



# VISITING NORWAY'S LOFOTEN ISLANDS

*AN HONEST GUIDE TO EXPLORING THIS ICONIC ARCHIPELAGO  
BY THE MOTOROAMERS*





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## THE LOFOTENS

Norway's northern gem and worst kept secret that has hoards of admirers rushing to experience its iconic vistas - despite its Arctic position. With in excess of 1 million visitors each year, Norway's Lofoten Islands have become a victim of their own success.

In this guide we report on our experiences during high season and deliver to you a frank perspective about how to get the best from your visit to this well-promoted Norwegian paradise.

## ABOUT THIS FRANK GUIDE

With a Summer in Scandinavia tour in our sights early 2019, we were at last about to fulfil our vision. Scandinavia had been on our wish list from the very first moment we left UK shores on our *Gap-year that became forever!* So serious were we that in January 2016 we even purchased our Danish, Swedish and Norwegian Krone, the latter two of which are now out of circulation! Still, good things come to those who wait and our patience was certainly rewarded.

In April 2019 after a visit back to UK for our annual MOT on the van, we headed north east with anticipation in our hearts and eagerness in our wheels.

With four months in the Nordic trio, we have amassed a huge amount of experience, knowledge and memories, many of which we have shared in our blogs, vlogs and eBooks. Although when we came to visit the Lofoten Islands, which let's face it has to be on every traveller's itinerary, we were a bit taken aback. So much so that we felt compelled to write this honest guide about this much loved and adored destination.

With this tiny community bursting at the seams, we felt it was important to present a realistic experience so that future visitors may plan their visits carefully and mindfully.

So whilst we are happy to have soaked up the Lofoten magic, we wanted to present a frank perspective. The real Lofoten after the Instagram photos have been posted.



## Who are we?

Formally, we are Karen and Myles; digital nomads who are inspired to discover the world with the freedom and choice that this travelling lifestyle has gifted us.

More lovingly we are known as **The Motoroamers** and in March 2016 we packed up and packed in our life in UK for a gap year of travel whilst we sold property. The grand plan was to put down our roots in the south-west and find the 'good life', once we had sown our travel seeds.

With visions of a small-holding, donkeys, chickens and soil tarnished fingernails put aside, we hit the road in our motorhome Scoobie. We were ready for adventures and exploration that would soothe our curious spirits and satiate our inner-adventurer. Yet a few weeks into our trip we discovered that this was the life we wanted permanently and that 'going back' was not an option. So from that moment on, 'home' became the place where Scoobie's tyres rested. We found love in every dawn, each new vista cleansed our eager eyes and fed our desire to live with freedom, fearlessness and choice.

In our first year with our trusty stead, a Pilote 740 (7.5m), we visited 10 countries and covered 12,000 miles; from Spain to Slovenia, to France, Belgium and Netherlands. A rich array of adventures that tempered our need to feel alive after too many decades of corporate stress and burn-out. Spring 2017 heralded a new set of adventures as we began an epic journey into uncharted territory. The idea was to travel across to Greece and then follow a natural passage through the eastern borders of

Bulgaria and Romania. What incredible cultures and natural wonders these countries had to offer. So young on the European stage and yet a whole new set of experiences for the eager traveller.

2018 was all about uncovering the scars of Poland and Slovakia and 2019 our adventures took us into the Nordic highlights of Scandinavia's north eastern trio of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. What an adventure every day is and a joy to share it with you.

We hope you value our virtual tour and that it provokes thought!

*Karen, Myles and Scoobie*



<https://www.motoroaming.com>



Hamnøy fishing village

## INTRODUCTION - SOME FACTS ABOUT LOFOTEN

The Lofoten archipelago is a collection of **7 islands** and plenty smaller islets, shaped by over **3 billion years of geological mastery**. With angular mountains looking like they could pierce the sky, there is something eerie about their penetration of the sea.

With a dominance that sets the scene for a dramatic filmset, these ancient rock formations present a tale of epic natural history. Yet in spite of their inhospitable persona, the Lofoten islands have evolved a unique cultural presence creating history, community and ancient tradition. This combination has resulted in them pushing their way onto the global list of tourist must-sees.

Add to this; seas rich in wildlife and tempestuous tidal eddies that are the origin of the **Maelstrom** and you have a colourful jigsaw that is the envy of their global competition.

Albeit only **30 miles (50km)** from Norway's mainland, Lofoten may as well be on a different continent. With its **Lynx Foot** formation and evidence of **human history dating back 11,000 years**, this Arctic masterpiece has much to reveal and the world is eager to see.

Beneath the surface of its recent tourist explosion, the Lofoten way of life continues. A **1000 year old fishing tradition**, thanks the marine-rich waters where cod come to spawn, give these tiny communities a world stage for exporting their **Stockfish**. Across the islands you will see land littered with '**hjell**'; wooden structures that support the world's oldest known preservation technique - air-drying. Fish caught during the winter months are hung on these wooden struts and air-dried without any salting. They are then exported to Russia, Italy, Africa and Portugal to name just a few! This is Lofoten!



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## THE GOOD, BAD & THE UGLY

I remember when we visited Italy's Cinque Terre in 2017, high with hopes of photographic brilliance and capturing a 'wow' moment. And yet the plethora of people, which I do acknowledge I was part of, and the associated commercialism, spoilt the whole experience. Would Lofoten have the same impact on me? Read on as we share our honest views on Norway's most successful marketing campaign.



## Inner Lofoten Isles

### THE GOOD

The Lofotens - Norway's most successful marketing campaign, are now the victims of their own success. 1 million visitors every year, a majority of which descend in July/August. Just when we arrived! Not quite our plan, although circumstances were beyond our control.

It is, without doubt a very beautiful landscape. Dramatic mountains piercing the sky. Clouds that tickle their tops like cotton buds. And iconic Rorbu fishermen's cottages that straddle the earth and sea in perfect harmony.

Fjords carved by Caribbean blue waters and the white sandy beaches were a real surprise. Boy are they something else. Turquoise waters that sparkle like jewels surrounded by mountains still dappled with snow, bring together that dichotomy of 'sea or mountains!' Daddy or Chips! Why choose, have both!

Tunnels are carved through the unforgiving mountain rock and iconic Nordic bridges connect the islands' communities. Atmospheric fishing villages, many of which still survive on their Stockfish industry, provide atmospheric images adored by so many.

We, like so many others were captivated by the promotional images. Pictures that draw visitors to this northern archipelago, that is bathed in history, 1000 year old fishing traditions and the majestic, dramatic mountain scenery.

The photographer in me was excited, our curious explorers were intrigued and a visit was inevitable.

Approx 50 miles from the mainland by sea and nearly 90 miles long, the Lofotens are a living art gallery. A destination nestled in the embrace of the Arctic Circle yet influenced by the warm Gulf Stream that rarely takes them below zero. With the Midnight Sun between mid May and mid July and 24hrs darkness from early December for a calendar month, this is a place of extremes. And let's not forget the Northern Lights. A fabulous place for watching the dancing light show that parades across the skies.

For outdoor lovers it's a dream. For photographers picture-postcard perfect. For cyclists, hikers and nature seekers, it's idyllic. Who would miss visiting this ridge of ancient rock islands in the middle of the sea that is home to the famous Maelstrom tidal eddies?

With its iconic E10 that is one of Norway's 18 most scenic routes, this has the *potential* to be the most amazing road-trip. It certainly looked to rival some of the best routes we've enjoyed.

Over seven days we enjoyed getting off the beaten track to explore the many peninsula, where beautiful wild landscape awaited us. Spectacular sunsets, wetland wilderness and craggy coastlines.

The southern islands were best with their iconic mountain peaks and contrasting village landscapes 100's metres below. With hikes to incredible beaches, we basked in blue sky days in shorts and t-shirts. It had all we could possibly ask for. On the surface at least.

Here is a visual storyboard of our Lofoten best bits.







## Uttakleiv Beach - Most Romantic

### THE BEACHES

One of the greatest surprises about Norway is how beautiful the beaches are in this part of the world. In fact - I'll correct that. I'm surprised that Norway even has beaches, let alone beautiful ones.

When I think of this Nordic destination, deep majestic fjords jump into my mind, snow-capped mountains and Northern Lights. Not Caribbean-style, white sandy beaches with brilliant blue hues that invite you to dive into their Arctic waters.

And yet, this is what we have found, certainly in the northern regions around Senja. And Lofoten is no different.

Haukland Beach has been voted as the best beach in Norway, whilst its neighbour, Uttakleiv has been rated as the most romantic

beach. What great accolades to hold. If only the weather had been a little warmer, we would have accepted their invitation willingly.

Alas these are waters, that whilst influenced by the Gulf Stream, are still way inside the Arctic Circle. So when water-sport lovers take to the seas on their SUPs, kayaks and surfboards, they are duly donned in head to toe wetsuits. Hardy creatures they are up here.

Although be without doubt, the Lofoten beaches are incredible even if they are subjected to the force of Mother Nature's wrath. Whether on the ocean front-line or more sheltered behind one of the archipelago, the colours, smell and vista is an evocative experience.



Top; Flakstad Beach

Left, Uttakleiv rocks

Right; Haukland Beach





E10 Vista, Lofoten Islands

## STUNNING SCENIC ROADS; E10 AND OFF-THE-BEATEN-TRACK

Norway has 18 National Tourist Scenic Routes; all special in their own right. And the E10 through the Lofotens is most certainly spectacular. With clear days, the colour of the ocean is held at bay from fusing with the sky by the dramatic mountain ridge that curves dominantly southwards. Through wetlands, u-shaped valleys, fjords and fertile agricultural low-lands, the Lofotens have plenty to offer the road-trip lover.

Whilst narrow in places, generally navigating around the archipelago is doable in most size vehicles, albeit at times breathing in feels necessary. No one section of the road is duplicated so you are presented with a feast for the eyes around every corner.

Each mountain has its own personality and every one of the seven main islands have a unique way of surviving island life. It seems that

each body of water is determined to make its own mark on the mind of the curious traveller.

And yet for us, often the best bits were off the beaten track. The E10 as a spinal route north/south is beautiful. Yet it is only when you turn off the main road and seek out the authentic charm of Lofoten, that you begin to get a real sense of its culture.

Lofoten's road less travelled reveals small villages untouched by the tourist masses. Farms and settlements go about their daily business without regard for the odd car and motorhome that trundle past. Fishing huts, whilst harbouring mariner's secrets from their 1000 year history, are left to their own devices without the prying eyes of the camera hungry visitors.



Take your time. Turn off and meander away from the crowds along the many minor roads that guide you around the peninsula. It is here that you start to learn about the real Lofoten lifestyle and the full extent of its natural beauty.

We loved, in particular route **Fv 888** which takes you around the northern edge of the archipelago.

The **Fv 816** to Henningsvær on the easterly edge, where you will find hundreds of tents perched precariously on any spare piece of land, whether it be rock or sloping grassland.

The **Fv 807** to Nusfjord is incredible.

The **Fv 862** shows the wild and exposed character of Lofotens' wetlands around Gimsøya.

The **Voieveien** route to Haukland Bay and Uttakleiv Beach will make you go 'wow'.

And favourite of all is the diverse route of **Fv 815** from Leknes. What an incredible eastern road that hugs the coastline, supervised ably by the smooth contours of the mountains.

So even if you only have a short visit on the islands, take the time to explore off piste as you will find much beauty and a far more intimate experience of this land of treasure.

# Our Lofoten Off the beaten Track experience





Aerial footage of south Lofoten village - Hamnøy

## QUAINT FISHING VILLAGES WITH ANCIENT HISTORY

In the year BT (Before Tourists), the Lofoten Islands were like any other community trying to make a living from their environment. Villages that survived off the land and sea, dealing with the harsh realities of Mother Nature's forces.

With the mariner using all that was offered to him, he maximised the curvaceous land and coves that could give shelter to his boats. He optimised the seas, that in winter teem with cod as they arrive to spawn their young. And with the Gulf Stream, he would take the opportunity of the warm airstreams to master his Stockfish trade.

The farmers used the fertile plains to grow their crops and harvest grasses to feed their cattle. And each and every Lofoten inhabitant whether fisherman, farmer or boatbuilder, it seems hung on to the

thread of life with all their might as the extremes of light and dark coursed their way through the seasons. And they survived!

1000 years of history blesses this string of archipelago as tales of mastering the ocean and land give the Lofotens their identity. Hjell, the wooden structures for drying their fish give texture to every village landscape and whilst empty in summer, you can only imagine how it looks and smells during the cold and dark winter days.

The traditional Rorbu - fisherman's hut - are iconically dotted along the coastline, often precariously positioned on the craggy rocks with water as its companion. Stilts give some protection in calm seas, although imagine how in rough seas those huts must bear the brunt of the storms passing through the ocean straights.

There is no doubt that tourism plays a significant role these days in the Lofoten income stream, thanks to the marketing campaigns over the last decade. Yet today, you still see evidence of the authentic way of life, now thriving thanks to the new finances that have provided a golden lining to this exposed Arctic destination.

Visiting the charming Å in the far south, Moskenes, the iconic Reine, the stunning Hamnøy and Henningsvær will give you an insight into life back in the day. The smell of the sea and the fish will powerfully tell you about their lives here and the sight of the harbours with their brightly coloured sea-faring vessels will reveal some of their historical secrets and traditions passed down through the generations. It is also possible to get a further insight of life on the islands by visiting Nusfjord although we must warn you there is an entrance fee of 100NOK per person to enter the throbbing heart of this tiny fishing village.

Many come to the Lofotens for the scenery. Yet in many ways the landscape is just one part of the draw. The jigsaw that is *the Lofoten Islands* is a collaborative partnership between;

- the majestic mountain contours
- the villages that cosy up in the nooks and crannies and
- the arching bridges that connect tiny strips of land.

Each rely on the other to create the perfect panorama that brings people in their droves to experience its magical charm.

Top image; Hamnøy, south Lofotens

Middle; Å's traditional Rorbu fishing huts

Bottom; Tiny fishing harbours trying to make a living



An arial shot of Hamnøy





Henningsvær harbour





Iconic mountain scenery of the Lofotens

## HIKERS' PARADISE

So many come to the Lofotens because of the sensational hiking. Whether coastal walking or for the more adventurous, the mountain trekking, Lofoten can placate your desires.

Whilst we couldn't do much hiking sadly due to injuries, it's easy to see the potential. Those towering peaks just calling the thrill seeker in you. And can you imagine the rewards you are offered? The views spanning across these archipelago must be simply stunning. After all it is those views that have promoted this visual beauty to the world.

With your walking boots at the ready why not set out on one of the 90+ hikes that span the islands. Like the famous Reinebringen that gives you the iconic perspective of Reine. Scaling 448m, it is not

one of the highest mountains, although this recently repaired path, reopened in May 2019, is a serious uphill challenge. Although in the summer months, be prepared to share it with a few hundred others.

Or perhaps you fancy the hike over to Kvalvika beach which can only be reached by foot. A one hour walk that gives you access to one of Lofoten's beautiful beaches that you will only share with fellow hikers.

For something more gentle, check out the walk from Uttakleiv around the headland to Haukland Beach. Where turquoise waters and white sands welcome you after a gentle stroll or cycle along this 6 mile return trip. A walker's paradise for sure.

Mountains galore for hiking







## Camping in every possible place

### THE BAD AND THE UGLY

As with so many places around the globe that are sinking beneath the weight of tourists, the Lofotens have become the latest victim.

After excellent marketing campaigns to raise awareness of these once little known islands, they are now firmly on the world's stage. 1 million visitors flock here each year, a large majority of whom travel during July and August. And the islands are bursting at the seams.

After re-reading my rhetoric from the last section, it's easy to want to sign up! Who wouldn't want to visit a place with all these incredible offerings? Yet this is the downside of creative writing, it doesn't show all sides. Much like a new release film; the trailer only shows the best bits. So, as with every good piece of travel writing, a balanced perspective is needed. So here are our lowlights.

In 2007 the Lofot route was opened connecting the E10 to the mainland. Reaching the islands became instantly easier. Add to this marketing phrases like, *"the most extraordinary landscape on earth"* and people rushed north like the January sales. In 2017, tourist figures exploded to an unsustainable level.

Not even the locals expected the onslaught of so many visitors. Quite simply, this tiny archipelago hit the global news and they were not ready or able to support the influx.

In 10 years, I suspect the evolution that Lofoten has undergone will have altered its culture forever. Many of the traditional Rorbu no longer house the weary mariner. **Now they are hotel rooms.**



### Traditional Rorbu now holiday accommodation

Places like picturesque Hamnøy, are essentially **holiday villages**. Boats still bob in the harbour, hjell structures still await their fish like laundry lines, yet life seems to have changed dramatically.

Now it's Ribs, ferries and speed boats that command the seas. I'm sure this rebalances when the cod arrive to spawn in winter.

The **traffic was instantly noticeable**. Like a caravan of camels, vehicles thundered past us as we stopped on the outskirts of the islands for lunch. Every vehicle imaginable; one after another!

Admittedly we had chosen probably THE worst period to come, 23 July - amidst Europe's summer holidays. We had been warned about the sheer volume of motorhomes and wow the reports weren't wrong. It felt all-consuming and suffocating. If this was the entrance, what what the beating heart of the islands be like?

Despite Norway's Freedom to Roam policy, there seemed to be **few, truly wild spots** to camp, at least not for the camper.



### Unseasonal Stockfish hanging for the tourists.

We agreed that the spots on the busy E10, were certainly free, although not what I call *wild camping*. Stuck for somewhere to stop we resorted to parking on a lay-by. And albeit it had a pretty view, it didn't have a pretty sound as the traffic revved up at 6.30am. Off the beaten track we found more options although generally we found it tricky.

And it is evident that the infrastructure can't cope; for motorhomes in particular. as there was a **general lack of services**. Although there are rest areas, which have a sexy toilet cleaning system, this is only good if you have a Thetford cassette. So for us Dometics, black waste disposal was very difficult. Thank goodness for 2 cassettes.

**Grey waste** was another challenge. There's a lack of grills to empty, not even the campsite we resorted to stopping at had grey waste facilities.

The traffic had a secondary impact; with narrow roads and tight spaces, we often had to **breathe in praying for our wing**

**mirrors' safety** as fellow campers disregarded the need to slow down.

Visitors stopping in crazy places for the ultimate Insta-pose, vehicles parked in passing places and on the road-side, made getting around challenging. **Car parks for hikes were bursting**, parking areas to enjoy the iconic Reine, impossible and double these traffic volume issues at weekends.

We also found a number of real commercial impacts that seem to signal a shift for the Lofotens; **entrance fees for villages and view points**. Now we're neither tight nor on a restrictive budget, although £10 per person to see the tiny, historic village of Nusfjord seemed excessive.

We believe it's important to give back to the community and paying entrance fees is a way we can do that. Although there's a debate about what constitutes value for money and so sadly we left. £5pp, for sure, £10 too steep.



Locals are getting understandably unhappy with the sheer volume of tourists. 50 coaches a day have been recorded at Nusfjord. **The roads simply can't take it**, let alone the car parks.

Lofoten in the summer and at weekends is simply bursting at the seams. And I do accept that the privilege of writing this eBook means that we too were part of the problem. Although these are just factors that coloured our experience.

The bottom line is that Lofoten **IS** beautiful and has so much to offer us curious culture seeking nature lovers, **although timing is everything!**

What is the future for the Lofoten? I wish I had the answer. Like so many places around the world that are being consumed by tourists, something needs to change. What that something is I don't know.

We are so glad we visited Lofoten although because of the time of year we visited, we came away feeling that its hype marginally exceeded the reality.

So do go, although not in July/August or weekends. Then perhaps you will have a smooth experience.

Our next chapter shares some vital tips on making the best of your experience to the Lofoten Islands.

**Nusfjord - entrance fee for visiting**





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## TIPS FOR VISITORS

The Lofotens invite you to walk, cycle, photograph, camp and generally admire its majestic landscape. After all, so many of us crave adventure and seek those unique and special moments.

So in this chapter we share our Top Tips for visitors, sharing with you how to make your visit to this Nordic jewel a positive and memorable one.



Hamnøy Bridge

## TOP TIPS FOR VISITING LOFOTENS

The Lofotens are at the mercy of the seasons despite their Gulf Stream location. So from a weather perspective, choosing a time to come when you will get some warmth, blue skies and not too many visitors is an interesting conundrum. And there's no simple answer.

We visited at the end of July and the weather was gorgeous, although the previous week it rained each day. And this is pretty much how it's been throughout our seven weeks in Norway. So there are no strategic tips for getting this right. It really is pot luck.

Although when it comes to the time of year you visit, then strategy is very much key to your Lofoten experience. Ours was possibly *the* worst time to go. With much of Europe on their summer holidays, crowds seem to flock north. And whilst by 20th August Norway's

kids have returned to school, many southern European countries use August as their prime time to travel.

We found our visit pretty claustrophobic and the drives around the narrow roads difficult thanks to the pure volume of traffic. It can be quite stressful trying to navigate in between parked vehicles on the sides of these little roads, speeding coaches, heavy goods lorries and fellow motorhomers. Strange how you breathe in when something passes with a feather's distance between you. And of course the impact of the crowds on parking spaces means that in high season you may not be able to fulfil your vision. So here are our Top Tips for visiting the Lofotens...



1. For a 'summer' vacation **May, June and September** are possibly the best months to visit. The spring brings the driest weather and from 25 May to 17 July you will experience the Midnight Sun. And in September, whilst the days are getting shorter, you have a chance of seeing the Northern Lights.
2. Whilst the **winter and early spring** may not feel like a natural time to visit, the locals often say that they are the most unique seasons. With temperatures rarely getting below zero, thanks to the Gulf Stream you still get a wintery feel with snow, although not as extreme as its mainland neighbours. Mid January - February the horizon is a permanent sunrise/sunset providing a magical light. The fishermen are active thanks to the cod season and there are few crowds around. Although the downside is that nothing much is open, so be prepared.
3. **Avoid October to December.** October sees three times more rain than the rest of the year and November/December bring the darkest nights and unpredictable weather. Equally steer clear of **July and August** due to the crowds who flock here.
4. If you have no other choice than July or August, then make sure that you **book up your travel and accommodation** well in advance.
5. **Pack for all seasons!** Not helpful I'm sure although in any one week you could experience four different seasons and a multitude of weather fronts. So layers are the best bet.
6. **Having your own wheels** is the best option for exploring all corners of the Lofotens. So consider hiring a car if you are flying in.



Scoobie parked at Flakstad rest area

## TOP TIPS FOR CAMPER

Norway is an amazing place for wild camping. With its Freedom to Roam Policy, it embraces camping of all sorts from tents to cars and motorhomes. So you would be forgiven for thinking that camping on the Lofoten Islands would be easy, offering some stunning locations with breath-taking morning views. And there would be a resounding YES if you come with a tent. Yet with a camper, it's a little more tricky.

**Iconic wild camping** does exist, in patches, although not as prolifically as we had expected. This was one of our disappointments, given the islands' glossy magazine portrayal. When I stop to think about it, beyond the dreaminess that we imagine, the Lofotens *are* islands and it is worth preparing yourself for this. The places we saw to park up responsibly would best be labelled as *free camping* - not what we would describe as wild, with tranquility surrounded by nature.

**A word about campsites.** This was another surprise. We didn't find many formal campsites, not in the traditional sense of the word. We perhaps have an image of campsites with marked out pitches, electric hook ups and shower facilities. On the Lofotens there are few of these to be had. The one we stayed at was in an outstanding location, although it was a bit of land, by a beach, with a port-a-loo, fresh water and toilet dump all for 250NOK. Other 'sites' tended to be gravel areas of land that entrepreneurs had ear-marked, labelled them 'camping' enabling them to charge a lot of money for very little.

The final thing to be aware of are **services for campervans.** We found nowhere to dump our grey waste. The campsite didn't even have a grill to park over. And fresh water and toilet dump facilities were few and far between. There is one service point at Reine that we found. Otherwise there are few opportunities for filling/emptying.



Our Top Tips for Campers;

1. **Avoid staying in lay-bys on the E10.** Whilst it's one of Norway's 18 most scenic routes, in high season it's throbbing. We made the mistake of stopping in one. Albeit had a wonderful view, the noise from the vehicles thundering passed at 0630, was not what we had imagined nor an exercise we repeated.
2. **Venture off the beaten track** to find beautiful places to stay. We found a couple of amazing spots during our seven day Lofoten tour and the peace was palpable. Check out Chapter 5 for our locations and our interactive map for more detail.
3. **Come fully loaded.** Make sure you arrive on the Lofotens with a full tank of fresh water, additional portable water containers and empty toilet cassettes. This way, you can have a week touring, use the facilities at Reine and not panic about filling and emptying.
4. There are plenty of **supermarkets** around, so don't worry about getting food supplies. The prices are not much different to the mainland and diesel is roughly the same price.
5. There are plenty of official **Restplass** - Rest Areas, intended mostly for the prolific coaches. There are toilets here, lovely views and Toilet Cleaning Cubicles. Although be warned these are ONLY for Thetford Cassettes and NOT Dometic. Although no overnighting is advised, staying is tolerated. We stopped at one in Flakstad with 20 others!
6. If you are there during high season, **leave early** in the morning or **late afternoon** to enjoy quieter roads. Some islands have narrow roads, especially further south, so avoiding the traffic will save your nerves and your wing-mirrors.



Iconic Reine

## TOP TIPS FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS

The Lofoten Islands are a photographer's paradise - any time of the year. Although can you imagine capturing the Northern Lights as they dance across the skies? And the never sinking sun? What an experience that would be on the west coast. Personally I would love to feel the atmosphere of the winter's 'Blue Light' as it flirts with the landscape, show-casing the snow-capped mountains as it tries to compete with the street lights below.

With summer comes fabulous flora providing a great framework for the meandering roads and Caribbean coloured fjords. The rainbows of colours will make your camera jump for joy. What about autumn with its russet hues that grace the mountainsides, moors and grasslands? Photographers are spoiled for choice.

1. A **wide-angle lens** was my best and most used option. Whilst some of the flora and fauna would have been happy with my

zoom, the Lofotens are about the context, the big picture and trying to capture the enormity of the landscape.

2. **Time your fjord shots carefully** as they are affected by the tides. So a landscape can change dramatically based on the tides.
3. The Lofotens are **best seen with height**. So if you can hike up into the mountains to look down and across the islands. Whilst a ground level view is undoubtedly good, I missed some of the best perspectives because we couldn't get up high.
4. If you have a **drone**, be careful. Even though Norway's Drone Laws allow you to fly, it can come up against hostility.
5. The Lofoten **light and shadows** from the towering mountains can be a challenge to that iconic shot. Pick the timing of your picture-perfect shots carefully.

Uttakleiv Beach



Iconic Hamnøy







SUP paradise at Lofoten's best beaches

## TOP TIPS FOR OUTDOOR LOVERS

The Lofotens are outdoor heaven. Whether your love is water, exploring the nooks and crannies with your bicycle or tramping the mountains with your hiking boots. With Norway's best beach accolade being awarded to the Lofoten's Haukland Beach, resistance of its golden sands and inviting waters is futile.

In fact there's very little to do indoors on the Lofotens. There are a couple of museums, although the main focus of this adventurous archipelago is based in the fresh Arctic air.

If you love being outside, then your spirit will be well satiated in this iconic destination. Here are our Top Tips for enjoying the Lofoten's outdoor Mecca...

1. For water sports, you will need a **wet suit**. Whilst the waters look inviting, these are Arctic waters and are icy cold.

2. There are often **SUP, surfboard and kayak hire vans** along the beaches, so you can hire when you want to. Although I didn't spot whether they hired out the wet suits.
3. Do **bring the right clothing and foot-ware for hiking**. The mountains are unpredictable and waterproofs, good walking boots and hydration are essential. And be prepared for huge fluctuations in conditions.
4. For **serious hiking lovers**, check out the [Hiking App OUTT](#) which shows you all the main treks around the islands.
5. If you **come with a tent** - you can camp almost anywhere as long as you respect the [Right to Roam policy](#).

SUP at Flakstad beach





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## PRACTICALITIES

So I'm sure, if like us you are inspired to visit Norway's iconic archipelago, you will need some practical information to help you on your way.

Check out our guidelines for making your trip to the Lofoten Islands a memorable one, for all the right reasons.



Harbour at Svolvær

## PRACTICALITIES OF GETTING TO AND STAYING ON THE LOFOTENS

Over the last ten years, the islands have become so much easier to reach. The building of the new Lofot route has enabled travellers to reach Lofoten within a couple of hours rather than days!

Although paradoxically its success has also been its undoing. Whilst the infrastructure to arrive at these treasure islands is great, sadly the same is not true in between the communities. Consequently the villages are bursting at the seams in high season. That said, if the Lofotens are on your wish list, knowing how to get here may help your route planning.

### By Road

If you are arriving from the north or east via **Tromso** or from **Narvik**, then take the **E10**.

From Narvik travel time is under 3 hours and Tromso around 6 hours.

From the **south**, the arterial E6 is the quickest route. Or take the more scenic option of **Fv17** to Bodø, which is one of Norway's 18 Most Scenic Highways. This is a stunningly beautiful route as you weave around the coast.

### By Ferry

There are a couple of ferry options. Via **Bodø to Moskenes** in the south of Lofoten. Or **Stukvik to Svolvær**.

These are car ferries and take around 3.5-4 hours. There's a good summer schedule and you are able to book in advance if your travel window is short. [Here's a link](#). They charge per vehicle including the



driver and then per additional passenger. The final cost is dependent on the length of your vehicle although costs do increase significantly if you are over 6m.

We strongly recommend getting a **Ferry Discount Card** from [Autopass](#) if you are travelling up through Norway. Ferries are a major feature of Norway's transport system and the prices can soon add up. If you register for this card, which is new for 2019, then you get up to 50% discount on your ferry journeys including to/from Lofoten. It has made a huge difference to our expenses. Make sure you apply for the card before leaving home as the card is sent to your home address.

If you are travelling on foot and hiring a car when you arrive or have a bike, then you can take the Express Ferry from Bodø to Svolvær. This is only for foot passengers and takes 3.5 hours.

If you are leaving the islands by ferry from either Moskenes or Svolvær, then if you are there in high season it is worth trying to book ahead. As long as you book at least one day in advance of your crossing, then you can reserve your place. Click [here](#). 40% of each ferry is set aside for those who reserve. The remaining 60% are for those who wish to turn up and take pot luck.

When you arrive at the port, if you have made a reservation, then park up in **Lane 1 or 2** - which are reserved for bookings. Lanes 3-5 are for those without a ticket. Please bear in mind that there is limited capacity on these ferries - approx 50 vehicles. So if you arrive and have to park in Lane 5, you are unlikely to get on that sailing. The advantage though is when the ferry has departed you can park up immediately in Lane 3 and be guaranteed a spot. We stayed overnight in Lane 3 of Svolvær's port ready for our 0815 sailing.



## By Plane

The Lofotens are surprisingly accessible by air. If you are flying in from foreign lands, then take a flight to Oslo (Gardermoen) which flies to 100 cities around the world.

Then you'll need a link to one of 250 domestic flights to northern Norway; either **Tromsø**, **Narvik** (Evenes) or **Bodø**. You could then hire a car from the airport or take another short flight to one of the Lofoten's three airports at **Røst**, **Leknes** and **Svolvær**. For more information, schedules and prices check [here](#). I can certainly vouch for the internal flights in Norway as I had to fly back to UK from Tromsø and the flight was excellent.

## Accommodation

If you are looking for non-camping accommodation, you have plenty of options.

One of the most authentic places to stay is a Rorbu - a traditional fisherman's cabin - many of which have now been converted to try to soak up the influx of summer visitors. Alternatively in the main towns like Å, Reine, Leknes or Svolvær you have guest house or hotel options. Check this [link](#) out for more information.

## Camping Options

Whether you like wild camping or prefer campsites, there are places to stay. In the next chapter you will find our favourites and the route we took, although you can check out [Park4Night](#) and [SearchforSites](#) for options for tents, campervans and motorhomes.

## Currency

The Lofotens have Norwegian Krone and whilst it's worth taking some cash, Norway is a cashless society. So take your credit card.



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## OUR ROUTE AND OVERNIGHT STOPS

In this penultimate chapter, we offer you a peak at our tour of the Lofotens, our off-the-beaten-track routes and the places that we called home.

We've put together a video and an interactive map with all our highlights and our overnight co-ordinates.



Scoobie overlooking Reine from Hamnøy

## OUR ROUTE AROUND THE LOFOTENS

Our Lofoten Islands' experience was a real mixed bag. The gulf that emerged between our initial excitement, hope and anticipation to the reality was huge and our disappointment sank into it quickly. Although as we reflect on our seven days, we are very happy that we went. Albeit we visited at the wrong time of year, it certainly wouldn't put me off going again. Although next time I would go February/March so that I could experience the winter scene and a completely opposing perspective.

All that said, the islands are a unique destination and on so many people's bucket list. We love that travel gives us a range of experiences and we have no regrets about our time there. Here is our video which gives you a peak into our personal perspective of the Lofoten Islands.

Click here for video

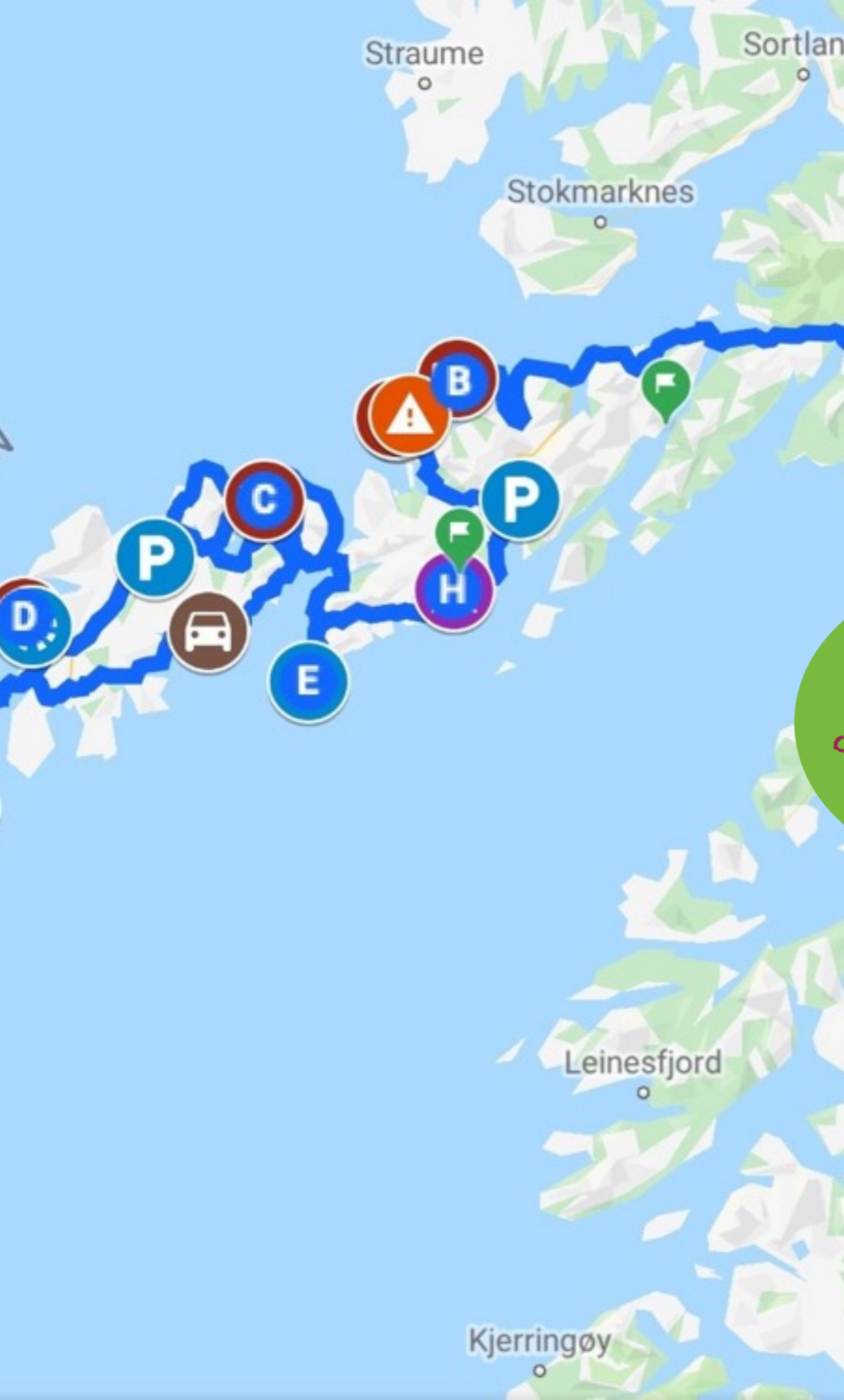




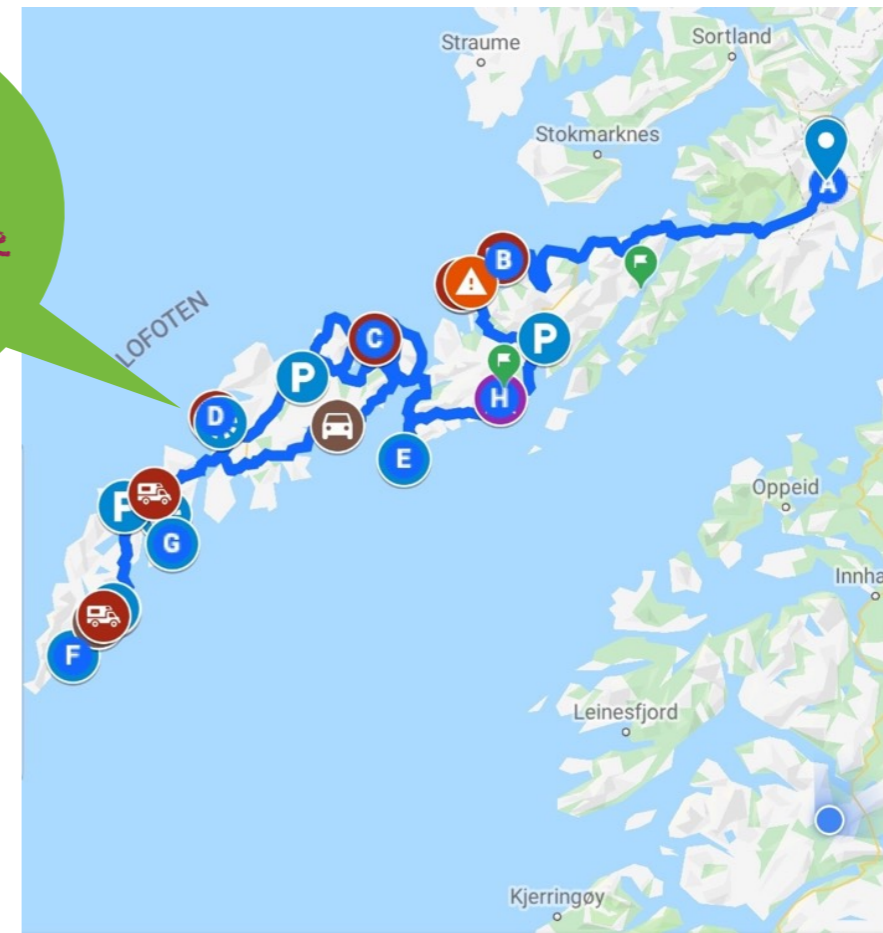
## OUR ROUTE AROUND THE LOFOTENS

We have created an interactive map of our Lofoten road-trip in July 2019. It highlights our overnight stays with co-ordinates, pictures and our best bits.

I hasten to add that this is a driving guide and not a walking route map, given injuries we had sustained the previous month. So we hope that it might be useful for checking out some of our more off-piste routes.



Click here for our interactive map





Scoobie's 'home' at Rolf's Bar, Lofoten

## OUR 'HOMES'

Here are our overnight stops, one which was a 'campsite' so we could get services and the rest were free camping spots. Check these out.

**Rolf's Bar - 68.423948 14.563117**



**Gimsoy - 68.315116 14.092139**



**Uttakleiv Campsite - 68.209223 13.507946**



**Flakstad Beach - 68.103732 13.283131**



**Hamnøy - 67.945235 13.133114**



**Svolvær Ferry Port - 68.234754 14.553024**





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## OUR PHOTO GALLERY

And finally, to give you a flavour of what we experienced through our eyes and our lens, here is a gallery of our Lofoten images.

We hope you have enjoyed this frank guide and that it helps you optimise your visit here sometime in the future. In the meantime we hope that the Lofotens finds a way to manage its new-found fame and secures and protects the authentic character that has made it so popular.



**Lofoten fishing - their true way of life**

## Reflections on Lofoten



## Hamnøy village - south Lofoten











## Driving view of southern Lofotens





## Hamnøy fishing harbour











## Southern Lofoten fishing port







# THE MOTOROAMERS' GUIDE TO THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS - NORWAY

