

My Meaningful Study Visit to Norway

This study visit to Norway was incredibly meaningful. I believe this rich and colorful time in Norway will undoubtedly leave a profound and memorable chapter in my life experience. Next, I would like to structure my report around the following aspects: natural environment, cultural landscape, education and healthcare, social gatherings, and accommodation & transportation.

First, the natural environment. Norway is known as the country of fjords, boasting abundant fjord geography, which I had learned about in high school geography textbooks. Fjords are a landform completely absent in China. Even though I had prior knowledge, when I actually sailed through the Geirangerfjord, I was deeply astounded. I couldn't help but think that millions of years ago, this area was a glacier; later, the glacier melted, seawater flooded in, forming the spectacular scene I witnessed. Thinking about that, I felt an involuntary sense of awe and also gained an appreciation for Norway's uniqueness in terms of nature. Along the way, I also saw pastures, small towns by the shore, fish farms, and waterfalls cascading down mountainsides, all of which left a deep impression on me. Another thing that impressed me was perhaps the weather in Ålesund. After arriving, I found it rained almost every day, something the locals were thoroughly accustomed to. This is likely because Ålesund is coastal and has mountains inland, causing moisture-laden air to be easily lifted, resulting in rainfall.

Then, the cultural landscape. Upon arriving in Trondheim, I immediately noticed that the buildings in the city were generally low-rise, unlike Chinese cities like Shanghai or Hangzhou where skyscrapers are everywhere. As I understand, Trondheim is Norway's third-largest city. Puzzled, I asked a local student accompanying us, and she told me that one reason is the preservation of traditional architecture. Indeed, while walking through the city streets, our guide pointed out many traditional buildings preserved for cultural conservation reasons. This refreshed my understanding of Norway and made me feel the strength of local efforts to protect traditional architecture. In China, although we also have similar cultural relic protections, the implementation is not nearly as strong as in Norway, which I believe is worth learning from. Furthermore, in Trondheim, we visited the Nidaros Cathedral, the largest church in Norway. I must say, it perfectly matched my imagination of a Western-style church: solemn, magnificent, and sacred. It left a deep impression on me.

Next, education and healthcare. Starting with education: through exchanges with teachers and students, I learned that local Norwegian students have many choices on their educational path. They can choose vocational training after high school and then go directly to work. They can also choose to attend university. If they choose university, they don't need to stake everything on a single national college entrance exam like Chinese students. Instead, their grades from each semester of high school are considered, and they finally take an exam. All scores are calculated together for a final grade. If the total score doesn't meet the admission requirements, they can wait a few years; it seems policies offer additional points for such students. Or, if they work for a few years and later want to attend university, they can still apply and become full-time students. I also learned that the Norwegian government has policies to forgive part of the student loans for those who successfully graduate from university, which undoubtedly motivates students.

Prospective university students can also choose to take a gap year while retaining their student status. Additionally, when visiting the gross anatomy lab at NTNU, I found the standard setup was one dissection table for four students, and each table was basically equipped with a digital display screen, indicating abundant teaching resources. From the above, it's clear that Norway has a mature education system and diverse pathways, allowing everyone to find a suitable route for themselves, truly worthy of being a developed Nordic country. Given China's population and resource pressures, its less mature vocational education system, and other reasons, the current educational pressure remains high. Attending university is still the only choice for many, leading to a state of systemic involution. This study visit to Norway certainly broadened my horizons. Then, regarding healthcare: during our visit to Trondheim, we toured the local St. Olav's Hospital. We saw the hospital's helipad, library, exhibition room, etc., and listened to a presentation about the hospital. I found the hospital environment very warm and welcoming, using warm color tones, with a neat architectural style. From the introduction, I discovered that Norwegian hospitals pay attention to details; for example, there is research investigating how different views from hospital windows affect patient recovery. I also noticed the hospital wasn't overcrowded with patients, doctors had more time for consultations, and Norwegian families often have a designated family doctor. The medical welfare security is quite good. I suppose these aspects are somewhat related to national conditions.

Furthermore, social gatherings. During my time in Norway, I deeply experienced the local students' fondness for parties, drinking, and similar activities. In Trondheim, there's a student-owned foundation (Samfundet), where local students gather in its buildings to party, drink, and socialize. The students hosting us also brought us to play games they usually play, like beer pong, Jenga, and other party drinking games. Perhaps because it was the graduation or enrollment season, in Trondheim, we often saw groups of university students in eccentric outfits walking to bars holding beers in the evenings. The atmosphere was wild and exhilarating. Including in Ålesund, local students took us to an activity called 'bar-to-bar,' which gave us a chance to personally experience this local social culture. The whole process was very fun. Based on some internet content I'd seen before, I had thought Nordic people might be more introverted. I didn't expect Norwegians to love parties and drinking so much, being completely uninhibited and very open. Also, when visiting the university, I noticed that Norwegian university students have very rich extracurricular lives, with various clubs, and the campus atmosphere is excellent—not solely focused on studies, but enriched with various activities.

Finally, accommodation and transportation. I must say, I felt the per capita living space in Norway is very large. Many families have their own detached houses with very complete supporting facilities. Regarding student accommodation, local student apartments generally offer better space and environment than Chinese university dormitories, but consequently, the rent is also significantly higher. In terms of transportation, I found that buses are one of the main modes of transport for locals, whereas subways are not extensively built. The local buses have many user-friendly designs, such as dedicated seats for people with guide dogs, for disabled individuals, for mothers with babies, etc. Additionally, locals also choose to walk, cycle, use shared electric scooters, or drive. The modes of transport are diverse and promote environmental protection.

Besides the above, during this study visit, I also experienced the local high cost of living, Norwegian traditional culture like "trolls," and the locals' love for hiking and skiing, among other things. I gained so much from this study visit activity. I hope to meet and chat with my Norwegian friends again someday.