A family travels to Norway with the ultimate tour guide: a Richfield man who was so struck by the country’s beauty he had to share it with others.

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A cool drizzle was falling as the little green train completed its ascent of the Flam Valley and crested to a halt in the village of Myrdal. My wife, two kids and I stepped down from the car, crossed the railway platform and peered into the gorge below. I'd heard Norway called one of the world's most scenic destinations; finally, on day four of a family vacation there, I was convinced.

Sheer granite walls plunged 1,000 feet to a foaming river on the valley floor. Tufts of cloud drifted along the rocky walls, curling and uncurling among the stands of pine. Every turn in the zig-zag gravel path we followed back down the valley opened some spectacular new vista: a towering waterfall or a herd of goats with tinkling bells and outsized horns. Our son and daughter, both fans of J.R.R. Tolkien, said it was as if we had stepped into a chapter from "Lord of the Rings."

That afternoon I understood why people who love the outdoors flock to Norway. I also understood that, even for travelers who are not keen on visiting the land of their ancestors, Norway has unforgettable attractions: enchanting villages, invigorating trails and mountain views that can stop you in your tracks.

That evening, dining on reindeer and salmon in Flam's Preikestolen Hotel, my fellow travelers and I complained about the long descent and our tired legs. But by the time desert appeared everyone was saying: "Where are we hiking tomorrow?"

Norway continues on G4

Oh, but then you visit the engineering marvel of the Holmenkollen Ski Jump. The world's newest jump appears unsupported as it stretches into the sky, as slim and elegant as an egret's neck. Illuminated at night and visible from downtown, surely this is the icon destined to define modern Oslo.

Oslo, a city since 1048, is a mix of the venerable old and the cutting-edge new. The two-thick walls of the ancient Akershus Fortress look down on the chic restaurants of the Ak-

Kaiser’s tours take advantage of invigorating trails and mountain views.

IF YOU GO
More info at www.visitoslo.com/en, featuring tours of the world's oldest ski museum, covering more than 4,000 years of people skiing, exploring and competing on ski slopes.

A spacious viewing platform at the new effects a cinematic view of the quiver.
**NEW DESIGNS PUT A SHINE ON OLD OSLO**

**OSLO FROM 61**

Oslo and islands dappled the fjord. An open field vista on Bygdøy, one of the larger islands, is part of the Royal Farm that the King and Queen use as their summer residence. The city lines lies in a gentle bowl, and the roots of the same Oslo are in the word "ostri", which means "eastern". The atmosphere at the top of the ski jump, however, is not. In fact, one of the notable design features is a transparent sheet of steel mesh and glass canopy that can be retracted to expose visitors to the elements.

A museum on the Bygdøy Peninsula, the Oslo Museum has an impressive collection of Norwegian art, from prehistoric to contemporary. It's a must-see for any visitor interested in Norwegian culture.

**OSLO FROM 61**

Oslo, seen from here the ski jump at Holmenkollen, counts 40 islands within the city limits and is noted for its unique coastal design. The city's architecture reflects a blend of modern and traditional influences, with many buildings and structures incorporating local materials and techniques. The Oslo Opera House, for example, is a striking example of modern design, with its distinctive white wings that appear to rise out of the water.

The snow-covered monasteries of northern Norway's higher elevations are overlooked by trails and footbridges. The monastic rooms are often open to tourists and provide a unique insight into the lives of the monks and nuns who have lived there for centuries. The monasteries are not only a place of worship, but also a center for learning and scholarship, with many of the monks and nuns being skilled in the arts of music, literature, and natural sciences.

The first monastery was founded in the 12th century, and over the centuries, many others have been established across the region. The monasteries are a testament to the enduring power of faith and the importance of community in Norwegian culture.

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