

# SOBE, NORWAY

Ålesund – city of culture, architecture, nature

*That getting there is part of the experience is definitely true when it comes to Ålesund. Whether you decide to travel by train, boat, or car, the city on the West coast of Norway offers a magnificent starting point to the beautiful surrounding area.*





*(This page) The Pharmacy Square Ålesund. The whole town, its towers, turrets, and medieval romantic facades are pure Art Nouveau, but the Ålesund version of Jugendstil includes some Nordic elements of its own with details from Norse mythology. The homogenous city center is the result of the devastation after a fire in January 1904. / (Left page) : The Brosundet Canal in Ålesund by night.*



Blue skies and a sun glittering ocean are just the beginning of this beautiful break away. Ålesund is situated where majestic mountains meet the great blue sea. The scattered islands of the archipelago shelter against the brisk winds of the Atlantic Ocean and the inland mountain tops stand as a protective backdrop to the city. As if this was not enough, Ålesund sits on the inlet of the Geiranger Fjord, one of the most beautiful places I ever visited.

The city itself is famous mainly for its architecture – Art Nouveau, or Jugend, as it's also called. The buildings in the entire city center are built in the same architectural style due to a huge fire that ravaged the city in 1904. During one stormy winter night, 850 houses burned to the ground in 16 hours; they were subsequently rebuilt during the next three years. The hearty Norwegian architects were strongly influenced by the modern European architecture at the time, which turned out to be good for Ålesund as its architecture now attracts visitors from near and far. Art Nouveau, or “new art”, an art form that became popular in Paris during the end of the nineteenth century, was revolutionary and progressive in its features. The dynamic flow and highly-stylized curvilinear designs, often incorporating floral and other plant-inspired motifs, characterize the Art Nouveau style. A good way to spend the day in the town center is to stroll around and try to discover the adorned details on buildings as a form of architectural treasure hunt.

Architecture, however, is not the only thing Ålesund has to offer. If you want to enjoy further grandiose experiences, you should walk to the Aksla view point. Follow the street Rådstugatan to Byparken and look for the steps. After climbing 418 of them you can sit back and enjoy the extraordinary scenery from the view point restaurant: the horizon of the Atlantic with Ålesund town at the forefront and the islands of Godøya and Giskeen just beyond. If you do not fancy the ascent by foot there is a road for driving all the way to the top as well.

The fishing industry is of great importance to Ålesund. During fishing season, the different islands in the archipelago attract plenty of workers. If you are not inclined to spend your holiday preparing fish, you may enjoy preparing your own authentic sea view snack while sitting on a bench in the harbour, peeling shrimps bought fresh from the fishing boats. If you'd prefer a simpler fishing experience, you could poke a fishing rod directly out your hotel window as many hotels are literally on the sea with their walls dropping straight into the water. No matter the extent of your fishing interest, you can't escape the history of this fishing town at its fishing museum, which explains many of Ålesund's interesting historical facts.

A visit to Ålesund without going to the Geiranger Fjord is like going to Greece and not visiting the beach. The fjord is said to be the most beautiful in the world. Enjoy it on a boat from Ålesund and see snow capped mountains scattered with tiny cabins and numerous magical waterfalls running down the steep cliff walls into the deep blue water. After two hours of breath taking scenery you reach the town of Geiranger. From there you can get to the view point Dalsnibba. At 5,000 feet (1500 m) above sea level, Dalsnibba offers astounding panoramic views and ample photo opportunities of the fjord.

The travelling experience does not end when leaving Ålesund, as roads wind through the fjord landscape and experiences and impressions wind into life long memories.

## CITY GUIDE ÅLESUND

Looking for a city break or a nature holiday? Ålesund is yet another of the Scandinavian cities where you can easily get the best of both worlds – located a little over 300 miles (500 km) north of Oslo, beautifully positioned on the coast and an interesting holiday destination from many aspects. The city is famous for its Art Nouveau architecture. There are also numerous restaurants that offer the daily catch prepared local style, or why not pay a visit to the fishing- or art museums. Ålesund also offers easy access to the dramatic Norwegian nature – spectacular mountains, fjords and waterfalls.

The Jugendstil Museum tells all the stories about the city's architectural history.

Ålesund Museum hosts an entire section about the fire of 1904. It destroyed large parts of the city center and is the reason for all the rebuilding – in the same architectural style. Other interesting historic facts about the city can also be found here.

Aksla view point, 418 steps above the city, has an amazing view over Ålesund and the archipelago. You get there from the park in the city center and you can have a relaxing drink at the restaurant once you reach the top. At the fishing museum there are exhibitions on Ålesund as a fishing village.

The nature around Ålesund is dramatic to the point of being breathtaking and always amazingly beautiful. The city is protected by a string of peaceful little islands, and the journey inland with steep mountains is challenging to say the least.

The Atlantic Ocean Park with its over one million gallons of water in different tanks offers an interesting insight into the aquatic life of the Atlantic Ocean as well as the under water inhabitants of Ålesund's archipelago. The park is one of the largest aquariums in Europe and one of Norway's largest tourist attractions. Eleven miles from Ålesund, you can find the Godøy Peak with picturesque walks on the easy, intermediate, and difficult levels. On the top you get a good view of the mountains and if you like fishing, the lake Alnesvatnet is supposed to offer a good catch. If you want to rest your legs, there are boat trips to a few different locations. The choice is between the beautiful Geiranger Fjord and the open sea for deep water fishing, diving, and bird watching. On the coast outside Ålesund, you will find the North Islands, a string of pearls best seen by bike. A bike trip on the islands Løvsøy, Haramsøy, Flemsøy and Fjørtoft offers extraordinary natural surroundings, old light houses and open plains. Bikes can be rented at \$23 (140 kroner) per day.

Ålesund became a smorgasbord of town and nature, tranquillity, rest and then activity. Geiranger and its mind blowing fjord felt like it offered the best view in the world (which is how it promotes itself). The winding roads of Trollstigen – the walk of the trolls – nearby, is one of the most visited sites in Norway. Stryn is one of few places in Scandinavia that offers summer skiing...

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For more info on Ålesund, see: [www.visitaalesund.com](http://www.visitaalesund.com); and on surrounding areas: [www.geiranger.no](http://www.geiranger.no), [www.trollstigen.net](http://www.trollstigen.net), and [www.strynefjellet.com](http://www.strynefjellet.com). You'll find a more complete guide to the Ålesund region under Incidental Intelligence, page 47.



(This page) Boat trip in Eiksund. / (Right page) Geiranger Fjord. Ålesund is located in the center of Norway's most famous tourist region. It attracts visitors interested in the nearby scenic attractions of the Geiranger Fjord, Trollstigen, and the island of Runde as well as its very own charms.