

SOME LIKE IT HOT.

I HAVE in recent times contributed a number of articles describing a memorable voyage undertaken one July by my wife and me to Spitzbergen and ultimately the polar ice cap (Lat. 80° 42' N.) i.e. just 600 miles from the North Pole. Spitzbergen can be approached from the sea only in mid-summer when the polar ice cap has receded somewhat. We had sailed up the coast of Norway from Bergen, calling at a number of ports, eventually leaving Norway at North Cape and sailing north across the arctic ocean to the everlasting snow and ice. "Br-r-r", so said our editor. "Has anybody been south to warmer places?"

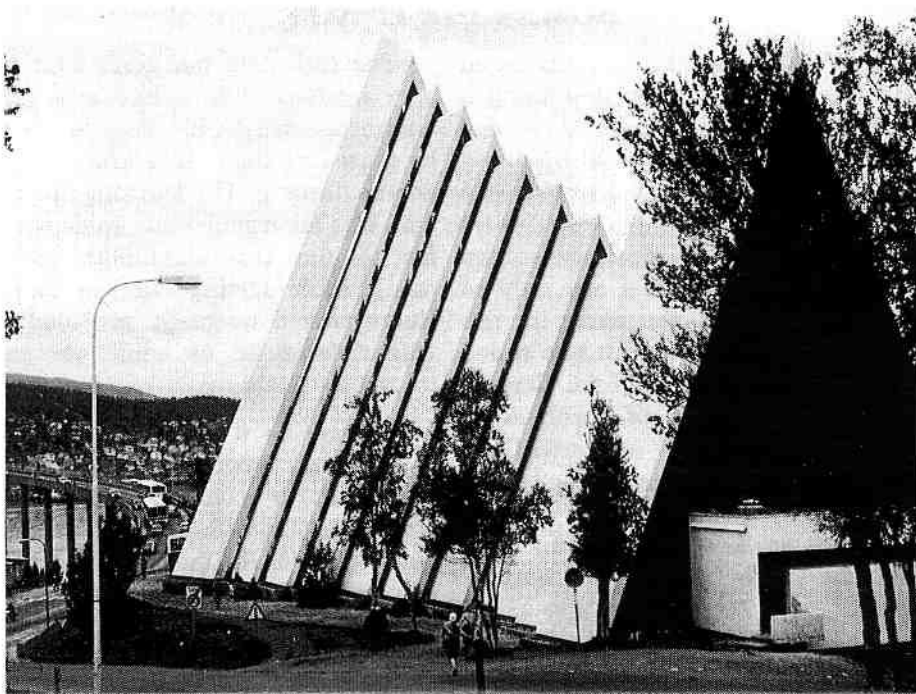
We have since had travel articles about sunny climes which satisfied the need, but may I come back once more and surprise you? Our voyage was full of surprises. You do not have to go south for the sun, how about above the arctic circle?

After leaving Bear Island which lies between Spitzbergen and Norway we returned south to Tromsø, the capital of north Norway. Here we ran into a heatwave. There were near-naked bodies of passengers sunbathing on the deck. Here we were at Lat. 70° N., above the arctic circle. We learned that even the average winter temperature in Tromsø is higher than in Oslo some 700 miles further south. Tromsø is the largest township north of the arctic circle, possesses the world's northernmost brewery, and has been the departure point for many arctic expeditions.

The cathedral has been built in a very modern style – like a series of enormous structural triangles linked by glazed sections. It is known locally as the Iceberg. On learning that my wife was an organist our guide invited her to play this magnificent instrument. After sorting out the controls (there was a language problem!) my wife entertained us while our party toured the building.

Norway is a fascinating land of legend and mystery. It is worthy of note that it comprises some 72% mountains, 24% forest and 4% tilled land. Much of the means of travel and movement of goods is by the excellent coastal steamer service. My wife and I have visited Norway twice by this means – once to sail up the west coast to North Cape and Spitzbergen, and another time to continue round the north coast to Kirkenes on the Russian border. During these voyages we have called at, and explored, numerous towns, both large and small, each with its own particular interest. Space will permit me to name a few only.

Kirkenes is a small town near the Russian border. We made the short journey by coach to Boris Gleb, to a crossing point into Russia. Here also was a Norwegian military border post. We were allowed to disembark and wander about on the Norwegian side. No cameras were permitted. They would have been confiscated immediately. We were allowed, however, to use field glasses with which we observed the Russian guards in a



Tromsø Cathedral – (The “Iceberg”).

watch tower. They, in turn, gazed at us. (At this time the Cold War was still on.) It was a lonely spot. We wondered how the local farming community felt about it.

Hammerfest, the world's northernmost town (Lat. 70° 40' N.) was a German naval base during the War. In 1944 it was razed to the ground by the Germans, except for a mortuary chapel, and has now been entirely rebuilt. We joined the Polar Bear Club here. Their purpose is to protect polar bears which are now regarded as an endangered species. As members we are entitled to attend their meetings, but it is a long way to go from here! We are, however, content to think that in paying our joining fee we have helped some cuddly little polar bear

cub to survive somewhere out in the arctic wastes.

We called at North Cape at midnight to see the midnight sun which was well above the horizon. It is visible usually from mid-May to the end of July. We took photographs with a hand held camera. Our ship was berthed at Honningsvåg nearby. This port handles some 4 - 5,000 ships each year including British trawlers. It also was razed to the ground by retreating Germans in 1944 – except for the church – and has been entirely rebuilt.

Trondheim is the third largest town in Norway. Its enormous cathedral is the largest mediaeval building in Scandinavia.

The west front very much resembles that of our Lincoln cathedral. A visit to the Ringve musical museum outside the town was arranged. This is a fascinating museum containing a vast collection of musical instruments from all over the world.

The coastal steamers whose main purpose is to carry goods and passengers between the numerous coastal towns also cater for a limited number of cruise passengers who book accommodation for the complete voyage (11 or 13 days). A strict timetable is adhered to. A stop at a small port may be for only half an hour, at another up to four hours, but the ship always sails on time. Some cruise passengers have been known to return late at a stopping place and thus have really missed the boat!

The shipping company, however, is very mindful of its cruise passengers and plans some shore excursions to rejoin the ship at another place further along the coast and also includes some diversions "en route". My favourite is the Trollfjord. This fjord is to be found among the Lofoten Islands.

The ship slowly approaches the fjord through a narrow channel (the Raftsund.) All on board are looking for the entrance which is very narrow and difficult to locate. We were fortunate on one of our trips to secure a place on the bridge and had a first

class view of this highly skilled exercise in ship handling. The Trollfjord is 100 m. wide, 2,500 m. in length and 108 m. deep, surrounded by steeply rising mountains. To take a 2,500 ton ship into this comparatively narrow waterway, turn round at the end and come out again is a truly notable feat of navigation. All the steamers include this in their schedules. The ship can turn as if on a pivot with little or no forward or backward movement (specifically for docking at the many small ports at which they call.) The helmsman selected for this duty, performed under the watchful eyes of his captain, other members of the crew on the bridge (and some passengers) must heave a huge sigh of relief when he finally, slowly, emerges from the fjord.

I hope that I have given a fair account (albeit brief) in these articles on Norway and beyond. There is much to be seen, much to write about and enough to cater for all tastes (both hot and cold!). We would like to go again, and, maybe, again. I fear, however, that times are changing and that these cruises with the Coastal Steamer Service may not be available eventually. Cruise liners calling at a limited number of places may take over. Much of the fun and interest such as we experienced we fear may then be lost.

Maurice G. A. Jackson.

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