



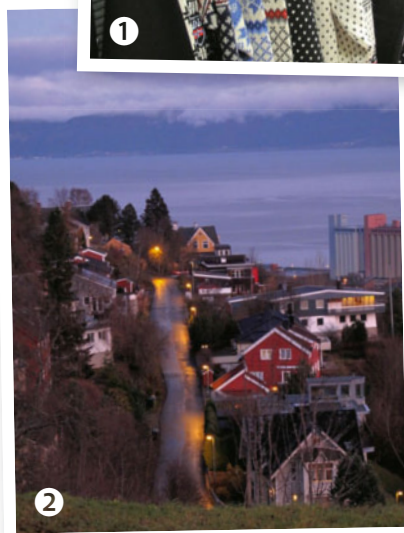
Northern delights

A knitting cruise up the coast of Norway proved both inspirational and educational for **Juliet Bernard**



The cruise passed through many pretty Norwegian ports as it headed up into the Arctic Circle

Knitting cruise



1 The shops are filled with traditional jumpers 2 An early morning trip from the port of Trondheim 3 One of the Hurtigruten ships 4 Bergen is filled with colourful houses 5 Debbie Abrahams with one of our party, Claire 6 Debbie designed this lovely project especially for the cruise

ONE OF the wonderful things about the craft of knitting is just how much you can still learn, no matter how many years you have spent developing your skills. This is why I am such a fan of workshops – yet I had never been on a knitting tour. Because I am someone who likes to learn, and loves spending time with other knitters, a knitting holiday sounded perfect for me.

At the end of 2011 I had the fantastic opportunity to join an Arena Travel knitting tour, cruising up the coast of Norway to try to catch a glimpse of the Northern Lights. Debbie Abrahams, one of my favourite designers, was going to teach us about Scandinavian knitting as we went, through a project she had created especially for us in Rowan yarns.

At Heathrow we joined a group of quilters and were expertly shepherded on and off planes by our tour manager Lynn – an extraordinarily organised lady

who took care of everything. Norway is an amazing country that felt very familiar to me, in that it was recognisably European. The further north you go, though, the more you become aware of how foreign the landscape feels and how resilient its people must be to live in isolation with so little daylight in the winter.

Our first day was spent sightseeing in Bergen, and I was particularly struck by the Hanseatic-period houses painted wonderful shades of red, orange and yellow with touches of grey. These colours are echoed on the houses everywhere you go, but only when I was sat watching an Arctic Circle sunset with the warm colours against the grey clouds did it strike me that the Norwegians are trying to catch a bit of that sunlight to brighten the landscape, and remind them that the sun will return and will burn for 24 hours in the summer. I was so inspired by these hues and feelings

that I am trying to design a hat at the moment which echoes these colours.

All aboard

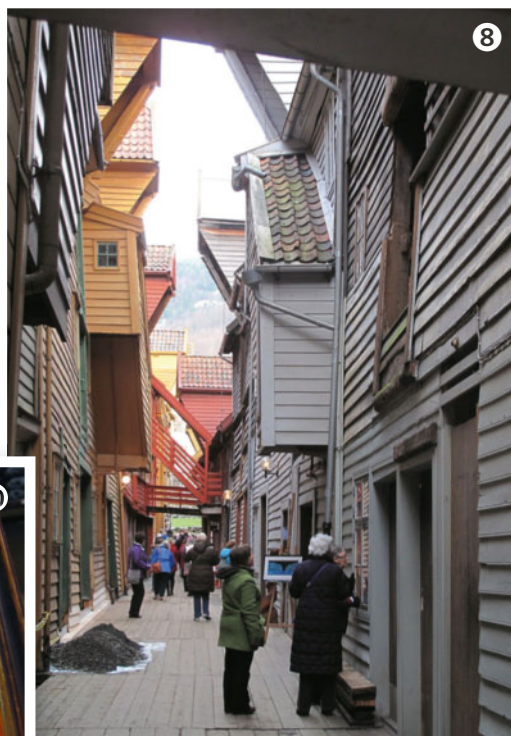
The excitement of boarding our ship and settling into our cabins was wonderful. Our entertainments officer, Eskild, was funny in at least two languages that I could understand, and probably a lot more. Sitting up high on the observation deck as we set sail at night was breathtaking, particularly because the lights of Bergen reflect on the clear cold water so you are not sure which way you are going.

The next morning I threw open my curtains to catch a glimpse of the view. I hadn't realised how hypnotic a cruise would be – you just want to watch the scenery as you drift along. But enough about the scenery and on with the knitting!

The project Debbie had created especially for us was a gorgeous drawstring bag in



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7 Anne-Sofie enjoying some Fair Isle knitting
 8 Bergen's ancient streets are very atmospheric
 9 The Fantoft Stavkirke with its roaring dragons on the roof
 10 Traditional Norwegian fastenings
 11 Debbie Abrahams in one of the many gorgeous yarn shops we visited

traditional Norwegian patterning and, cleverly, she had incorporated a number of different techniques for us to try, such as knitting Fair Isle in the round using two hands. We couldn't wait to cast on, and in between each interesting trip or shopping excursion we were hard at work.

Learning new skills

The generosity of knitters when we get together always leaves me with a warm glow, and our lovely group of 14 was no exception. We each knitted differently and we were all more than happy to show each other just how we did it. I am always looking to fine-tune my techniques, and we learned perky bobbles from Jenece, the neatest buttonhole in the world from Mary and the stay-put surgeon's knot from Amanda. Claire demonstrated the magic cast-on, and Anne-Sofie showed us how to steek. Pat showed us her magic tape - a

very long piece of highlighter tape, perfect for marking your place on charts - while Mary told us how she keeps track of how many rows she knits by flipping a piece of yarn in and out of her knitting every 10 rows. Not to mention all the expert help and advice we got from Debbie Abrahams herself, of course.

My personal favourite was a refinement to my Fair Isle knitting. I was always taught never to float the second yarn behind your work for more than three stitches, but I have to be so careful that my knitting doesn't pucker. After seeing a wonderful hat from *Norwegian Handknits* by Sue Flanders and Janine Kosel that Mary had brought along where she had floated up to nine stitches I was inspired to have a go. Lo and behold, my work was more even - definitely the way forward for me.

My New Year's resolution is to try to join at least one tour a year from now on. ☺

Juliet learnt many great knitting tips from her fellow travellers - here are two of her favourites:

MARY'S PERFECT BUTTONHOLES

2 stitches

K2tog, yrn, slip 1, K1, pssso. On the next row knit and purl into the yrn from previous row. This gives a perfect circle.

3 stitches or more

On the first row, cast off the required number of stitches. On the next row, work up to the buttonhole, wrap the yarn round your left thumb (as if doing a thumb cast-on) transfer the loop onto the right needle then knit it (still on the right-hand needle), pull this tight, repeat for each stitch required. On the next row you can work into the back of the buttonhole stitches to twist and tighten up the stitches.



JENECE'S PERKY BOBBLES

RS facing: Knit pattern to where the bobble is required. Knit into the front and back twice and then knit into the front again, making 5 stitches in total.

WS facing: Knit or purl 5 stitches depending on whether you want a garter stitch or stocking stitch bobble, TURN.

RS facing: Knit 4 stitches then slip the final stitch onto the RH needle purlwise (do not knit this last stitch).

Still RS facing: Pass the next stitch (closest to the slipped stitch) over the slip stitch and pull yarn firmly, then pass the remaining 3 stitches over, one by one.

Continue in pattern to end of row.

