

A Rewarding Exchange Experience at NTNU: Insights into Culture, Medical Education, and Beyond

My two-week exchange program at the Trondheim and Ålesund campuses of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) broadened my horizons significantly. It allowed me to gain a profound understanding of the cultural differences between Norway and China, as well as the distinctions in medical education and learning approaches between the two countries.

During our visit to both campuses, we toured the facilities and participated in several research seminars. While Nankai University offers a wealth of research activities for students, NTNU has a smaller student body, enabling undergraduate students to spend more in-class time engaging in hands-on basic experiments. Due to differences in academic systems, the curricula of medical laboratory science and bioengineering in Norway differ slightly from clinical-focused content in China. For instance, venous blood collection is included in Norwegian courses—though it is not a key focus in our clinical studies, it sparked my great interest. Additionally, the medical ethics course in Trondheim was particularly enlightening. Generally, Norway and China share the same core principles in this field: prioritizing patients' well-being. Healthcare often faces imperfect scenarios, and I realized that listening more to patients' own needs is equally crucial.

Beyond academics, we joined various enriching student activities. In Trondheim, we were invited to teachers' homes, and in Ålesund, we took part in some Fadder activities (Norwegian orientation events for new students)—experiences I had never had before, making them incredibly fascinating. Norwegian cuisine, deeply rooted in the country's coastal geography and Nordic traditions, was a novel experience too. We tried classic dishes that reflect Norway's reliance on seafood and local ingredients: rakfisk (fermented fish, a traditional delicacy often served with flatbread and sour cream), lutefisk (dried cod rehydrated in lye, typically paired with potatoes and bacon), and fårikål (mutton stew with cabbage, Norway's national dish, slow-cooked to highlight hearty, simple flavors). Seafood like fresh salmon, pickled herring, and king crab is also ubiquitous, prepared with minimal seasoning to preserve the natural taste—though these dishes didn't quite suit my taste. In the second week, my Chinese peers and I started cooking our own breakfasts and dinners, which was a brand-new adventure. We even made dumplings from scratch—with four of us from different hometowns, our dumplings came in various shapes. These moments helped us grow closer, and living and interacting with each other was full of joy.

We also explored local architecture and took a cruise through the fjords—geographical wonders that are not only natural landmarks but also integral to Norway's cultural identity. Norwegian fjords, formed by glacial erosion over thousands of years, are narrow inlets of

the sea between steep cliffs, with deep, calm waters. The fjords we visited, likely part of the Western Norway Fjords (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), such as the Geirangerfjord or Hjørundfjord near Ålesund, showcase breathtaking scenery: snow-capped mountains towering above, waterfalls cascading down cliffs (like the Seven Sisters Waterfall), and small fishing villages nestled along the shores. Culturally, fjords have shaped Norway's history as a maritime nation—for centuries, they served as transportation routes, supported fishing and coastal farming, and influenced local traditions, from boat-building techniques to folk stories centered on the sea.

Architecturally, Trondheim's buildings reflect the fusion of medieval religion and Nordic traditions: the Nidaros Cathedral, built from light gray granite, has 102-meter-high spires adorned with religious carvings (depicting Bible stories and vine patterns), a pressure-resistant "pointed arch + ribbed vault" interior structure, and a 17th-century silver altar symbolizing the integration of religion and royal power. The old town's 2-3-story wooden houses, with their iconic "Trondheim Red" exteriors (a mixture of iron oxide pigment and linseed oil for corrosion resistance) and dark gray slate roofs (designed to withstand heavy snow), highlight the Nordic "practicality first" concept. Ålesund, meanwhile, showcases the symbiosis of Art Nouveau and fjord nature—rebuilt in the Art Nouveau style after a 1904 fire, its buildings feature organic motifs inspired by the sea: the City Hall has white stucco walls, "wave + poppy" carvings on the facade, and slender arches, while Hotel Brosundet, renovated from a 19th-century warehouse, blends Art Nouveau elements (curved lines, floral carvings) with industrial style (exposed wooden beams, dark brown masonry), breathing new life into old structures. We also compared these Norwegian architectures with traditional Chinese ones—noting differences in core materials (Norway's focus on stone and wood for cold resistance vs. China's use of wood, bricks, and rammed earth for convenience and earthquake resistance), structural logic (vertical, exposed structures in Norway vs. horizontal, hidden structures in China), and decoration themes (religious symbols and natural elements in Norway vs. auspicious patterns and ethical symbols in China)—and reflected that nature shapes architectural genes, historical traumas (like Ålesund's fire) can evolve into cultural symbols, and architectural differences stem from distinct cultural logics.

This exchange was far more than a short trip; it was a transformative journey that deepened my understanding of medical education, cultural diversity, and humanistic values. The knowledge and insights gained—from the nuances of Norwegian medical curricula to the stories behind fjords and architecture—will continue to guide me in my academic pursuits and future career in healthcare. I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to engage with NTNU's community, explore Norway's culture, and connect with peers across borders, and I look forward to using these experiences to promote further cultural and academic exchanges between China and Norway.