

where we rejoined the ship in time for lunch.

In the afternoon we enjoyed a stunning sail through a narrow area called the Trollfjord, a passage a mile and a quarter long and 100 meters wide. The weather remained perfect, and the closeness of the sheer sides of the mountains was heart stopping.

After an early dinner of roast pork and potatoes we arrived at Svolvær, where we headed out again for an evening excursion of the Lofoten Islands. We stopped in the little fishing village of Henningsvær, which provided passengers with a 3-screen slide show about the local area. Though it was quite late, it was not too dark for photographs. We continued to enjoy the drive along the coast below the Lofoten Wall, a chain of mountains which rose directly up from the ocean floor, before rejoining the ship at Stamsund.

The next day we sailed along the Nordland coast, stopping in the afternoon in Sandnessjøen, a small fishing village. The sun came out and we sat on the top deck enjoying the scenery,

including the Seven Sisters Peaks.

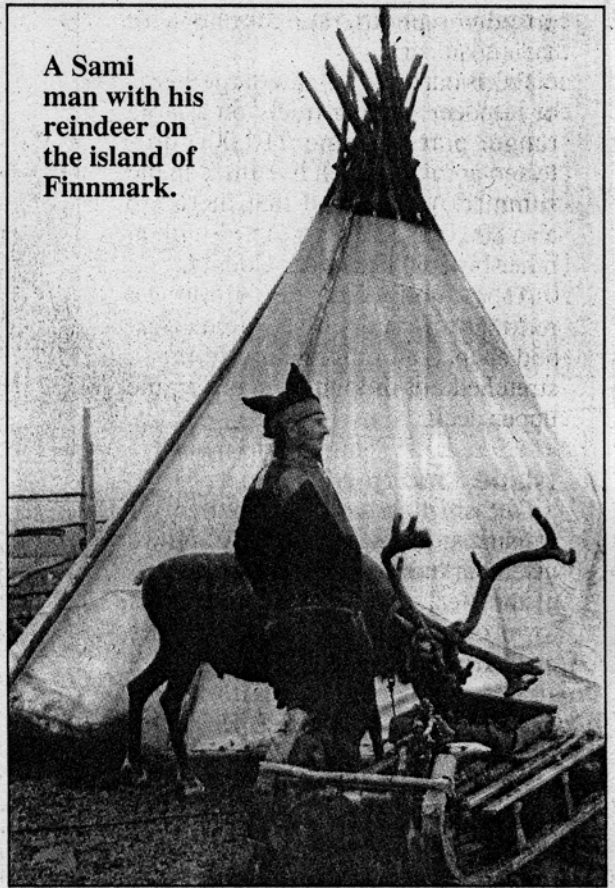
In the evening, the Captain's Dinner featured venison, carrots, Brussels sprouts and potatoes. Dessert consisted of a Norwegian specialty, cloudberry and cream. I had only tasted cloudberry once before, in a liqueur, when I was in Finland, so eating them fresh was a delightful treat.

On to Bergen

In Trondheim we went ashore for a tour of this old Viking settlement, the first capital of Norway. Our guide, Trine, told us that 50 cruise ships visit this thousand-year-old city each summer.

We passed the Royal Residence, built in the 1770s, which functions

A Sami man with his reindeer on the island of Finnmark.



as a museum in the summer. Old wooden houses, now considered national treasures, line the streets in a rainbow of colors. A tour of the nearly 1,000-year-old Nidaros Cathedral completed our tour.

The final morning was spent packing as we cruised south to Bergen, where we disembarked and headed for **Hotel Neptun**, owned by Norwegian Coastal Voyage.

Arranging passage

Passengers aboard Norwegian Coastal Voyage ships can book a variety of programs, including 6-, 7- or 12-day cruise-only trips or 12- to 18-day air-inclusive independent or escorted programs combining land explorations with the coastal voyage. I was on the 6-day sailing from Kirkenes to Bergen, which cost \$1,303 per person (for my cabin category) and included three meals daily plus taxes and port charges.

Senior savings and AARP discounts are offered on most sailings, and most ships have three handicapped cabins.

Northbound travelers will see

visit us at www.intltravelnews.com

different scenery than those sailing south, as many of the daytime port stops are arrived at during the night on the return trip. To see all the sights along the route, you have to take the 12-day round trip.

Land excursions averaged \$50, with the North Cape and Geirangerfjord excursions costing about \$125 each. Beginning in 2005, all shore excursions will be available for purchase before leaving the U.S.

so that space is guaranteed, but there will be a slight increase in prices.

A plus — no tipping is expected on board.

Though most of each day is dark



Passengers tour the Lofoten Islands. (This photo was taken after 9 p.m. using only available light.)

during winter, the Christmas and New Year's cruises offer special programs, food and entertainment. The ships stop at local churches for services, and lectures are offered on

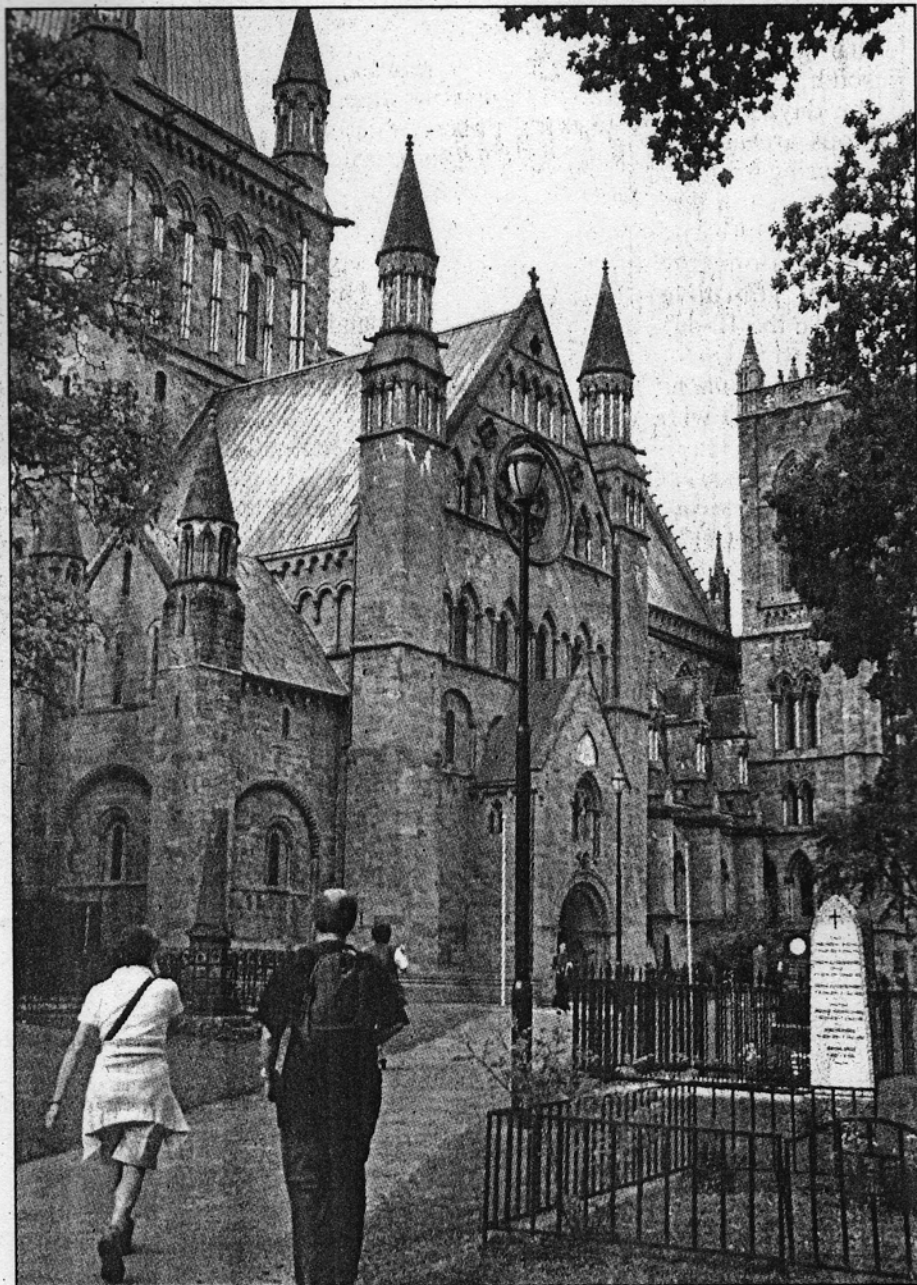
Norwegian folklore and Christmas traditions. There are even classes for making Christmas decorations, and passengers are often greeted in ports by carolers.

For more information, contact Norwegian Coastal Voyage (405 Park Ave., Ste. 904, New York, NY 10022; phone 800/323-7436 or visit www.norwegiancoastalvoyage.us). For more information on travel in Norway, contact the Norwegian Tourist Board (phone 212/885-9700 or visit www.visitnorway.com). *ITN*

Norway at 100

••• Norway celebrates 100 years of independence from Sweden this year with festivals featuring art and cultural programs in Bergen (June 14-19), Kristiansand (June 15-26), Trondheim (Aug. 1-6), Tromsø (Aug. 16-21) and Oslo (June 3-13), where opening Culture Night events will include public viewing into the wee hours of the morning at many museums and theaters. Free concerts will be held in city squares and streets.

Other highlights — the opening of a new bridge to Sweden, at Svine-



The 1,000-year-old Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim.

sund, on June 10 and the debut of the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo on June 11.

Call the Norwegian Tourist Board at 212/885-9700 or visit www.norway2005.no, www.nobelpeacecenter.org, www.svinesundslopet.no or www.visitnorway.com.

Belgium hits 175 2005 marks 175 years since the state of Belgium was founded, and several Brussels museums have special exhibits. "Romanticism in Belgium" runs

until July 31 at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium and the Antoine Wiertz Museum as well as the ING Art Center. Visit www.fine-arts-museum.be.

The Royal Museums of Art & History (Parc du Cinquantenaire, 10 Brussels) will host "Art Nouveau and Design, 1830-1950," May 25-Dec. 31. The museum is open 10-5 Tuesday-Sunday; €9 adult.

Inquire about guided tours of Brussels' Art Nouveau architecture. Call the Belgian Tourist Office at 212/758-8130 or visit www.visitbelgium.com.