



# The man behind Kviknes Hotel



DE HISTORISKE





**Hotel Director Sigurd Kvikne officially joined the management of the historic Kviknes Hotel in Balestrand at the age of 26 — but he's been running through its hallways since he was a little boy. We took a trip to Balestrand to catch up with the hotel king himself and chat about childhood, music, and Norwegian tourism.**

**By:** Camilla Iversen, De Historiske

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We step into the beautiful Høyvik Hall — the crown jewel of the hotel, filled with stunning artworks and furniture from various eras and artists. It's one of Sigurd's favorite spots, where he also hosts weekly storytelling sessions for his guests. History has always been a key part of the hotel experience. Generations have carefully preserved heirlooms and artworks, giving the hotel its distinct soul and atmosphere.

Together with his sisters, Marta and Kari, Sigurd keeps the daily operations running at this fairytale hotel built in the Swiss chalet style. The tradition of hosting guests here dates all the way back to 1752, and the Kvikne family has been the warm and welcoming hosts since 1877, when great-grandfather Ole Kvikne took over the hotel with his wife Kari and brother Knut.

That marked the beginning of a remarkable journey of growth — one that's still going strong today. Now, a new generation of Kviknes is carrying on the legacy.

- "I'm the eldest son and fourth generation to run the hotel. I grew up here. Even though I didn't live at the hotel, I was here all the time while my parents were running Kviknes Hotel as the third generation of hosts," says Sigurd.

He goes on to explain that while it was never a given that he and his two sisters would one day take over the hotel, it was always in the cards.

- "I was constantly being patted on the head and told, 'One day, this will all be yours, my boy.'"

Early on, Sigurd fell in love with music — more specifically, with the American singer, songwriter, and guitarist James Taylor. That passion heavily influenced his choice of education after middle school.

When it was time to pick a high school, the music program in Voss caught his attention. He sent in his application, crossed his fingers and hoped for the best.









*"Music is a wonderful hobby that has brought me a lot of joy and fun."*

## **Voss High School**

-“When I applied, I was told I didn't get into the music program — just waitlisted. So I ended up going with my second choice: economics at the local high school in Balestrand,” Sigurd explains.

It felt like a natural part of his education, since he was expected to eventually take over the hotel. But two weeks in — textbooks bought and classes underway — he got the message: he'd been accepted to the music program at Voss High School after all.

-“So I ran downstairs to my parents and told them, ‘I'm off to Voss to study music.’ They were a bit skeptical and asked if I was absolutely sure,” he says, smiling. “I told them, ‘Yes, I'm completely sure.’” Then Sigurd packed his bags and set off for Voss to begin his music studies.

- “Three unforgettable years — filled with music, mountains, and fresh powder,” he says with a smile.

He still had this underlying feeling that he wasn't quite “James Taylor,” and not good enough to become a full-time musician. But hey, he could always keep it as a hobby. After Voss, he began exploring what it would take to best prepare himself for a career in the hotel industry.

-“That's when I started studying hotel management in Stavanger, at the Norwegian School of Hotel Management,” he says. “But I've kept music as an amazing hobby and have had a lot of fun with it over the years.”

## **Balejazz**

As a die-hard James Taylor fan, Sigurd even started a tribute band called “Sigurd and the Sweet Baby James Band.” He was also one of the founders behind the successful Balejazz Festival, held every year on the first weekend of May at Kviknes Hotel. This year marked the 33rd edition of the jazz festival — and according to Sigurd, it was a huge success.

-“The Balejazz brand has become so strong that when guests leave on Sunday, they're already booking their stay for next year. So by Sunday, before the next year's lineup has even been announced, every room in the historic building is fully booked,” Sigurd says, before continuing:

“ -We arrange 17 concerts over the course of two days. We think broadly when putting together the program and make sure there's something for everyone. The forecast called for terrible weather this year — but in the end, it turned out perfect, just as we'd hoped,” Sigurd says with a big smile.

He's performed at Balejazz a couple of times himself and describes a truly unique atmosphere that arises when around 2,800 people gather in the hotel garden to watch a concert — with a stunning fjord view as the backdrop to the stage. But he's played for even larger crowds than that — most recently this March.

## **Oslo Spektrum**

Back in March, Sigurd got to open at Oslo Spektrum — for none other than his two sons: Per Áki Sigurdsson Kvikne, better known by his stage name Kjartan Lauritzen, and DJ Theodor Sigurdsson Kvikne. That night, he got a real taste of what it means to be a rock star — performing for a crowd of 9,000 people.

-“It felt like the circle was complete when I stood there on stage. Because for a brief moment, I was James Taylor — in front of 9,000 people,” Sigurd says, smiling. “It was just incredible. An amazing experience — one I'll probably never have again.”

But saying yes to the invitation from his sons didn't come easy.

-“Honestly, it was the nerves,” he admits. “The day before, we went to check out Oslo Spektrum. It's a massive venue. And I realized I couldn't let my anxiety ruin this moment. I couldn't just go back to the hotel room and sit there all day, shaking and dreading it. This was something to enjoy, something to look forward to.”

So, when he stepped onto the stage at Oslo Spektrum with his band on Friday, March 28, the nerves were gone — and the show went even better than expected. His rock star dream had finally come true.





Foto: 3. og 4. generasjon Kvikne

## The Art of Hospitality

Let's rewind 39 years — back to when Sigurd completed his studies at the Norwegian School of Hotel Management in Stavanger. He joined the hotel's management team at the age of 26. From the beginning, he felt proud to be part of the hotel's long story — and today, he's even prouder of what the family has accomplished together.

—“I'm proud of what we've built over the years — as one family — and that we've managed to carry it forward,” Sigurd says. “In our generation, we've really managed to raise the quality of what we offer. At least within our niche. It's a large building, and it takes a lot to maintain it. But all in all, I think our guests feel that my sisters and I have taken good care of this hotel.”

When he took over from his parents, there were a few things he knew he wanted to carry on — one of them being the warm sense of hospitality he had learned from both his mother and father.

—“My father was a fantastic storyteller. Incredibly knowledgeable. When he spoke, I could see people were genuinely captivated,” Sigurd says. “He had a way of drawing people in — with tales of national romanticism, art, and stories about emperors and noblemen,” he says and continues:

—“My mother was incredibly skilled when it came to operations. She was always present, supported the staff, and made sure everything was clean and in perfect order.”

## Homebody

Sigurd speaks proudly of his staff, saying they're lucky to have such loyal and dedicated employees — some who've stayed for decades, and seasonal workers who return summer after summer.

—“We're truly blessed in that regard. Several of our employees have been here for over 20, even 30 years. Seasonal staff come back every summer to work with us — and some have even decided to settle down and build a life here in Balestrand. It's amazing to have such loyal and kind colleagues. We appreciate them more than words can say,” says Sigurd.

As for himself, he's deeply attached to his hometown and says he feels grateful to live in Balestrand. That feeling often hits him hardest after he's been away.

—“When you travel and see the world, then come back here... you realize just how special this place really is,” he says, and adds: “The nature, the fjord, the mountains — it's all just incredible. It's a wonderful place to grow up, and to raise your own children someday. It's safe, it's peaceful — it's home.”



## Open-Door Policy

Living in a small town doesn't mean missing out. If Sigurd and his family ever feel the need for big-city energy, it's just a trip away — and they can always come back when they've had their fill. Sigurd also points out the daily benefits of small-town life.

—“It's a luxury to live just two minutes from work — no traffic jams, no stress. You might save two hours a day compared to others, and that's time you can spend doing something meaningful. We're really privileged to be running this hotel, and to have done so for so many years. You meet so many amazing people.”

Kviknes Hotel truly feels like a gathering place — for locals and travelers alike. The hotel is open seasonally, from April to October. During the few hours we've spent here, we've seen both Sigurd and his sisters chatting warmly with several guests.

—“We have an open-door policy here at the hotel. Please come in, take a look around, feel at home.” That's one of the things Sigurd says he truly looks forward to when the season kicks off.

—“It gives the local community a welcoming space with food and drink. It's always a joy to see neighbors and guests relaxing on the balcony in the summer.”

## Development

After so many years in the hotel industry, it's clear a lot has changed. Sigurd fondly recalls the early days when bookings were written down by hand with a pencil. Card payments were done using a manual machine that made an imprint of the card on paper. Guests would sign the paper, and then the hotel had to send those papers away to get the money — quite different from how it works today.

Between 2017 and 2018, the hotel underwent a major renovation, updating 22 rooms in the historic building to include private bathrooms and toilets. Each room in the historic building has its own unique charm, with different interiors and layouts — some even featuring balconies overlooking the beautiful fjord. Across the street stands a more postmodern building from the 1960s, constructed by the previous generation to meet growing tourism demands. Opinions on this building have been mixed.

—“It's a bit of a love-and-hate building for me. Many people don't think it's very attractive. But it's actually part of the history — just like the oldest building is part of the Swiss chalet style era. Architecture evolved like that in the '60s,” Sigurd explains. “When my father took over the hotel, tourism was booming. We needed more rooms, so they built it — with larger room sizes and balconies on every room. Buildings like that are rare nowadays.”







He reminisces about when his grandmother became a widow and had to run the hotel on her own. It was during the rise of the Functionalism era — or what we now call the “funkis style.” Back then, his grandmother planned to tear down the historic building to meet the modern demands of society. Luckily, his great-grandfather’s brother stepped in just in time to stop the demolition before the workers began.

“They were actually going to tear down this beautiful historic building and rebuild it in the funkis style. All the balconies were to be removed, and the plan was to replace it with a concrete structure. Thankfully, that never happened. Otherwise, I think our hotel would be closed down today, and the building would have been gone,” Sigurd says. “It’s funny how society shapes trends. A few decades ago, our guests might have preferred Functionalism and block-style buildings like those in East Berlin. But now, we’ve come full circle — guests appreciate historic buildings and their charming atmosphere again.”

### Historic Hotels Award

Kviknes Hotel used to have a lot of bus groups visiting in the past, but in recent years they’ve deliberately chosen to welcome fewer large groups. Instead, they’ve focused more on individual guests. Today, that strategy pays off — with high occupancy rates driven by loyal repeat visitors who return every year, as well as new guests from both Norway and abroad.



Last year, Kviknes Hotel took home the award for “Best Historic Resort Worldwide” at the Historic Hotels Worldwide Awards of Excellence 2024.

When we ask whether the prestigious award has affected their international market, Sigurd explains that they’ve always had a strong base of international guests. Still, he’s deeply grateful — and proud — to receive the recognition.

“We’ve always had 60 to 70 percent international guests. But I think the award gave us a bit more attention here in Norway, which is really nice,” he says. “There are so many fantastic hotels in the Historic Hotels Worldwide network, so winning that award — that’s definitely a feather in our cap.”

### Soft adventure

When asked what kind of guests tend to visit Kviknes Hotel, Sigurd explains that most of their guests are travelers looking for what he calls soft adventures.

“Hiking is really popular here. We’ve got amazing mountains and trails,” he says. “Some people rent bikes and head out on excursions, and RIB boat trips are also a big hit.”

He adds that many guests enjoy visiting the glacier museum in Fjærland or simply using Balestrand as a base to explore the inner Sognefjord region.

“Balestrand is a perfect starting point for day trips to places like Fjærland, Luster, Sogndal, Lærdal — and more.”







# *"We don't serve rice or pasta here. Our focus is on Norwegian ingredients."*

SSigurd himself is a big fan of hiking in the mountains — and he also mentions wine tasting in the hotel's impressive wine cellar as a personal favorite. He recommends many of the same activities to anyone planning a visit to Balestrand and the Sognefjord region.

—"Hiking up here is absolutely amazing — and for good reason. The mountains around Balestrand are among the most painted landscapes in Norway. We've got trails and paths for everyone," Sigurd says, before adding:

—"Even just biking or walking around the village is a great experience. Along the fjord, you can pass the homes of famous painters like Hans Dahl. Or take a RIB trip into Finnabotnen. There's also cider tasting at the Cider House — and then my personal favorite: wine tasting in our one-of-a-kind wine cellar."

## **Local Suppliers**

Great food and drink experiences are a top priority at Kviknes Hotel — and something they've built much of their hotel operations around. The focus is on clean, local ingredients and showcasing the best of Norwegian cuisine. Reducing waste and choosing local suppliers whenever possible is part of the everyday operation.

—"We're environmentally certified, and of course we try to use as many local ingredients and craftspeople as we can. We hire local companies — carpenters, electricians, you name it," says Sigurd. "If we can source it locally, we do. And we're very committed to serving Norwegian food made with local, short-travelled ingredients."

During the summer season, guests are treated to a buffet that overflows with Norwegian salmon, locally sourced meat, colorful vegetables from the neighboring farm, homemade pastries, and fresh shrimp and seafood.

—"We don't serve pasta or rice here," Sigurd says firmly. "Our focus is on Norwegian ingredients."

## **A Historic Member**

Kviknes Hotel is one of the oldest members of De Historiske – Historic Hotels & Restaurants. As a membership organization, De Historiske places a strong emphasis on quality in every aspect – from personal service and operations to unique culinary experiences and guest activities.

Each year, member hotels and restaurants are evaluated according to a comprehensive quality manual. This ensures that guests enjoy the highest possible standard. Sigurd explains that the manual plays a central role in training new staff.

—"It's a really solid guide. It helps ensure that both employees and guests understand what we're about and what De Historiske represents. We've ranked among the top in quality for many years, and we're proud to share that commitment with our team," he says.

Kviknes Hotel has been part of De Historiske almost since the beginning, and Sigurd himself served as chairman of the board for several years.

—"The term historic hotel is worth its weight in gold. It says so much in just a few words – about the atmosphere, the legacy, and the experience. We've never considered joining any other organization. Being part of De Historiske feels absolutely right for us," Sigurd says.

Many De Historiske guests collect the association's annual catalogue and make it their mission to visit as many of the member hotels as possible. Sigurd often encounters guests arriving with the booklet in hand, ready for a signature.

—"I've lost count of how many times I've been asked to sign that book – but it's always a pleasure," he says with a warm smile.





## Better travel connections

Before wrapping up, we ask Sigurd about his future plans for the hotel. He remains optimistic about the projected growth in Norwegian tourism but emphasizes that there's important work ahead—particularly when it comes to long-term infrastructure development in areas like the Sognefjord.

-“The outlook for Norwegian tourism is incredibly promising. If those growth projections come true, the future looks bright for both the industry and for Balestrand,” says Sigurd. “But the next big challenge will be to make sure a fair share of that growth reaches Western Norway and the Sognefjord region.”

One of the main issues, he explains, is seasonality.

-“Summer is intense, but then it gets very quiet for five—sometimes even seven—months. We need that growth to spill into the quieter months. The guests are out there, but the infrastructure here in the fjord is simply not equipped to handle tourism in winter. It's no use saying ‘Come to Balestrand’ if people can't actually get here.”

He shudders at the thought of international visitors having to drive on icy winter roads. Public transport options are limited, and the express boat that connects Balestrand to other parts of the region only operates from April 1st to November 1st.

-“The express boat should really run year-round. That alone would solve so many of the logistical challenges we face when it comes to getting visitors here—and helping them leave again.”

## Future Goals

During the high season, Kviknes Hotel employs 100 people. In winter, that number drops to 20. Sigurd believes that with improvements in infrastructure, they could increase the number of year-round employees to at least 50.

-“If we managed to increase traffic throughout the entire year, we could have around 50 full-time staff at Kviknes Hotel. That would mean 50 people living and working in the village,” Sigurd says, and continues:

-“What will people in rural Norway live off in the future? Tourism has to be part of it. With the right infrastructure, we could create 100 or 200 more jobs in Balestrand. It's definitely possible.”

Sigurd doesn't want to reveal all their plans yet, but says this is one of their main future goals: to extend the season, foster more growth, and create more jobs, making the business even more sustainable for years and generations to come. What they have is a truly unique product in Balestrand that's worth experiencing.

Curious about what a stay at Kviknes Hotel in Balestrand is like? **[Read our travel report here.](#)**





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