



DE HISTORISKE



A letter from **Kviknes Hotel and Balestrand**



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FOTO: CAMILLA IVERSEN, DE HISTORISKE

The sun is shining as we make our way down to Strandkaaien in the heart of Bergen — a rare treat on an early May morning. But the timing couldn't be more perfect. Today, we're catching the express boat to Balestrand to visit Kviknes Hotel.

Even before boarding, it's clear we're not the only ones drawn to the fjords. The pier hums with eager travellers, all ready to experience the beauty of Norway's west coast from the water. The boat glides through the mighty Sognefjord and on toward Flåm, offering one of the most scenic routes in the country — a front-row seat to both the Sognefjord and the UNESCO-listed Nærøyfjord.

As we wave goodbye to Bergen, some passengers head to the sun deck to snap the first photos of the journey. The crossing to Balestrand takes just over four hours, with brief stops in picturesque fjord villages, remote islands, and historic trading posts along the way.



“We exchange a quiet smile. This is where we’ll spend the night.”

As the boat glides deeper into the fjord, the crew shares stories over the loudspeaker—charming anecdotes about the villages we pass and suggestions on when to turn our gaze toward the unfolding landscape. The fjord lies mirror-still, glittering in the sunlight. Eventually, we join the others on deck, drawn out by the fresh air, the views, and the calming sound of water against the hull.

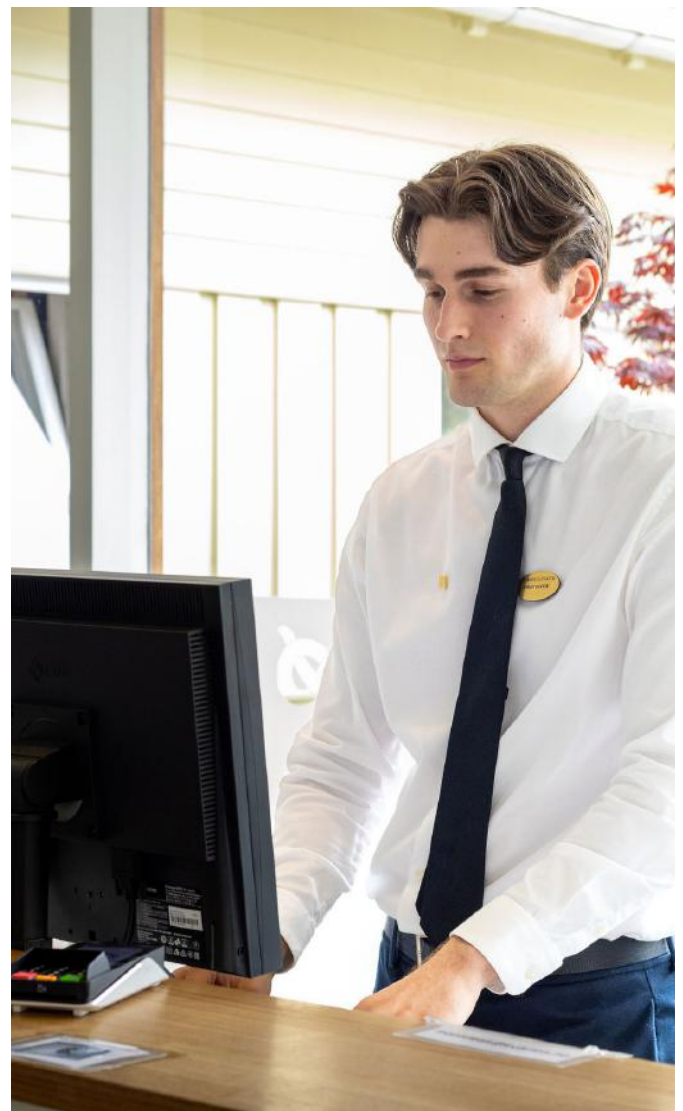
Soon, Balestrand comes into view—and with it, Kviknes Hotel, rising like a fairytale castle from the water’s edge. The grand white building in Swiss style makes an immediate impression, and fellow passengers gather along the railings, cameras at the ready. The serene fjord, the towering peaks, the elegant architecture—this is the definition of Norwegian romanticism. We exchange a quiet smile. This is where we’ll spend the night.

Stepping ashore, we’re met by crisp mountain air and a sense of calm that settles almost instantly. Surrounded by steep, green hillsides and snow-dusted peaks, it feels like walking into a painting. During the journey, the crew spoke about Balestrand’s unique light—a quality that has drawn artists from all over the world for centuries. Now we see it for ourselves. A quick stop at a charming little shop later, and we’ve secured sunglasses—ready to face the light and the rest of the day.

At the hotel, we’re warmly welcomed by Kari Kvikne. Hospitality at Kviknes Hotel dates back to 1752, and today the fourth generation of the Kvikne family runs the show. Together with her brother Sigurd and sister Marta, Kari continues the legacy that began when their family took over the hotel in 1877.

“Welcome to Kviknes,” she says with a smile, asking about our journey across the fjord.

We enjoy a pleasant conversation as she effortlessly balances chatting with us and greeting guests coming and going. It’s clear that the role of host is second nature—something passed down, just like the hotel itself.



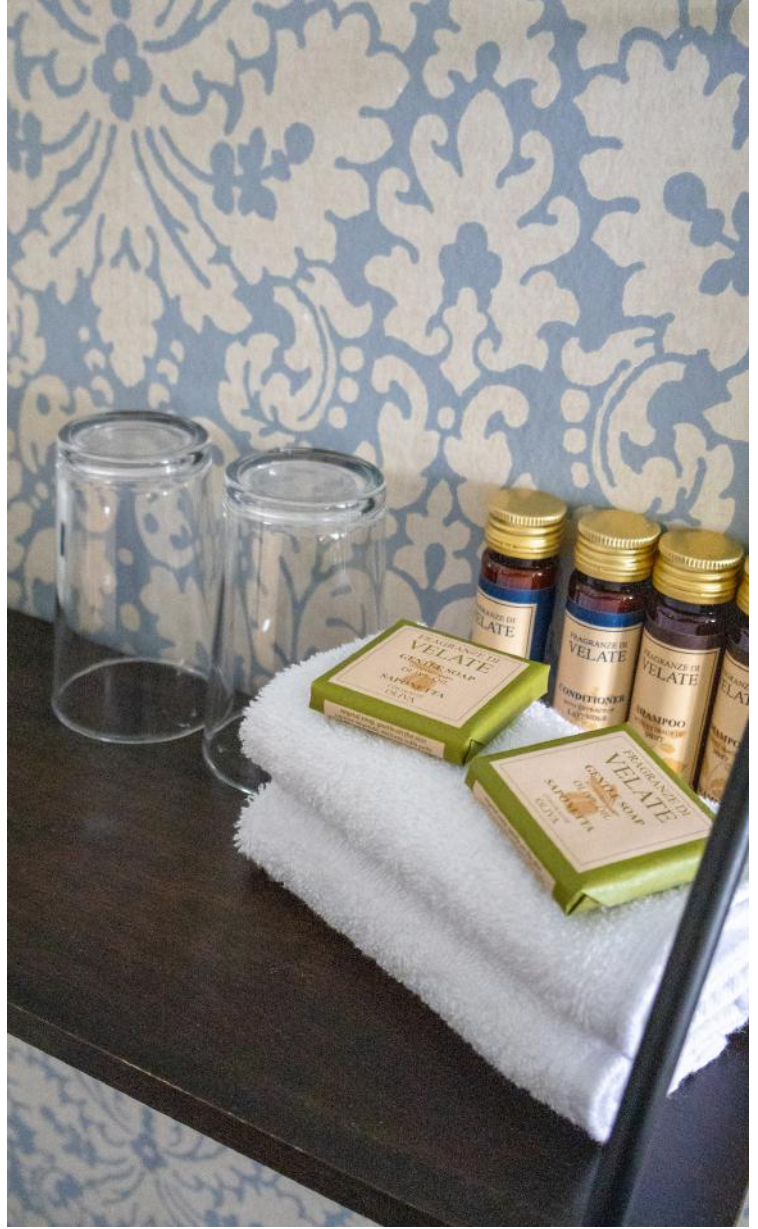


A Tour with Housekeeper Burute

We arrive well ahead of check-in and leave our luggage with the friendly reception staff before being welcomed on a tour by Burute, the hotel's housekeeper. She greets us with a warm smile and explains that she originally came from Lithuania — and has now worked at the hotel for nearly 19 years.

"My plan was to stay for six months," she says. "But then I found friends, family, and a life here in Balestrand — so I stayed."

As we stroll through the elegant lounges, surrounded by ornate frames, historic paintings, and large windows that open up to stunning views of the hotel garden and fjord, Burute speaks passionately about the hotel and its rich history.



The common areas feel both spacious and refined, and soon we're climbing the staircase for a glimpse into the historic rooms. Behind each door is a unique space — complete with antique furniture, beautiful detailing, and carefully curated interiors. Many rooms have balconies where you can enjoy your morning coffee with a view.

We snap photos as Burute continues to share her knowledge and affection for the place.

"I love working here," she says.

"There are so many layers, so much history. The Kvikne family's story is still being written — and it feels meaningful to be part of it and to pass it on to new colleagues."





We leave the oldest part of the hotel — the historic Swiss-style building — and make our way to the newer wing, where the more modern rooms are located. While this section of the hotel reflects a more contemporary style, each room still carries its own character. Throughout the rooms we notice unique touches that carry the hotel's story through different eras.

The walls are adorned with artwork, and the curtains vary in pattern and texture.

"It's Sigurd's wife who is in charge of the interiors here," Burute tells us.

It's clear that care and attention to detail are present in every corner — no matter which wing of the hotel you're in.



Art and Culture in Historic Lounges

We thank Burute for the tour and let her return to her work. We then head downstairs to explore the hotel's historic lounges and salons.

There's so much to take in. Room after room is filled with treasures, artwork, and antiques — collected by an art-loving family over generations. Carved furniture, vintage lamps, embroidered tablecloths, and fresh flowers — every detail thoughtfully placed.

Many of the artworks come from painters with a strong connection to Balestrand — artists like Hans F. Gude, Johannes Flintoe, and Hans Dahl. They weren't just regular guests at the hotel; many of them settled in the village. Around the turn of the 20th century, Balestrand became a hub for artists, drawn by its distinctive light, dramatic fjord landscape, and rich history. Several built their summer houses here in Swiss chalet style, and both the homes and paintings from that era remain an important part of Balestrand's identity today.





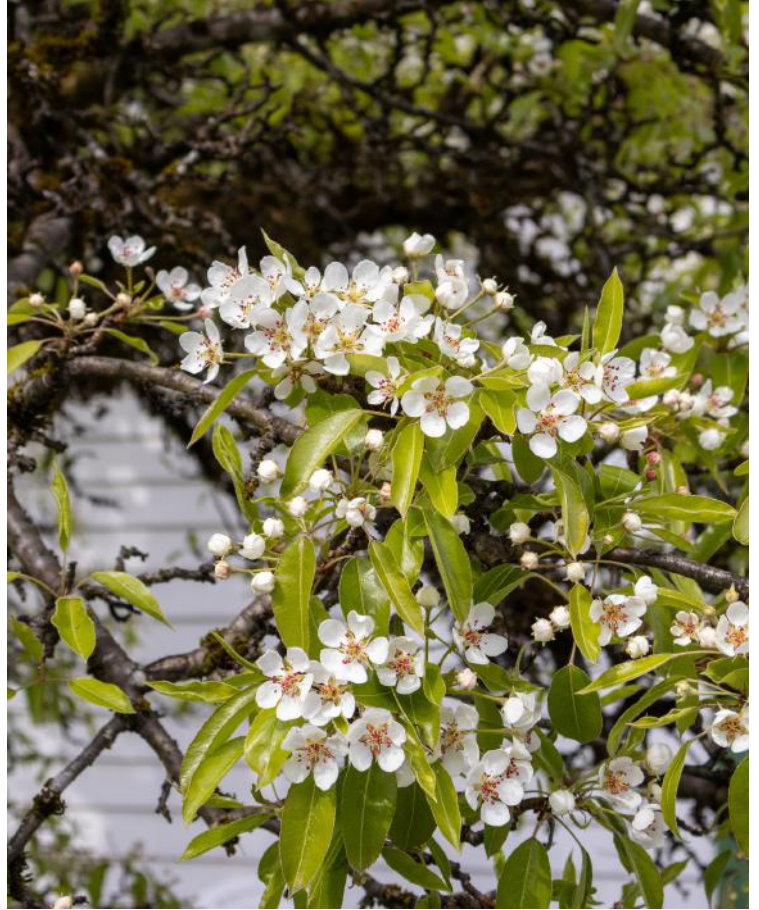
Among the many remarkable spaces at Kviknes Hotel, Høyviksalen (the Høyvik Hall) stands out as something truly extraordinary. The entire room is a cohesive work of art, crafted by the master artisan Ivar Høyvik. Every element – from chairs and tables to doorways and mirror frames – is handmade in the traditional Norwegian dragon style. The room exudes history, skill, and soul. According to legend, it was in this very room that Kaiser Wilhelm II sat when he received word of the outbreak of World War I.

Høyvik's distinctive carvings have left a lasting imprint on Balestrand. His unique craftsmanship can still be seen adorning homes and villas around the village – a living legacy that connects past and present.

The walls of the hotel are adorned with paintings by renowned artists such as Adelsteen Normann, whose works capture the powerful landscapes of the surrounding fjords and mountains. Interspersed between the artwork are portraits of the Kvikne family and vintage photographs that offer a window into the hotel's storied past.

For those wanting to explore more of Balestrand's rich heritage, the Norwegian Museum of Travel and Tourism is just steps away. Here you can take part in guided tours through both the museum and the village, and immerse yourself in the golden age of travel – a time of grand garden parties, imperial visits, and flourishing artist colonies. If you're lucky, you may also have the chance to join hotel director Sigurd Kvikne for a storytelling session before dinner. With warmth and pride, he brings to life the stories of the hotel, the early pioneers of tourism, and the magic that has drawn guests to Balestrand for generations.





Flavours and Flowers by the Fjord

We could have spent hours wandering through the hotel's historic lounges, but eventually, our stomachs take the lead. We make our way back toward the reception and settle into a table at the Balholm Bar – the hotel's relaxed and inviting bistro.

Our lunch choice is a classic open-faced shrimp sandwich with hand-peeled shrimp and creamy mayonnaise, paired with the soup of the day: the house's own cauliflower soup. The food can be enjoyed indoors or out on the terrace.

At the neighboring table, we spot Kari sharing a coffee and a bite to eat with her mother – the third generation of the Kvikne family. They smile warmly and exchange a few friendly words.

"Have you found anything worth photographing?" Kari asks with a knowing smile. We assure her that we most certainly have.

After a lovely meal, we step outside to explore the hotel's lush garden.

A vibrant pink cherry blossom tree reaches up the side of the building, glowing in the afternoon light. The air is fresh, the fjord glistens just beyond the hedge, and all around us, the sense of peace is almost tangible. Bright yellow tulips and colorful flowers sway gently in the sea breeze. Scattered throughout the garden are white benches – perfect places to pause, unwind, and perhaps lose yourself in a good book.

Just in front of the hotel, the floating dock stretches calmly into the bay – ideal for a refreshing dip when the weather allows. Today, the water feels a bit too brisk for swimming, but on warm summer days, it's the perfect spot. We follow a small gravel path that winds along the shoreline, leading us to the hotel's private bathing area. The sun dances across the surface of the water, creating a shimmer of tiny, glittering stars.

In summer, this is the place to stretch out on a sun lounger, towel draped across your lap, soaking in the sun and the breathtaking views of Balestrand, the mountains, and the fjord.



Check-in and Dinner

We make our way back up to the reception and check in. Our rooms are located in the modern wing, and mine includes a spacious sitting area and a private terrace. I brew myself a cup of coffee, step outside into the sunshine, and let my gaze rest on the majestic landscape—the very same views that have inspired generations of artists.

A few hours later, we meet up again in the reception area. We've been given a rare treat: a quick visit to the hotel kitchen before dinner to snap some behind-the-scenes photos. It's not our first time behind the line, so we know to stay light on our feet. The pace is intense—chefs move quickly between hot pans and sharp knives. "Behind!" echoes through the kitchen as they pass one another, but even so, a few offer a quick grin to the camera.

They're busy for good reason. Tonight's meal is the hotel's generous summer buffet—a spread brimming with local cheeses, fresh vegetables, seafood, cured meats, warm dishes, and crisp salads. And then there's the dessert table, lined with tempting cakes and sweet treats. It's hard to stop at just one plate.

We settle at a table with a view of the fjord. Our server recommends a glass of local cider—perfect, since we're visiting the farm behind the bottle tomorrow: Ciderhuset. For wine lovers, it's worth noting that the hotel also boasts the largest and most impressive wine cellar along the Sognefjord, with over 300 different wines on the list.

Satisfied and content, we linger at the table, enjoying the food and atmosphere before calling it a night. The hotel bed awaits—and so does a new day of discoveries.





Day 2: A Cultural Walk in Balestrand with Eli-Grete

After a good night's sleep, we draw back the curtains—and there it is again: the sun, shining brightly from a cloudless blue sky. The view is postcard-perfect.

We squeeze in a quick shower before gathering for breakfast in the restaurant. The buffet is laid with freshly baked bread, buttery croissants, sweet fruit, and local cold cuts—just what we need before a day of walking.

Today, we're meeting Eli-Grete Høyvik—granddaughter of woodcarver Ivar Høyvik and host at Ciderhuset Balholm. She'll be guiding us through the cultural highlights of Balestrand, with stops at the English Church, the Viking burial mounds at Balahaugen, and of course, Ciderhuset itself.

We just have time to change into walking gear before the tour begins. Fittingly, we meet in the Høyvik Room—surrounded by Eli-Grete's grandfather's craftsmanship, carved details from floor to ceiling.

She greets us with a warm smile: "I see the hiking clothes—then you must be from De Historiske!" she laughs, extending her hand.

We laugh too and shake hands, before she leads us further into the room for a brief introduction. She begins with Balestrand's story—how the tiny fjord village first drew artists from far and wide, and how it found its place on the map. Naturally, the conversation turns to her grandfather and his contribution to the town. She gestures toward the many carvings, drawing our attention to the intricate details. Many of them are inspired by sagas and motifs from Norse mythology.

"Here, for instance, is Sigurd the Dragon Slayer," says Eli-Grete, pointing to a carved panel.

She tells us that this very motif also inspired Bjor—a traditional Norwegian cider crafted at Ciderhuset. As we let our eyes wander around the room, more and more intricate details begin to reveal themselves.

Then, we step outside and begin the cultural walk. Balestrand is a picturesque village to stroll through, and it doesn't take long before we're surrounded by lush gardens, stately Swiss-style villas, and small historical plaques dotting the roadside.







But one building truly stands out—a small church reminiscent of a stave church, nestled among the ornate Swiss-style villas. Eli-Grete leads us inside and begins to share the story behind this unique place—and the woman who left a lasting mark on the village.

She explains that much of early tourism in Norway began with the so-called Grand Tours—a tradition from the 17th to 19th centuries, where young, affluent Europeans traveled across the continent to cultivate themselves through culture and nature. One such traveler was William Slingsby, a British outdoorsman and mountaineer, who was the first to summit Store Skagastølstind in 1876.

His story inspired many—among them an English clergyman's daughter named Margaret Sophia Green, who journeyed to Norway to climb the same peaks. Her plan was to follow in Slingsby's footsteps, but poor weather forced her to change course. Instead, she made her way to Balestrand, where she met Knut Kvikne, great-grandfather of the hotel's current director, Sigurd.



Knut had just returned from America to help with the expansion of the hotel. The story doesn't say much about which mountains they climbed—but love blossomed. Margaret and Knut married and settled down in Balestrand.

Sadly, their time together was short. Margaret died of tuberculosis only four years after their wedding. Before she passed, she asked her husband to promise her one thing: to build an English church in Balestrand. Knut kept his word, and with the help of the local women, St. Olaf's Church was completed in 1897.

Inside the church hangs a portrait of Margaret, along with a memorial plaque bearing a quote from the Book of Psalms: "The mountains shall bring peace."

The church is built in English style, but modeled after traditional Norwegian stave churches—and it even served as inspiration for the church in Disney's *Frozen*. To this day, services are still held here each summer, led by English priests and always conducted in English, following Anglican tradition.



GLORIA IN EXCELSIS



KOMMER O TIL NOS

Olaf den hellige

St. Olaf's Church
The Church
of the Holy Spirit
in the town of
Haugesund

“We can’t afford to buy the paintings — but we have the view!”

We continue along the cultural trail until we reach Belehaugen and the statue of King Bele. In the 19th century, the saga of Fridtjov the Brave and his love for Ingebjørg, King Bele’s daughter, became widely popular across Europe. Balestrand is home to several Viking burial mounds, strategically placed in the landscape so they can be seen from the fjord.

Inspired by the saga and the dramatic surroundings, artists like Gude and Flintoe traveled here to paint. Emperor Wilhelm II was also captivated. In 1913, he commissioned a bronze statue of King Bele at Belehaugen — and that same year, a statue of Fridtjov, Ingebjørg’s chosen, was erected across the fjord in Vangsnes.

Nearby stands an open photo frame facing the fjord, similar to one we spotted in the hotel garden. Eli-Grete explains that these sculptural frames are positioned in the landscape to capture four key motifs of Norwegian national romanticism. Here, you can admire the scenery exactly as the artists saw it.

“We can’t afford to buy the paintings — but we do have the view!” she laughs.

Before we continue on to Ciderhuset, Eli-Grete invites us inside the newly restored Høyvik House, built by her grandparents in 1910. With support from the Cultural Heritage Fund, she and her husband Åge Eitungjerde have returned the home to its original splendor. It feels like stepping into a living museum. The house is filled with original furniture crafted by her grandfather Ivar Høyvik and beautiful textiles created by her grandmother Eli, who embroidered, wove, and sewed traditional bunads.





In the basement, there is a cozy gathering room for storytelling and cider tasting. The house is also planned to be rented out to guests seeking an exclusive and authentic overnight stay in the heart of this cultural village.

Midway through the tour, Eli-Grete receives a call from her daughter-in-law inviting us for coffee at Kunstfabrikken. Åge drives us there, sharing lively stories about the village along the way.

Upon arrival, we are warmly welcomed by Tuba Ardic, who, together with her husband Gard Eitungjerde Høyvik, founded Creative Connections Norway (CCN) in 2018 as part of the Cider House. The project "ARTicipation" aims to use art as a tool for self-expression and social connection.

We arrive during an ongoing workshop where international participants explore how nature and art can be used as tools for emotional development. Today's focus is mindfulness, and several participants sit quietly, scattered throughout the house. We find a quiet corner to chat.

"This is also an important part of Balestrand," Eli-Grete says. "It's wonderful to see the younger generation continuing the artistic spirit that has always defined the village."

Tuba explains that many course participants return — inspired by the landscape, just like the artists did 200 years ago. In Balestrand, there is room for both tradition and innovation.





After a cup of coffee, we say our goodbyes and continue our walk toward Ciderhuset. This time, Eli-Grete takes the wheel while Åge is dropped off in the orchard to deal with a stubborn robotic lawnmower.

We begin in the farm shop, where shelves are filled with local delicacies — chocolate, jam, cider, and wine — all beautifully decorated with Norse motifs and playful names. It's Tuba who crafts the chocolate, blending sweets with fruit: dried apples, plums soaked in dram, or Prunus dessert wine.

The Cider House is nestled in an orchard established in 1922 by Andreas Eitungjerde. His grandson Åge took over in the '90s, quit his job as a college lecturer, and devoted himself fully to fruit processing.



The result was Balholm and Ciderhuset — a place where local fruit from Sogn is transformed into cider, jellies, and chutneys, depending on what nature provides: apricot, quince, medlar, currants, blueberries — or perhaps something entirely different.

Upstairs lies the cider restaurant, where the menu is tailored to complement the house's own ciders. Guests can savor the flavors of Sogn while enjoying panoramic views of the fjord. During the summer season, both cider tastings and the "Cider Makers Dinner" are held daily.

We would have loved to stay longer, but hope to fit in a mountain hike before departure. With chocolate and apple juice packed in our bags, we continue on.



One thing is certain: the people of Balestrand are both hardworking and exceptionally hospitable. We chat about everything that has impressed us as the clinking of the apple juice bottle echoes in our bag.

The hiking trails offer plenty of options, and we received maps from the reception. At the trailhead, signs point in every direction — but unfortunately, time is short. We have an appointment with hotel manager Sigurd Kvikne and must turn back. We make a note of the routes for our next visit.

Back at the hotel, we change into casual clothes and meet Sigurd in the lobby for a conversation — covering everything from the hotel's history to when he opened for his son, "Kjartan Lauritzen," at Oslo Spektrum.

[*You can read the interview with Sigurd here.*](#)

Before leaving, we manage one last lunch at Balholm Bar. This time, it's the salad's turn — fresh, flavorful, and the perfect way to end our trip before the boat takes us back across the fjord. We feel both satisfied and a little wistful. We could have happily stayed longer.

We wave goodbye to the hotel as we board the boat:

"Thank you for everything, Kviknes — we'll definitely be back!"





Recommended hikes:

Nature Trail (0–150 m.a.s.l.)

An easy walk suitable for most people. Along the way, you'll find informational signs about the local nature and wildlife.

Orrabenken (0–370 m.a.s.l.)

A pleasant hike with an ascent to a bench offering panoramic views over the village and the fjord. Suitable for most hikers.

Raudmelen (0–978 m.a.s.l.)

A relatively challenging mountain hike. Good resting spots along the way, including Orrabenken and Buråsi (575 m). From the summit, enjoy fantastic views of the Ese mountains, Esefjord, and large parts of central Sogn.

Saurdalen (650–920 m.a.s.l.)

A beautiful valley and starting point for both short and long hikes in varied nature. Recommended day hike: from Saurdalen to Balestrand via Raudmelen — an impressive route for those in good shape.

Tjuatoten (0–1098 m.a.s.l.)

A demanding summit hike starting from Dragsvik, 9 km from the center. At the top, you'll find an ancient sun cross and breathtaking views.

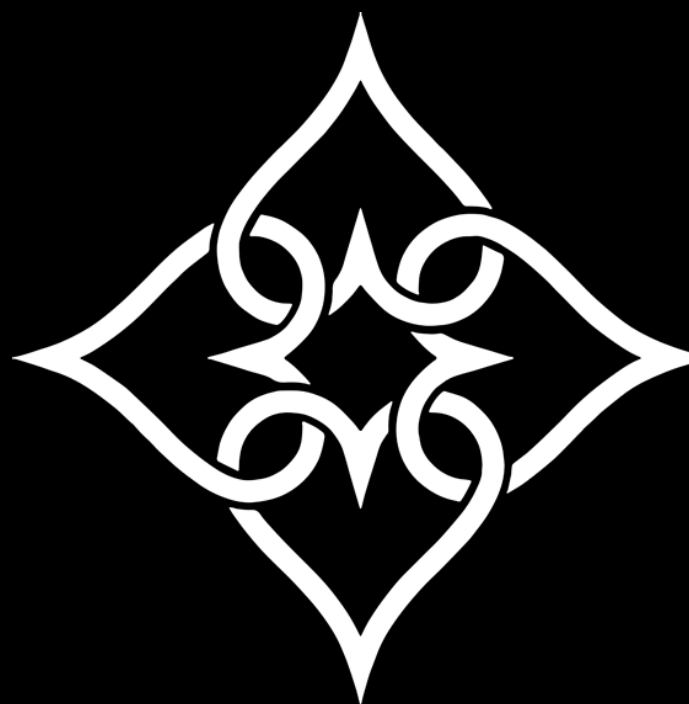
Keipen (0–1417 m.a.s.l.)

A long and physically demanding hike (12–14 km with nearly 1500 meters of elevation gain). Rewarded with a spectacular nature experience!

Fossestien (500 meters elevation gain)

A hiking trail from Gaularfjellet to Viksdalen. Suitable for most people, passing 14 major waterfalls — including Likholefossen — and 7 mountain lakes. There are four different starting points.

[Read more about the hotel here](#)



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