushed now downstream. Whenever they bumped into the still solid part of the icecap, it broke further apart, sending more giant ice-blocs downstream. It wasn't secure anymore to stand close to the river, as some massive icesheets were washed up to the shore. A few hundred meters downstream from the rapids, the icecap stayed intact. Therefore, the ice-river of giant, meter thick icesheets was stopped, meaning a few ice-blocks disappeared below the ice, but most stockpiled above the icecap, leaving behind a hill of pancake like piles of massive ice sheets!

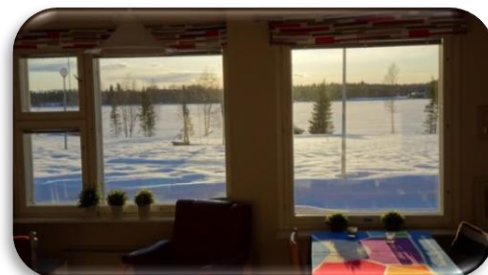


Here, we witnessed a truly impressive spectacle of nature. Mind, the previous day, there were still some daredevils racing with their snow scooters over the icecap that now had vanished within half an hour! Only 500 meters up- and downstream, the icecap was still intact, probably inviting more madcaps to combine risk and fun ... With such a spectacle in front of our balcony, our three weeks in Siikajoki went in a flash (our cottage was the only one out on a limb with river-view, not tree-view!).

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, we continued to Itäkoski, a bit north of Kemi. Also there, we managed to get one of the odd



Finnish holiday cottages not hidden behind trees. For it, our landlords proved to be typical, reticent Finns; usually they responded to our e-mail requests with only two, exceptionally three characters: "ok", or "yes". In front of our Itäkoski cottage, there was a frozen river in our view. Mighty Kemijoki was about 600 meters wide. As a retaining wall was only about half a kilometre downstream, the ice lasted until the beginning of Mai. Then, the power plant volunteered to give the river back to the leisure captains.



Instead of adjusting the water level slowly and carefully, the water flow was first brought to almost stop, causing the water (and the icecap) to rise. Then, all the doors in the dam were being opened sumptuously, to create a cavern between the still more than half a metre thick icecap and the water surface. It didn't take long,

until the icecap collapsed, leaving uncountable, giant icesheets floating gently down the river. Some were initially so big, there would have been enough space for several soccer fields! Other floating icesheets were rather small, only ~60-100m in width, but up to an impressive kilometre long!



Itäkoski is situated less than 100 km south of the polar circle and therefore, you should be able to see the northern lights here. Though, mid of April the nights don't get dark enough anymore, to see them well. Only between 0:30h and about 3AM it was darkish and so the northern lights unfortunately faded into the afterglow which soon thereafter turned into dawn.

### **Last but not least: a couple of jabs restore travel freedom to some extent**

Spectacular sights such as riptide ice-rivers were the highlight of our stage in Finland. Nevertheless, we were keen to see something more than trees everywhere. Following corona-statistics closely, we had reason to hope that Norway would re-open its border to northern Finland soon. Therefore, we decided to move northwards, opting for another stage at the ski resort town of Levi, to which we returned on Mai 10<sup>th</sup> 2021.



End of September, we had witnessed with astonishment how snow from the last season was being distributed over two ski slopes and a cross-country track, and how their skiing slopes and cross country tracks had been

opened at the very beginning of October, despite temperatures up to 15°C.

Now, we returned only a week after the 7-months long ski-season had ended. Nevertheless, more than a dozen snow-groomers and dozens of staff were still working on the skiing slopes throughout May, to stockpile

and cover masses of (artificially) produced snow, to summer it so it can be used in autumn for another early opening of the ski season.



Our intended 2 – 3 months in Finland had meanwhile accumulated to 8 months. A worldwide pandemic and a life as roving spirits are somehow as incompatible as anything can be. As mankind has decided to abrogate natural selection, vaccination is certainly the most efficient way to end the pandemic. Furthermore, it became more and more obvious that being vaccinated will be THE KEY to continue our travels, so we had to find a way to get the door-opening job!

Therefore, we made some effort to get a Corona vaccination. Already because of the language barrier and even more so, because she wasn't sure whether we qualify as "leftover tourists", Brigitte was sceptical. She said: you Heinz, never take a NO for a NO. I always wonder, how often your insisting brings some success, whereas my questioning is of no avail.



On the day a nearby Lappish 6.000-soul village opened its Corona vaccination Hotline for Heinz' age band, we set the alarm clock and Heinz called almost early. Not unexpectedly, the phone was answered by a synthetic voice. However, after some Finnish sentences, there was a "for English press two". Bingo. After confirming our phone number, we heard a "thank you, we will call you back". Wow, that was easy. A few hours later, we really got a call and after Heinz answered some questions, we had an appointment 6 working days later.

According to Finnish rules, if one household member qualifies for a Corona-vaccination, everyone of the same household gets vaccinated. Therefore, also Brigitte, then a not even 60 years old greenhorn, got vaccinated thanks to Heinz' senility!



Despite of spring temperatures around 15° - 17°C, our vaccination date was exactly on the day, when winter came back. No worries, by now we were already used to Finland getting embedded with snow, predominantly on those days when we had to hit the road! So, on May 21, the landscape around Levi (200 meters above sea-level) got again powdered in snow.

After driving through a flurry of snow, both of us got vaccinated straightforward at a small regional hospital. The leaflet we were handed regarding possible side-effects of the vaccination against Corona, mentioned foremost that we DON'T have to miss out on daily occurrences, like SAUNA baths! Surely, in Finland this is much more convincing than just promising that you're better protected after the vaccination!

Initially, we were a bit disappointed that we had to wait for three months to get the second jab. Yet, all of Scandinavia had a twelve-weeks interval between the two jabs. Retrospectively, we know that the protective effect with longer intervals between two jabs seems to be even superior – so, it was a blessing in disguise.

After our first jab, we had 10 more days to enjoy the beauty of Finland. It's a pretty country, especially for those seeking top class holiday cottages in the heart of nature, providing plenty of privacy, peace and quiet.

Experiencing an ice-cold winter that lasted almost the entire 8 months we got stuck there due to corona, was another worthwhile experience. Even more so, as virtually every house and every flat has its own sauna. Finland may attract many visitors, as no other European country can boast with so much water and so much forest. The 188'000 lakes are certainly impressive, whereas the uncountable trees that cover 70% of Finland's landmass, hide the full beauty of the country more often than we had appreciated.

## Northern-Norway: 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ months with uninterrupted daylight



Exactly on the day we got our first jab of the Corona-Vaccination, Norway communicated, it will open its borders for several Finnish provinces with low infection rates, including Lapland. Yeah, just great! So, we booked a holiday cottage on Balsfjord near Tromsø, as soon as we found an entry on the Norwegian immigration website, stating that ten days in a Finnish low-incident region are enough. Confident that nothing can stop us from entering Norway, we drove towards the border crossing near Kilpisjärvi on May 31<sup>st</sup>. On any account, we had spent at least (the last) 4 months in low transmission districts of Finland.

About five Kilometres after the Finnish/Norwegian border, Norwegian police officers stopped everybody to check whether they arrive in compliance with the Corona act. Surely, they didn't expect any non-Scandinavians popping up from Finland's northern border! As displeased they seemed to be with our arrival, as pleased we were that they processed us with bare faces!

After examining our number plate, they came up to our windows and we welcomed them with: "Hello, we're probably the most special arrival's for today!" They confirmed and asked whether we're Finnish. After denying, they asked how we had made it into Finland. After explaining that we got stuck in Finland due to Corona, they replied the border is only open for those residing in Lapland, not for visitors to Lapland!

After our objection that the immigrations-website indicates that 10 days in Lapland are sufficient to enter Norway, the two clerks backtracked for consultations and phone-calls. After five minutes, they still insisted that we're not meant to enter Norway and asked repeatedly, whether the cottage we stayed in is our own property, or just rented.

We guess they looked for reasons that the Finns (5 km down the road) had to take us back, as cottage owners were allowed to enter, but other foreigners not! After proving that we've been renting and showing also a contract for a cottage in Norway, they retreated again for consultations.

After another 10 minutes, one official returned and said, even though the website (falsely) states "10 days are enough", we wouldn't be allowed to enter. But as they can't let us camp in the still snow-covered middle of nowhere, until somebody in Oslo decides tomorrow what to do with us, he and his colleague decided to declare "exceptional circumstances" and to let us in! Lucky buggers we are but that was tight.

## Balsfjord: a newly renovated holiday-house with a stunning view

Now, we continued for another hour to our pre-booked holiday cottage right on Balsfjord near Storsteinnes, just a bit south of Tromsø. Here, our landlord was just giving the final touch to his parental home, which he had converted into a contemporary holiday dwelling. Due to Corona, he thought he'd already put it online in time to fetch some attention. But he didn't expect anybody to book it anytime soon, as long as the borders remained pretty closed. Therefore, our last-minute booking became a real challenge to him and his wife... He had even to set up a temporary water pipe, as the water supply was still frozen!



After 8 months in Finland, Norway was a real dream. Suddenly, we were spoiled with unobstructed views, instead of uncountable trees in front of any window and along any roadside. Our holiday cottage was sitting right on Balsfjord, and the view was just awesome. Wherever we went, Fjord-views were stunning. Absolutely unusual for the far north, the county "Troms og Finnmark" spoiled us with several heatwaves with temperatures well above 30°C. Despite these rather hot temperatures and despite midsummer approaching, there was still snow lying almost all the way down to the shoreline. The fjords rarely freeze, even during peak winter, but only a few dozen metres above sea level, many water bodies were still frozen, despite the heatwaves.

Yes, of course; we could enjoy Northern-Norway's beauty day and night. If it was raining during the day, we just postponed our outings to the "night-time" and were rewarded with pictures in the best of light. Already since mid-April, we hadn't experienced a really dark night anymore, and now, beginning of June, we had more than two months with midnight sun ahead of us – what an experience!

Only in June, spring arrived but the plants grew like crazy, helped by the abundance of sunlight. Greenery seemed almost lusher than in Switzerland, with many plant species growing higher or having bigger leaves than we know it from our former homeland. Not only pretty plant species could be seen, but it was also the time of animal babies. We hadn't seen Reindeer calves and so many kinds of sea bird chicks before. They were all incredibly cute – if you got to see them up close. The former were very shy, the latter aggressively defended by the parent birds.



On Balsfjord, we had a perfect first base to discover Northern-Norway for 4 weeks. Troms og Finnmark's uncountable, spectacular landscapes awaited us, indifferent the direction we've ventured out. Be it just to the opposite side of the fjord, or as far away as Senja Island. We enjoyed walking, but realized that it was too early for the mountains, even now in June. Once we turned back halfway up, after we had crossed various snowfields that were still pretty big and deep, whereas the ground that was free from snow was completely soggy. In other parts, the track was rather a muddy riverbed. So, we rather enjoyed the many waterfalls, lakes and fjords just from the roadside.



## Troms og Finnmark: just awesome everywhere

Troms og Finnmark is probably Norway's largest province, and it has much more to offer than just the area around Balsfjord. Yet, our next temporary abode was not very far away, this time right above the city centre of Tromsø; again with a superb view.

Surprisingly, the islands north of the town boasted some of the districts most spectacular coastal scenery, including picturesque beaches framed by craggy, high mountains as backdrop. We let ourselves amaze how often the water was incredibly turquoise green, marvelled at the pretty fishing villages and sporadic white sandy beaches many Mediterranean beach resorts could be jealous of.



Walking around the pleasant town of Tromsø, barely anything reminded us of the Corona Pandemic. Shops and restaurants were open and also the staff worked topless; only most tourist businesses were closed, as the borders remained pretty proof. Well, souvenir-shops, up here frankly named and marked "tourist shop", remained open for local visitors, but all the tour agencies were firmly closed. No sane Norwegian would ever come up with the idea to book a tour just to see northern lights, reindeer or the midnight sun. They know, it's all just there and everybody spending some time around here, will see some of it once a while.



The midnight sun was visible only around the corner from where we stayed, we've sighted reindeer on the footpath 50 meters from a Thai restaurant where we had dinner and many more on the islands north of Tromsø (connected by bridges and undersea tunnels).

Nevertheless, for most package tourists to Tromsø, Northern-Light and Midnight sun chasing tours, as well as reindeer feeding and petting seems to be the highlight of any group tour to the far north! Well, chasing Northern lights or the Midnight sun means in practice, keen winter tourists might see a glimpse of the Aurora borealis, even on nights with dense cloud cover. Tour-operators promise to search for tiny openings in the blanket of clouds and then drive the pack there, however far it is!

After two weeks in Tromsø, we moved north-east and rented another holiday appartement, this time in Rotsund, east of Lyngen. Also here, our large granny flat rewarded us with more breath-taking vistas, right from our windows. The panorama included a fjord, islands connected by ferry, the peaks of the Lyngen Alps (1.500-1.800m high), plus a lot of neat houses and boatsheds



During our three weeks, we went on countless hikes and did many sight-seeing drives through the picturesque landscape. Several national parks with deep valleys and high waterfalls waited to be adored. Sometimes, we



held our breath when standing on a high bridge looking down into the rage of the water, or when standing in a deep chasm looking up at the rocks towering precariously above us.

### During 8 days to the Russian border: even more breath-taking landscapes



On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, we left Rotsund and started a big tour eastward, driving literally as “Far North” as you can go within Scandinavia, which means all the way to the Russian border. We almost couldn’t believe how many more astonishing natural sights Troms og Finnmark has on offer.



After a night in Alta, we continued in the best of light through amazing landscapes to Ifjord and the next morning onwards to pretty Kjøllefjord, where we stayed for a couple of nights at the local hotel. Their food was nothing to write home about, but we got compensated with a large, modern room spoiling us with superb vistas of the lovely fishing village, and the landmark castle rock. Additional spectacular landscapes awaited on our outing to Mehamn and on to Europe’s northernmost lighthouse Slettnes fyr.



To us the authentic fisherman’s village of Kjøllefjord, situated (almost) as much north as the famous North Cape, is much more charming, and not as overrun by tourists as (the visitor centre at) Norway’s northernmost road-accessible point only ~40 miles across the Barents Sea.



Looking for additional “off the beaten track” highlights, we decided for Kongsfjord and Båtsfjord.

However, as it was still peak season, in both places all of the few rooms were booked out. Not a worry, instead we took a nice cabin in Polmak and did a

daytrip from there up to Kongsfjord and Båtsfjord, again an extraordinarily picturesque drive. It led us basically from one fjord over the mountain, down to the next, whereby we passed high rocky plains, deep cut valleys and many rivers, lakes, bogs and impressive coastlines.

Next, we continued to Kirkenes, Norway’s easternmost town. From there, a day trip brought us to the hamlet Grense Jakobselv, right on the Russian border. It’s a unique and very history charged place. Due to Corona, the Norwegian / Russian border was now even more insurmountable than it ever had been during the entire Cold War. Otherwise, despite the many NATO and Russian military observation towers on both sides of the border, things got quite relaxed during the last few decades. Norwegians and Russians living within 30 km from the border were allowed to cross the border visa-free at any time. There were even discussions whether this privilege should be extended to all Norwegians and Russian. Then, the pandemic hit both countries and the governments in Oslo and Moscow suddenly agreed that Corona is a bigger threat than any war ever could be, so the only feasible option for them seemed to seal the border!

The Ukraine war did probably further wrap up the border. We’re very worried that too many gullible voters around the world also elect villains spreading angst, fear and hatred, while making commoners believe to be patriots and the only true voice of the people...

Meanwhile, it was August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021, only two days prior to our appointment for a second Corona jab in Finland. So, it was time to wave farewell to Troms og Finnmark. Northern-Norway prove to be perfect to while the time away until we would get our second prick. Actually, it was impossible to just rest and relax – we just had to go out and about, taking advantage of the amazing scenery around the fjords, as well as the unusually sunny and warm weather. We were constantly smitten by Norway’s phantastic landscapes that frequently outdo one another, wherever you go.

## A second jab in Finland and a month across Sweden



Admittedly, it was a bit of gambling to travel for 2 ½ months to Norway, instead of waiting for our second jab. But after our stage in Finland had accumulated (Corona-related) to 8 months, our feet were just too itchy – we had to dare it

...

Even on August 11<sup>th</sup>, the Finnish border was still pretty closed for those not vaccinated twice. Lucky us, the only border fully open to anybody was in fact the land border to Northern-Norway. Here, the Norwegian border guard gave us a friendly reminder that we need to be fully vaccinated in order to come back, but the Finns were not present at all....

Surely, returning back to Finland, we knew where to go and therefore, we opted for another overnight stay with gourmet meal at the Kultahovi Hotel in Inari.

The following day, we continued to Levi, where we had pre-arranged a well-equipped cottage among the Finnish forest, for 4 days. So, we had a few days for daily sauna-baths, for checking whether the snow stored in May for the coming autumn is still there (it was!), for conquering Mt. Levi for the first time and to take

advantage of Finland's excellent selection of yoghurt and quark. While in Levi, the nights started to turn dark again despite its location still 90mi/150km north of the Arctic Circle. Slowly, the great four months with uninterrupted daylight were ending.

As scheduled, on August 13<sup>th</sup>, we got our second jab. Unfortunately, for foreigners, the Corona certificate was not ready then, but it was being e-mailed to us three weeks later.

We were lucky again, indeed. Sweden, our next destination, only asked for Corona-certificates from those arriving from outside Scandinavia. Meaningfully, they see no sense in checking people again, who had already been checked properly, while entering one of their neighbouring countries.



On August 16<sup>th</sup>, we continued to Swedish Lapland. After overnighing in Gällivare, we continued to Jokkmokk, from where we did an outing along beautiful waterbodies to Kvikkjokk. After a rainy day in Jokkmokk, we drove past countless scenic lakes and bogs to Lycksele. Here, we hired again a camping cottage and visited the town centre in the evening. In this area, it was the last time, we've seen reindeer.

Further on, there were less forests, but pastoral hills and pretty villages instead, especially on Höga Kusten. Countless idyllic fishing villages delight the visitor and thus we took a few days exploring some of these jewels.



Our next destination was history-charged Mora, with its old wooden houses. Here, we stayed for five days at a nice camping-cabin. From there, we discovered the lovely landscapes and the picturesque villages along Lake Siljan, which somehow feels like the quintessence of Sweden.

As the weather gods predicted an unseasonal heatwave, we took the chance to bare it all again. At Gustavsbergs Naturistcamping in Nora, we got a simple appartement with a sunny terrace. As the unseasonal warmth spoiled us for a fortnight (with only small breaks), we kept on extending into the second September week. We enjoyed this charming place on lake Nora so much, the only outing was to the lively town of Örebro.

Just a day before some heavy downpour was predicted, we left the naturist paradise in Nora on September 10<sup>th</sup> 2021. Southern Norway was now promising less rain and more sun, so it was time to say goodbye to Sweden for now. We continued via Arvika to Charlottenberg, a tiny Swedish border-village with three shopping centres, all aiming at Norwegian clients who consider it a human right to go bargain hunting in Sweden.

## Southern-Norway: boasting sheer beauty everywhere



Our Corona Certificate made the border crossing from Sweden to Norway, on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021, easy and worry-free. The famous ski-resort town of Lillehammer, our first overnight stop, was now, end of summer, expectably rather quiet. Nevertheless, we did an enjoyable walk from our camping cottage near the river, up to the pleasant town centre, after which we had an excellent meal at a Chinese restaurant.

From Lillehammer, it would have been only a bit more than 2 hours drive to Lom. Nevertheless, as we had scheduled five days to reach the city of Bergen, we decided for a detour via Beitostølen in a side valley. It was a very scenic drive, incorporating a breath-taking mountain road and two of Norway's famous wooden churches, one at Nordsinni, as well as the stave church in Hegge.



Once arriving in the skiing resort village of Beitostølen, we got caught flat-footed, as we had to pay peak season prices, despite being in a place absolutely off the beaten track for any late summer visitors, we thought! Well, Beitostølen was only unnoticed by foreign visitors, but seemingly ALL Norwegians knew that the nearby Valdresflye plain already gleamed in autumn colours at their best.

Therefore, weekend prices for tourist accommodations exploded, and the uncountable rooms and holiday flats were very well booked. As it was Saturday night, we had to bite the bullet and pay the price. Later, we had to grin and bear it, when the waiter of the gourmet-temple across the street told us, it is booked out tonight. Surely, on Sunday night, we would have gotten the room for half the price and could have had a table at any restaurant we desired!



However, next day's drive over the autumnal Valdresflye high plain was just fantastic! No wonder it felt as if all Norwegians would be just on THAT small road. Still, with such incredible autumn colours, it was very rewarding and quite different to our previous visit in Mai 2010. Back then, the Valdresflye plain had presented itself as an amazing winter-wonderland. This far north and on 1'389 meters above sea level, winter leaves late and autumn arrives early, giving only a small time-gap for spring and summer.

Towards the evening, we reached Lom, where we could admire the famous wooden stave church right from our cottage on a campground. The next day was again no less than a true culmination of highlights. First, we were rewarded with more unbelievably intense autumn colours and more breath-taking landscapes, while crossing the Sognefjell. With 1.434 m above sea level, this has Northern-Europe's highest pass road. Then we passed impressive Åsafossen waterfall above Skjolden, before descending to picturesque Lustrafjord. This is the rearmost part of Sognefjord, at 204 km the longest and deepest fjord in the world.

Skirting the coast, we reached the summer holiday resort village of Balestrand, which was now, mid-September, already in hibernation. So, for overnighing, we had to continue on to pretty Høyanger. The next day, we admired the sheer beauty of Sognefjord, which we traversed by ferry from Lavik to Oppedal.



On September 14<sup>th</sup> 2021, we've reached the beautiful city of Bergen in the best of light, despite its reputation for being Norway's wettest place. Surely, with such an exceptional, dark blue sky, we couldn't refrain capturing the most remarkable parts of this extraordinary, beautiful town again and again, until we got sore fingers!

Along the harbour-front, the town houses were of outstanding beauty and steeped in history. Many also host outstanding restaurants, just perfect to re-celebrate Heinz' birthday. In absence of better alternatives, we've celebrated it already at a rather modest countryside restaurant a few days ago. Norway is certainly among those countries that did rise from culinary hell up to high skies with creative, world class cuisine.



## Picturesque Fjords: tourist marvels become engineering marvels

On September 16<sup>th</sup>, we drove south to the island of Stord, where we had reserved a holiday house high above Langenuen Sound, a pretty offshoot of Hardangerfjord. The location of the house was divine and the view down to the fjords' dark blue water, sometimes with a blaze of colours as in a south-sea lagoon, was just nondescript.

Surely, we did go out to discover beautiful Stord Island, as well as the surrounding regions. Yet, the superb vistas often tempted us to just stay home and while the time away watching the many ferryboats, liners, oil and gas ships, fishing boats, cruise liners and other vessels passing the magnificent sound below.



After two weeks, we continued southwards to Stavanger, a very pleasant town, where we encountered the first cruise liner in a long time. As often in Norway, the trip to Stavanger involved several ferry crossings of the country's uncountable, picturesque fjords. What's certainly a big joy for tourists, is surely a waste of time for commuters.



Therefore, the government invented a huge road upgrade project, aiming at replacing all ferry crossings along the coastal highway E39 between Trondheim and Kristiansand (1.130 km) with sub-sea tunnels, bridges, floating bridges and the like. Many of Norway's fjords are already crossed by (sometimes frightening dark) subsea tunnels. However, cutting out a tunnel below the deepest fjords, where the sea floor is up to two kilometres below the water surface, cannot be done by drilling classic sub-sea tunnels. Those would be far too steep, if they would traverse the rock underneath the sea floor. Therefore, special solutions, such as sub-sea tunnels floating on pontoons and there like, are now under consideration.

To complete the new road link quickly, it was decided to implement the "easy" sections first, such as e.g. the new Rogfast-Tunnel. This 27 km long undersea tunnel is now under construction by use of well-known technologies. It will consist of two main tubes, an emergency tube and a grade separated junction in the middle of the tunnel, which shall lead to two under-sea roundabouts spreading out to several access drives, plus a 5 km long corkscrew tube, connecting Kvitsøy Island with the main tunnel. Though, upon completion ~2030, Rogfast will be the longest road-, as well as the longest subsea tunnel in the world, other subprojects of the new E39 are even more pretentious.

Sure enough, a tunnel can also shorten a waterway. So it's just logical that Norway plans an imposing 1.7 km long ship tunnel, big enough for cruise-liners!

Oil and Gas made Norway wealthy. Nevertheless, the revenue is also used to give environment friendly technologies a boost. Most car ferries and many Hurtigruten vessels, are already electrified. On the road network, many buses run with electricity. Of new, private car registrations, the proportion of electric vehicles has already surpassed the 70% mark, tending upwards.

The oil-wealth has also reached the common man. Most Norwegians own a holiday cottage, many also a campervan (bobil), a boat, maybe a quadbike, and of course a snowmobile – winter would be too boring without.

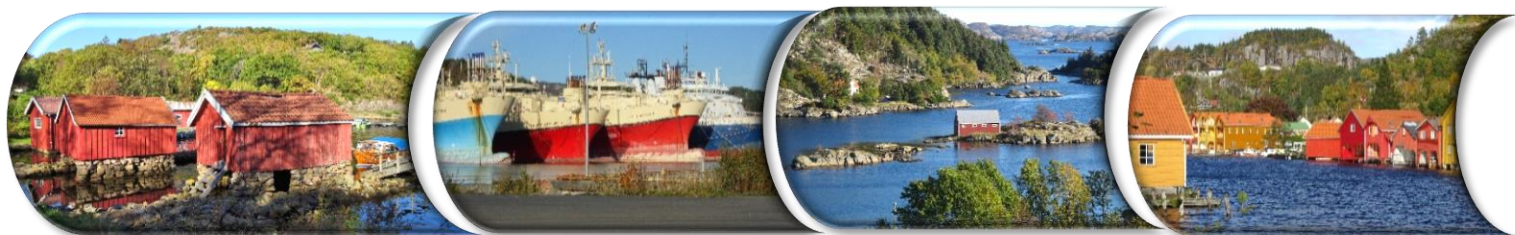
## **Cottage holiday: outstanding views outshine each other**

On October 2, 2021, we moved to our next temporary abode; a brand new, large modern flat in Lyngdal.



The owner has built this jewel as pastime above his (hobby-) workshop in a former stable. Here, the vista was

not as outstanding as from our last Also visiting the costal settlements and fishing villages, as well as the autumnal interior, was very rewarding. By mid-October already the first snow powdered the mountains, whereas children in the costal lidos were still jumping from diving towers into the sea – what a contrast!



We moved on after 4 weeks, this time to a brand-new holiday cottage 10 kilometres outside of Moi. Again, we had a top location, as our house was towering on a rock outcrop, right above Lake Lundevatnet. It was a typical, contemporary Norwegian holiday cottage awash with light thanks to fully glazed bay windows on both floors. Actually, the house had generous, huge windows everywhere, except in the bedrooms.



Sleeping rooms were, also typical for Norwegian holiday cottages, not just small, but tiny! The layout of contemporary, Norwegian holiday homes can easily boast a 45 m<sup>2</sup> eat in kitchen, a second 30 m<sup>2</sup> lounge on the same floor, plus a 35 m<sup>2</sup> TV-lounge on the second floor, but the bedrooms are rarely bigger than 5.5 m<sup>2</sup>. Sometimes, a bedroom can be as large as 7m<sup>2</sup>, but then it's usually replete with bunkbeds accommodating at least four, but more often 6 sleepers! Norwegian holiday homes are designed for socialising, not for sleeping!

On November 20<sup>th</sup>, we moved on to our next holiday home, again with a million dollars view. It was situated in the holiday- and fisherman-village of Sirevåg on the southwest coast. The house spoiled us with a fully glazed facade to the seaside and half glazed to the back. It had a very big open-plan living room/kitchen, plus again some tiny bedrooms! Norwegians love to have huge windows to be able to enjoy the often great vistas.



If there is a sizable rock on the yard, the holiday home MUST be placed on top of it, just to make the vista even greater!

We fully enjoyed a good four weeks here, with two short snowy periods. Norway's land- and seascapes pampered us also here with great panoramas.

Due to the country's uncountable fjords, Norway offers countless holiday homes on prime locations. Lucky us, found many affordable in off-season.



## Turn of the year: our travel plans adapt according to the possibilities

Well, the end of the year was again approaching. Our initial intention was to spend it in Sweden. However, soon we concluded that Norwegian holiday cottages offer much better value for money during the festive period than those in Sweden. In fact, apart from skiing resorts, Norwegian holiday cottages can be rented for the normal off-season rate, even for the New-Year's period, whereas Swedish prices triple! The holiday preference of German tourists might be responsible for this, as they invade Norway during summer and autumn, but not during winter, probably in fear of the snowy mountain roads, while Sweden is an all-season favourite.

However, we never perceived Norway as much more expensive than Sweden, many things are in fact substantially cheaper in Norway. It's probably booze that makes all the difference, but as we feel life is better without drugs, we don't have to worry about it...



On December 18, 2021, we've moved to our last holiday home in Norway. In Lindesnes, we rented the well restored former residence of an elderly couple. The location was perfect and winter had not exactly arrived yet.

This was in stark contrast to Lyngdal, just over a hill, again on sea level - It had gotten a fair share of the white glory already. Apart from visiting the nearby highlights, like Norway's southernmost lighthouse Lindesnes fyr, the plan was to stay until the beginning of January, and then to tour Denmark for a fortnight, before continuing to Sweden.

However, Denmark's re-introduced Corona-measures made us abandon the Danish section. On December 24<sup>th</sup>, we learned that as of December 28<sup>th</sup>, Sweden was going to request a Corona-test from new-arrivals, even from those fully vaccinated. To us, it was immediately clear that it would be more hassle free and cheaper to write our last few days in Lindesnes off, just to make sure, we arrive in Sweden before December the 28<sup>th</sup>.



Despite feeling forced to leave a few days earlier than appreciated, our three stages in Norway had still added up to 8 months full of excitement. The country's land- and seascapes are no less than a culmination of highlights. The friendly, easy-going locals might be a bit reserved, but fit naturally into this stunning environment. Norwegian tourist brochures habitually depict men near remote water bodies in the raw (from behind). Women, even

while out "hunting", don't wear flimsy, but rather practical clothing and gym shoes, NOT high heels. Even those Norwegian sheilas & blokes who feel the urge to participate at nude dating shows, have the natural desire to show what they received from mother nature, not what they bought from a plastic surgeon. Norway is in any respect a very natural, attractive country, indeed ...



## Back in Sweden: more charming villages and lovely landscapes

In a long drive on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021, we made it via Horten, Moss and the Svinesundsbrua bridge to Sweden, even without the need to present our Corona-certificate, as we were waved through. So, now we were back in the country, where our Scandinavian adventure had started 21 months ago.

Until the Swedes and the Germans were forced to return to work after the holidays, we had to pay peak season prices anyway. So, we decided to stay in one of our favourite regions, we normally only visited on day trips, as Sweden's northwest coast never seems to have proper low season prices. Outside Kungshamn, a pretty village on the picturesque Bohuslän Coast, we found a lovely 50 m<sup>2</sup> camping-bungalow. It sat right on



the waterfront, respectively on an ice sheet, during our first few days. Surely, we had checked whether this cottage would be available for a longer stage, but to be flexible, we had pre-booked it for two days only, as there was no long-stay discount anyway! By mischance, for December 31<sup>st</sup>, somebody had booked exactly that cottage for ONE night only, while we were on the road to reach it. Therefore, we had to shift to a simpler cottage for that single night.

Never mind, for almost two weeks, we enjoyed it to the full, to rediscover the Bohuslän Coast, which we consider as one of Sweden's most beautiful coastal regions. We could even reach some of our favourites, like Smögen and Kungshamn, afoot within one hour. We admired Smögen's famous, gaudy boatsheds in different weather and light-conditions: snow covered after dawn, in fog, as well as in the best of sunlight and without the white magnificence.

Other favourites, like Fjällbacka, Hamburgsund, Bovallstrand and Hunnebostrand were only a short drive away. Despite being primarily summer destinations, there was still a good selection of shops and restaurants open for business.

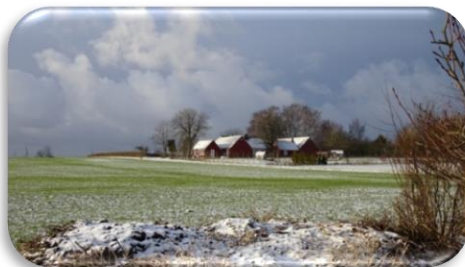


On January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022, we moved southwards to Frillesås (Kungsbacka Ö), where we had arranged a nice holiday flat for a few days. As we just arrived after a snow flurry, we took the chance to discover the surrounding winter-wonderland afoot. An outing with our car brought us to the picturesque Tjolöholm Slott, and



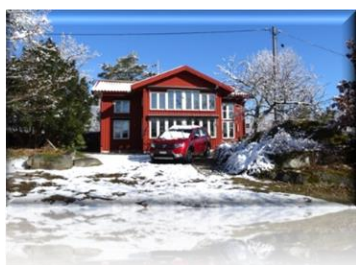
later to the Fjärås Bräcka nature-reserve. When we continued southwards after 4 days full of experience, we hit the coast at Varberg, a pretty town that was again free of snow and ice. We were lucky to admire the famous Moorish-style bathhouse in the best of light, as the sun disappeared soon after our arrival.

On January 12<sup>th</sup>, we reached our next temporary home. In Ängelholm, we had found a modern cottage that spoiled us with a fully glazed south façade. It was ideally situated for long walks, be it to the pretty town centre, or in the countryside. A longer walk brought us to Sibiria, a lovely seaside area with a popular beach, at least during the summer months.



Though, we rarely had any snow, and during our 3 ½ weeks temperatures remained in the -2° to +5° C range, we didn't need to go as far afield as Sibiria, to freeze something off! In this rather flat part of Sweden, the regular winter storms were sometimes so strong, it was just too unpleasant to leave the house at all. On some days, the populace was even called up to stay home, if possible. However, most probably those storms ceased, soon after we left at the beginning of February...

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, we continued to Ronneby, a very pleasant town in Blekinge Län. Here we had a pre-arranged, contemporary holiday flat, less than 100 meters from the coast. The house spoiled us with lots of luxury and, as it was built by a master electrician, with lots of additional technical frippery. This holiday cottage also had an ideal position, not so much for the sea-view, which was mostly obstructed by trees, but rather with its geographic location. Uncountable walks started right from the doorstep, leading to numerous scenic places on the sea or along a river, but also to charming hamlets, picturesque parks and forests or cosy coffee shops.



Furthermore, many enchanting towns like Karlskrona, Karlshamn or Kristianstad, as well as picturesque islets in the nearby archipelagos waited to be discovered on day trips.

In the faint hope of finally getting a Corona Certificate for our (Swedish) booster jab, we kept on extending our stage at Ronneby. We ended up staying for two months. With such a pleasant house and such an interesting vicinity, our stage became the perfect farewell from Sweden.

As pandemic restrictions and mask mandates were meanwhile lifted in big parts of Europe, we gladly decided to take the new travel opportunities arising south of Scandinavia. So, we left Ronneby on April 4<sup>th</sup> 2022 to Vellinge. After another excellent meal in Skanör (at the same place we've had our welcome dinner to Scandinavia two years ago), we continued to Denmark on the next day.

To us, Sweden represents a perfect mix between the spectacular sceneries we've experienced in Norway, and the quietness among the Finnish forests. Sweden boasts lovely landscapes, uncountable, island dotted lakes, charming coastal scenery with quaint fishing villages and many picturesque towns steeped in history. Furthermore, Sweden charms certainly with Scandinavia's most socialising people, even though they were a bit more reserved this time, due to the pandemic.

## Denmark: a few impressions enroute south

On April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022, we took the impressive Oresund road- (and rail-) link to Denmark. The astonishing, 7.845 m long Öresund Bridge connects, together with the artificial island of Peberholm and the 4.050 m long Drogden sub-sea Tunnel, the Swedish town of Malmö with the Danish capital of Copenhagen.



After crossing the islands of Amager and Zealand, we've reached Denmark's next impressive bridge structures: the Great Belt Fixed Link (Storebæltsforbindelsen), crossing the Great Belt strait between the islands of Zealand and Funen. The road link consists of two remarkable bridges, one of 6.611 meters of length, the other one with 6.790 meters of length. By contrast, the Railway link uses the first bridge only and descends on Sprogø island (about halfway of the crossing) into an 8.024 m sub-sea tunnel, leading to the island of Funen.

After such a spate of impressive strait crossings, we needed a break. An opportunity presented the beautiful town of Odense, with ~180.000 inhabitants Denmark's third largest city. The historic centre was quite impressive and wettened our appetite for more of Denmark. So, we continued over the "rather short" Little Belt Bridge (1.178 m) to Jutland, where we opted for a two-day stage in Ribe, Denmark's oldest town. With its



~8.300 inhabitants, it feels more like a large village than a town. Ribe's picturesque old town is steeped in history and attracts uncountable tourists. Now, at the beginning of April, it was already quite bustling. The river course of Ribe Å, which divides the place, adds even more charm to this pretty village. With its red brick buildings and the canal-like river, the place somehow resembles some Dutch villages – After a good two years in Scandinavia, it was now definitely time leave the Far North!

## Two years in Scandinavia during a pandemic: final thoughts

Well, at the time we arrived in Scandinavia mid-March 2020, we were neither aware how long a new virus would force us, or tempt us respectively, to remain in the far North, nor did we realize that this was probably Europe's best-Region to endure the pandemic without unnecessarily tough restrictions. The cool-headed Nordic governments restricted themselves to introduce rules proofed to work, yet abstained from introducing rules that "might help"! Furthermore, many measures were only introduced locally. Luckily, as we were always at the right time at the right spot, we got away without a real lockdown. National restrictions were confined predominantly to the sale of alcoholic drinks and to large events, like elite sport, nothing we're interested in at all!

Also face masks never became fashion in the Far North. In Sweden, there was neither a mandate, nor a recommendation (apart from 2 x 2 public transport rush hours daily). In Norway, a mask recommendation or mandate was more a choice between keeping distance or wearing a mask. Where we were, almost all Norwegians opted for keeping distance. In Finland there was only a recommendation to wear a mask in crowded indoor spaces like “supermarkets” and the way many locals interpreted it was rather amusing, than motivating to wear one... All in all, even at Scandinavian hospitals, the use of face masks was very relaxed, in comparison to rules and regulations Germany and other countries imposed just for shopping at the supermarket. The Finnish parliament was once debating about some tougher measures, but a legal opinion concluded, this would be against the constitution.

The most severe restrictions that affected us, were certainly border closings, affecting everybody, except essential workers, like 9.000 harvest hands from Thailand! But the lucky few ones who managed to use a short “open window”, as we did several times, could travel free and unrestricted inside the country. Therefore, we were regularly challenging holiday cottage rental agencies. Several times, after making an online booking, the rental agency contacted us and proposed, to cancel all our reservations for free, as we must have been unaware, that we’re not allowed to enter the country... How lucky we were!

It was admittedly a precious privilege to spend two years of pandemic in a region that was pretty closed to non-residents most of the time. We’re so thankful that we, as stranded roving spirits, could travel this unique region of sheer beauty as good as could be in the circumstances. Even more so, as Scandinavia provided us unregistered tramps, also with three jabs of vaccinations for free...

We’re anyway travelling rather slow, but the pandemic thwarted us even further. This gave us the unique opportunity, to immerse even deeper into Scandinavia’s natural wonders, as we finally ended up spending ~8 months each in Finland, Sweden, and Norway.



**Finland** spoiled us with sauna equipped top notch holiday cottages among uncountable forests and countless lakes, warranting peace and quietness. Furthermore, after twelve years, we could experience another winter with temperatures below  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$ ; cold, but awesome. Watching huge, frozen waterbodies, turning into fast ice rivers within minutes, was just exciting, as was walking on the frozen Bothnian Sea.



**Norway** was certainly the prize winner if it comes to breathtaking sceneries. Coastlines deeply indented by fjords compete with stunning mountain ranges and modern, cosmopolitan cities. Almost around every bending, we were smitten by outstanding sceneries. Holiday houses on divine locations were the rule, not an exception. Furthermore, we took the chance to spend midsummer in Northern Norway (and to a lesser part in Finnish Lapland), four months with uninterrupted daylight were just amazing, even more so with an exceptionally warm summer.



**Sweden** finally, is the clear winner, if it comes to Scandinavia’s most socializing people, even though, due to Corona, Swedes were a bit more reserved than usually. The country’s uncountable swamps, lakes, islands and fells in the interior, did charm our pants off, as did literally Sweden’s Naturist clubs. We were also charmed by the countless Falu rödfärg (Falun red) houses with white corners and white window frames. Further, we were captivated by the picturesque coastlines with its countless small ports and quaint villages.

In terms of weather, you can expect a minimum of  $12^{\circ}\text{C}$  during summer, but  $30^{\circ}\text{C}$  can also occur again and again. That it gets "pitch black for a long time" is a myth; even above the arctic circle. First, days never gets

really pitch dark and second, the sun only stays below the horizon between mid-December and mid-January. After that, the days get much longer very quickly. Therefore you can only see the Northern Lights from around the end of September to the end of March if the nights are clear!!! From April it hardly gets dark, which also only changes again in September. Accurate info provides: [Sunrise and sunset times \(sunrise-and-sunset.com\)](http://sunrise-and-sunset.com).

All over Scandinavia, we could spot some moose once a while, yet there could be months without sightings! In the north, we were also lucky to encounter orcas. Then again, reindeer sightings are quite common all over Lapland (N, S and FIN). Furthermore, all Nordic countries treasure great, lively and cosmopolitan cities, be they old or from the modern era. They spoiled us with excellent ethnic, as well as gastronomic cuisine from all over the world. Even though, we've stayed in Scandinavia much longer than anticipated (due to the pandemic), it remained very rewarding all the time – if we would need to choose a place to go on our last journey, Scandinavia could definitely win the bid...

*PS: If this story did whet your appetite to travel around **Scandinavia**, you're very welcome to also read the **comprehensive stories** about our trip in 2009/10. Though those tales are a few years old, they're still pretty much accurate in that we explored the regions the same way; meaning slow, with many holiday house rentals. Therefore, there is not much difference to our current stage. The one very positive exception to be noted, is that culinary skills in Norway improved dramatically, as did the infrastructure!*

*Especially about **Sweden** and **Norway**, our "old" Stories contain a wealth of information, not included into this travel tale, as we now wanted to keep it rather short and sweet:*

Chap 21: (S, N, FIN): [PDF-Document with photos](#) [Text only](#)

F-Naussannes, July 2022

Brigitte & Heinz



more pictures on our Homepage

