

PRESENTATION OF AURLAND MUNICIPALITY

Introduction

Aurland Municipality owes its popularity to the dramatic natural landscape and the wide range of activities available. By car, bus, train and boat you can easily get access to the beautiful nature that the villages of Aurland, Flåm, Gudvangen and Undredal can offer. Tourism, service, electricity production and transport are the most important commercial activities in the area.

Population: 1710 (2013) Area: 1519 km²

Vegetation

The Aurlandsdalen valley and the mountains surrounding the valley have for a long time been known as botanically rich, has something to do with the bedrock containing calcium-rich phyllite. In addition the summer temperature is high in the valley. There is also very little rain and a low temperature during winter. This is the reason why there are so few of the typical coast plants, but several coastal plants from the east are well represented.

The Flåmsdalen valley is particularly rich in flora; more than 500 species of flowers have been registered in the river basin. Of these, 128 are mountain species, which means half of the mountain flora in Norway. One main reason for this abundance is strata of phyllite in the ground, providing soil rich in limestone.

Wildlife

Bird life is rich and includes a number of rare species. More than 100 species have been registered along the watercourse. With luck, golden eagle as well as sea eagle may be observed hovering above the fjord. You might even spot some seals and small whales on our way. The mountains surrounding the Nærøyfjord and the Aurlandsfjord are the realm of the wild reindeer. Elk and roe deer may be spotted.

Seasons

Winter

The fjord and mountain is the perfect backdrop to unique and family-friendly winter adventures. A boat trip on the Nærøyfjord or a trip on the Flåm Railway is particularly thrilling in the winter, when the mountains are snow-covered and the waterfalls freeze to ice.

Spring

Spring comes early to Flåm. The waterfalls are in full flow and the snow-capped mountain peaks contrast beautifully with green of the hillsides. Especially beautiful is the blossom of fruit orchards in May.

Summer

This time of year is full of adventure, long and light evenings, outdoor activities for young and old. Enjoy the silence of nature by hiking in the mountains or just along the fjord.

Autumn – the golden month

From September the landscape dons its gorgeous autumn colours. The mountains call with their beautiful colours and abundance of blueberries for you to enjoy!

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THE FLÅM RAILWAY

718,195 passengers travelled the Flåm Railway in 2013, making it one of Norway's major and most spectacular tourist attractions. The Flåm Railway is designed and built at very high gradients, on narrow ledges in the mountain side, and with a twisting tunnel that spiral in and out of the mountain. Is proof of the most daring and skilful engineering exploits in Norwegian history. One can hardly imagine that nearly 80% of the 20 km long railway has a gradient of 5,5% and that the smallest curve radius is only 130 metres. It is no wonder that railway enthusiasts are thrilled about this railway!

The only thing missing when the railway line between Oslo and Bergen was opened in 1909, was a branch line to the Sognefjord. In order to assure a transport route to the fjord, work was begun on the Flåm Railway in 1923. When the Bergen Railway was under construction, a transport road was built up the valley from Flåm to Myrdal, called the Navvies road (Rallarvegen). During the summer months, there was a steady stream of tourists from Myrdal down the valley to the fjord below. These travellers were transported by horse and carriage. On some days, there might be as many as 30–40 carriages on this road at the same time. At the foot of the steep bends of Myrdalssvingene there was a sign imploring: "Be gentle to your horse and walk up the hill." Most travellers followed this advice, but many tourists were encumbered by a physique that made it impossibly strenuous for them to ascend to the top, through all of the 21 hairpin bends.

Construction

The most time-consuming work on the Flåm Railway was on the tunnels. These were excavated manually. Only two of the twenty tunnels, which have a total length of 6 km, were excavated using machines. Every meter of tunnel cost the labour force, the navvies a month's hard work. The labour force, 120 strong at the outset, rapidly increased to 220 men. Despite the dangerous work being carried out at a high tempo, and with insufficient safety measures, there were only two fatalities during the entire construction period.

The steep mountainsides were a major challenge, the solution being to build hairpin tunnels in order to equalise the big differences in altitude on the steep mountain. The danger of avalanches and rock falls also constituted a problem. To avoid these hazardous stretches, the line crosses the river and valley three times during the journey, but it does not cross the river on bridges. Instead, the river is led through the mountain in tunnels underneath the railway line.

The railway opens in 1940

The Flåm Railway was opened temporarily for steam engines on 1st August 1940. The newspapers reported that the first train "honoured" the navvies "Rallar" by carrying freight in the carriages. The railway was opened for passenger traffic not long afterwards, with two trains in each direction that connected at Myrdal with the day trains on the Bergen Railway. Electrification of the Flåm Railway was completed in 1944 making it one of the first Norwegian railway lines to be electrified. You can see the remnants of the first power station from 1898 at Kjosfossen waterfall. Today a new power station produces electricity providing "green" electricity to the Flåm Railway, the cabins and hotel in the mountain and some electricity is sold to the Bergen Railway.

The incredible train journey from the mountain station at Myrdal on the Bergen Railway down to Flåm station nestled in the innermost corner of the Aurlandsfjord has a height difference of 864 metres. The journey provides some of Norway's wildest and most magnificent scenery. On the 20 km-long train ride you can see rivers that cut through deep ravines, waterfalls cascade down the side of steep, snow-capped mountains and mountain farms cling dizzily to sheer slopes.

A strong survivor

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Flåm Railway was one of the secondary lines whose continued operation was being brought into question – but gradually passenger numbers started to increase. In the 1980s, the Norwegian Railways (NSB) considered limiting traffic to the summer, since they lost a lot of money during the poorly trafficked winter months. Local patriots were soon fighting to preserve the Flåm Railway as a year-round railway. On 1st January 1998, a new age was inaugurated when the Flåm Railway was transferred to a private company. Flåm Utvikling assumed responsibility for sales and marketing, and product development of the railway. However, the Norwegian Railways (NSB) and the National Rail Administration (Jernbaneverket) are still responsible for safety, maintenance of the railway line, staffing and actually running the trains.

Welcomes guest all year round

Today the Flåm Railway appears in new design, with locomotives and carriages coloured a natural green, with new interiors, and a unique multilingual guide system. There are six locomotives and 12 railway cars. From October to April there are four daily departures in each direction, while eight–ten departures are required to carry all the passengers who want to experience the Flåm Railway between May and September. In addition, improved viewpoints and expanded platforms enhance the travellers' experience. The Flåm Railway is guaranteed to be an unforgettable railway adventure through some of the wildest and most dramatic scenery in Norway!

Flåm Railway Museum & Documentation Centre

To learn more about the Flåm Railway's exciting history and its technological development we highly recommend a visit to the Flåm Railway Museum & Documentation Centre. The museum yields a deeper insight into one of the steepest railway lines in the world, the navvies and engineers who built the railway, how daily life in Flåm has changed through the years, as well as facts about the operation.

The Flåm Railway

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Technical information – the Flåm Railway

Length	20,20 km	Wight of engine	64 tons
Height difference	863,5 metres	Weight of carriage without passengers	40 tons
Upper station	865,5 metres	Weight of carriage with passengers	44 tons
Lower station	2,0 metres	Trains total length (2 engine + 6 carriages)	182 metres
Max. gradient	55‰ – 1:18		
Min. curve radius	130 metres		
Gauge	1435 mm		
Voltage	15000V–16 2/3 Hz		
Max. speed upwards	40 km/h		
Max. speed downwards	30 km/h		
Tunnel	20		
Water tunnels	4		
Halts	8		

The Flåm Railway delivers electricity back to the line via the break engines (engine reverses), an A synchronic engine.

CULTURAL TRESURES

The area offers public access to many culture-related attractions and activities. These include ancient monuments, museums, art galleries, farmyard, visitor centres and events.

Otternes Bygdetun

On the hills surrounded by powerful mountains, between Flåm and Aurland, with spectacular view of the fjord, you will find Otternes Farm. This ancient farm was probably cleared for cultivation before the Black Death, and was a cluster of 4 farms consisting of 27 buildings, each with its own function. In addition the old cultural landscape, with hills, wells, stairs and stone structure is intact. The buildings are preserved as they were in the sixteenth century, and today this cultural treasure emerges as a vivid museum where animals once again have moved in. Throughout the summer different activities like spinning, weaving, colouring of thread, baking and brewing will be arranged. Info: www.otternes.no

Flåm church

The present church in Flåm was built in 1667, but the site is known to have been a church site since the middle age. Flåm church is mentioned in written sources going back to 1320. Near the church, on the western side of the river, there was an ancient place of heathen worship, so the site has long traditions as a centre of religious life for the village people. The church has been restored several times, and received its present appearance in 1926, when it was painted reddish-brown outside. Internally, the church was restored in 1967. The old decorations, which had been painted over, were recovered. During the restoration in 1967 an old alter blanket, dating back to the 1300's, was found. You can see this blanket in the old timber house beside the church.

Vangen church in Aurland (1202) was built by an ancient family who lived in Aurland in the Viking age and Middle age. The church is built in the early Gothic style influenced by English architecture. A document written in 1714 tells us that the English merchants used to stay in Aurland during long periods to buy different articles and they are supposed to have taken part in the building of the church. Most likely they will have been the master builders. In 1725 the Danish-Norwegian government came into financial problems and the King sold the church. The church remained as private property until late 1800. Then the municipality bought Vangen church back for NOK 500. At the last restoration in 1926, the original colours and designs were uncovered. Then the ceiling was taken away and the baldachin over the pulpit was brought back again. A new altarpiece was made. The Norwegian artist Emanuel Vigerland has made the stained-glass windows (two of the windows in the chancel illustrate the story of the Prodigal Son, and the one in the middle, the Saviour). Vangen church is open June, July and August in the town centre, 10 km from Flåm.

The Aurland shoe

The Aurland Shoe is well known and has been a kind of trade mark of the district, and was an important item of commerce in the first half of this century. Though the shoe has taken other forms in the past, most people will think of the Aurland shoe as a moccasin-type. During the 1930's, 70-80 people were employed in different manufactures. Today the Aurland shoe factory employs 5 people and is open all year. Discover the shoemaking of today, its history and knowledge of this fine handicraft in the new visitor centre. The mission of the Économusée is to promote and keep alive traditional crafts. Free entrance. Situated in the town centre of Aurland, 10 km from Flåm. Info: www.aurlandskoen.no

Centre of local history in Aurland

The centre of local history offers several exhibitions with local themes and a photo-archive. Galleri Vinjum, displays a large collection of paintings from the Aurland painter, Johannes Vinjum (1930-91). Sivlesamlinga shows the belongings of the poet Per Sivle who was born in Flåm in 1857. You will also find information about emigration. Aurland Knitwear Design and the tourist information is also located in the centre. Open all year 09.00-16.00.

Undredal – the goat cheese capital

Undredal is a small village surrounded by untouched and powerful nature along the Aurlandsfjord. At the top of the valley you meet a working mountain farm where the trade mark goat cheese is produced. The traditionally rich mountain pastures have always been the basis for varied summer farming. The small cleared fields could produce grain, potatoes and vegetables. Fruit production is also very important as the mountain walls, warmed by the summer sun, kept temperatures moderate. In the 1930's tobacco growing was a source of income.

During the 1960's and 70's Undredal's future was insecure since many young people decided that the little village was just too isolated. The population continue to diminish until the new road was completed and now the younger generation have moved back to Undredal. The production of goat cheese has always been a significant factor in Undredal's agricultural history and no less important today. At the local shop you can taste and buy goat cheese. Groups by appointment can visit Eldhuset, a cellar for maturing white goats' cheese and sample the menu of traditional foods.

Undredal Stave Church

Undredal Stave Church is the smallest church in Scandinavia still in use with only 40 seats. The stave church was built in 1147 as a stave church and named St. Nicholas Chapel. The church received its present appearance from a subsequent restoration which was carried out in 1722.

In 1962 the church was internally restored and they recovered the ancient decorations we can see today. These paintings were the mark of the prominent Sop family which was based in Undredal during the middle ages. The chandelier, and the church bell, is medieval, while the rest of the church's content date from various periods like the two brass candlesticks which date from the year 1702 and the pulpit from 1696. Daily guided tours June – August.

Styvi in the heart for the UNECSO area

Styvi is located on the east side of the well-known Nærøyfjord. People have lived here at least since the Viking age, living primarily of domestic animals. Styvi has traditionally been an important link to both the local mail and shipping routes. The 6 kilometre long "King's post road", running along the fjord between Bleiklindi and Styvi, is a part of the old mail link between Oslo and Bergen. The foot path was built around 1660 and was used until the advent of the steamboat in 1860. The path was traditionally used when there was unsafe ice on the fjord. Styvi farm is today a farm museum where you can see a large collection of agricultural artefacts. One can also visit the old farmhouse and other existing farm buildings. Styvi is situated in the Styvi/Holmo landscape conservancy and in the heart of the UNESCO area. Styvi is accessible only by boat.

Contact the tourist information for timetable www.alr.no

ACTIVE HOLIDAY – SPECTACULAR NATURAL BEAUTY

Flåm is the perfect starting point for a memorable vacation, offering a wide range of activities and cultural treasures. Enjoy kayaking on a UNESCO World Heritage fjord, Fjord safari in fast Zodiacs, cultural historic walks, tastes of traditional food, guided tours to cultural attractions, bicycling and much more. There are also many opportunities for cycling or hiking along one of the many trails in the Flåmsdalen valley or in the mountains.

Hiking

The mountains offer many footpaths and you will find hiking routes along the fjord. Ideally combine a trip with the Flåm Railway with a hike in the Flåmsdalen valley or experience the many small trails in and around the centre of Flåm. The well-known and historical Aurlandsdalen valley was once one of the main routes between eastern and western parts of Norway, the area, known as Norway's Grand Canyon, is wild and breathtaking, rich in plant and animal life, cultural treasures, history and geological features. You can hike through the valley and stay in tourist cabins along the way, or come by bus or car for shorter trips. Routs: Finse - Geiterygghytta, Geiterygghytta - Steinbergdalen, Steinbergdalen - Østerbø, Østerbø - Vassbygdi.

Fjord Safari

In secure and rigid inflatable boats (RIB) you have a good opportunity to experience and explore the nature and wildlife at close range. Wildlife like seals, porpoises and eagles are frequently encountered. Explore the World Heritage Area, the Aurlandsfjord and the Nærøyfjord, representing one of the most extreme and stunning fjord landscapes in the world. Fjord Safari offers different type of tours; mini safari, safari with cheese tasting, safari dinner etc. Frequent departures from the harbour in Flåm.

Paddle the fjords

Small boats. Big impressions. A unique feeling travelling by kayak. Experience the silence when paddling on the Aurlandsfjord or the Nærøyfjord. Many types of paddle tours are offered: paddle and hike the trails of old King Sverre, mini fjord explorer, the ultimate kayak experience over 2 days where you camp along the fjord. A great adventure for the whole family, No experience needed.

Rallarvegen – The Navvies road

Experience Rallarvegen, the navvies' road - one of Norway's most scenic cycle routes. Rallarvegen is a one hundred year old man-built transport road designed for the conveyance of man and materials during the building phase of the Bergen Railway. Wild and untamed nature, thundering waterfalls, visit signalman's cottage Fagernut, Klevagjelet gorge and Kleven Bridge. The 21 twists and turns down from Vatnahalsen/Myrdal and through the beautiful Flåmsdalen valley to Flåm are unforgettable. Rallarvegen is 80 kilometres long, extending from Haugastøl through Finse and on to Hallingskeid, via Vatnahalsen downstream to Flåm. An additional length of 43 kilometres from Vatnahalsen/Myrdal to Upsete, Gravhalstunnel and then descends to Raundal valley and on to Voss. Recommend to use 2-3 days to cycle the Rallarvegen. Accommodation available along the route. Season: approx. 10/7 - 30/9.

Info:

www.alr.no

www.fjordtours.no

www.finse1222.no

www.sognefjorden-as.no

www.visitflam.com

Nærøyfjord

Long ago, there were only footpaths along the fjord. Boats were therefore very important when people wanted to get to other farms and hamlets. The Nærøyfjord is named after the God of seafaring, Njord. He created the wind for the sails and made sure that it was not so strong that boats capsized.

The Viking Age

Gudvangen is one of the oldest market-places in Norway. People have lived in the Nærøyfjord since time immemorial, and during the Viking Age there was a great deal of traffic both on land and by sea. The Nærøyfjord had already become important as a transport route between Western and Eastern Norway.

Rowing boats and sailing boats

Until 1859, people who lived in the Nærøydalen valley and beside the Nærøyfjord attended church in Undredal. The only way to get there was by sea. Church services were usually held once a month. However, people also had other reasons to travel, such as attending assemblies (*ting*), auctions and dealings with the police or priest. Weddings, funerals and feasts were other important events and social gatherings.

Officials such as bailiffs, local judges and policemen used the fjord when travelling on official business within and between local communities. The farmers were often obliged to ferry officials, and there were rules governing the size of the boat to be used and how many rowers were required. Trade also played an important role in former times. There was a market-place at Lærdalsøyri, and people from the different communities in Sogn went there to sell their wares and to buy goods. Many goods were transported to Bergen, and sailing boats (*jekts*) were often used for this purpose. They had large sails and good cargo capacity. The fjord was also the main means of getting from one farm or hamlet to another. The fjord joined people together and was often the most important means of travel when bringing home firewood or fodder from outlying fields.

The Royal Post Road

The modern Norwegian postal service was established in 1647. The post road between Kristiania (Oslo) and Bergen went up through Valdres to Lærdal. The mail was taken by rowing boat from Lærdal to Gudvangen. The trip could take 10-12 hours, but this included stopping at a number of farms to deliver mail. The post road continued from Gudvangen to Voss and Bergen. The postal system was so organised that farmers along the route carried the mail from their farm to the next farm. These farmers were often called post farmers. This system was in operation up until the middle of the 19th century. Today you can experience the old postal route by hiking from Styvi to Bleklindi.

The first tourists

A new type of traffic emerged in the early 19th century. Wealthy people, both Norwegians and foreigners, travelled from village to village to see and explore the country. Many travel accounts have been written about the area between Lærdal and Gudvangen. The travellers observed the landscape, fauna, birdlife and the clothes and behaviour of the locals. The youths who were given the task of rowing from place to place earned money from this traffic.

Modern roads

In the 1840s, a good, modern bridle road was built between the Nærøydalen valley and Stalheim. Horses with carriages could now travel the whole way from Gudvangen to Voss. The road itself, known as Stalheimskleiva, was so impressive that people came just to see it. There was a great increase in traffic, both on the road and on the fjord.

Fylkesbaatane / Fjord 1

In 1858, Fylkesbaatane in Sogn & Fjordane started a regular boat service to and from Bergen. This was an important development, since the district exported a great deal of agricultural produce. For the first few years, a steamboat sailed as far as Styvi, which meant that the farmers who lived further up the fjord and in the valley had to pick up and transport their goods there. In the 1860s, a steamboat sailed to Gudvangen during the summer months and, otherwise, out to Styvi. The boat then started calling at Gudvangen throughout the year. Potatoes, butter, cheese, meat, hides and tallow were the most important produce sold by the farmers. Salt, sugar, coffee and all manner of equipment were imported to the district. In 1875, a local service was started between Lærdal and Gudvangen. This service improved communication between the villages in the Voss district and Eastern Norway, and communication between Sogn and Hardanger also improved.

Cruise tourism

Around 1890, a new type of tourism arrived in Norway. Large English and German steam ships visited the fjords of Western Norway. The ships had pleasant cabins and offered good service. The wealthy could enjoy life on board while admiring the Norwegian scenery. The Nærøyfjord and Sørfjord in Hardanger were very popular tourist destinations. The amount of traffic increased as the years passed, and it was very great by the time the first world war broke out in 1914. After the war, cruise traffic declined, but it picked up again in the 1930s.

Cars and ferries

At the end of the 1930s, the Stalheimskleiva road was extended to make it passable by cars and buses. This led to a new increase in traffic, both on the road and on the fjord. Fylkesbaatane started a car ferry service between Gudvangen and Lærdal using a small ferry with space for a few cars. Car ferries were a new type of boat, designed to carry many cars and passengers. Around 1950, the war long over, Fylkesbaatane introduced a large, modern ferry called "Gudvangen".

The new road between Gudvangen and Voss made it possible to make a round trip by travelling from Flåm to Voss by train, continuing from Voss to Gudvangen by car or bus and from Gudvangen to Flåm by boat. The round trip Norway in a Nutshell immediately became very popular and around 1950, Fylkesbaatane put a new, modern boat called "Balholm" into service. This boat sailed the fjord every summer until the mid-1970s. Today you can experience the fjord cruise and the round trip all year round.

In 1991 a new road opened between Gudvangen and Flåm, and in 2000 the tunnel between Aurland and Lærdal were opened. This meant that it was no longer necessary to transport people and cars on the fjord. Since then, tourists have constituted virtually the only traffic on the Nærøyfjord.

Mining and transport on the fjord

In the 1960s, the mining of stone, white anorthosite, started at Jordalsnuten in the Nærøydalen valley. Large quantities of stone were to be transported to buyers in Norway and abroad. The only good solution was to transport the stone by ship on the fjord and today, in 2006, large cargo boats come to Gudvangen to ship the stone to European ports.

THE WORLD HERITAGE

The two fjords, Geirangerfjord and Nærøyfjord, among the worlds longest and deepest, are considered as archetypical fjord landscapes and among the most scenically outstanding anywhere. Their exceptional natural beauty is derived from their narrow and steep-sided crystalline rock walls that rise up to 1,400 meter from the Norwegian Sea and extend 500 m below sea level. The sheer walls of the fjords have numerous waterfalls while free-flowing rivers cross their deciduous and coniferous forests to glacial lakes, glaciers and rugged mountains. The landscape features a range of supporting natural phenomena, both terrestrial and marine, such as submarine moraines and marine mammals.

UNESCO World Heritage List

Geology is the main reason for the nomination to UNESCO World Heritage List. Man has been present for thousands of years in this landscape without leaving behind substantial marks. The cultural environment is reinforcing the experience of natural scenery, thus adding an extra dimension to the magnificent fjord panorama. But also thanks to the people who throughout history have lived here and actively have been forming the distinctive cultural landscape.

The Nærøyfjord – Europe’s most dramatic fjord arm

The wildest and most beautiful branch of the Sognefjord is the Nærøyfjord. Fjord cruises in unique settings, with sheer, snow-topped mountains, waterfalls and idyllic farms clinging to the mountainsides. The Nærøyfjord is 17 km long and the narrowest point is only 250 meter wide. The passage through Nærøyfjord is one of the most dramatic fjord trips in Europe. A passenger boat between Gudvangen-Aurland-Flåm is running all year round.

The world heritage areas of Nærøyfjorden comprise 709 km² of the inner fjord system on the south side of Sognefjord. Approx. 683 km² of this is protected under the Nature Conservation Act, consisting of several areas. Ca 51 km² are marine waters, of which 34 km² are within nature protected areas. The world heritage area includes the settlements of Undredal, Bakka, Dyrdal, Gudvangen with Nærøydalen and Stalheim; none of which are protected under the Nature Conservation Act.

UNESCO is hardly alone in viewing the Norwegian fjords as exceptional. In 2004 National Geographic Traveller Magazine named these fjords “the best unspoiled travel destination in the world”, and that same year, the respected American newspaper Chicago Tribune included Norway’s fjords on its list “Seven Wonders of Nature”.

FRETHEIM HOTEL & THE ENGLISH SALMON LORDS

The English salmon lords were a phenomenon of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was a conjunction of disparate events that brought about their fishing trips to this country. The rise of the steamship shrunk the world – just as budget airlines are doing even more so today – and made Norway’s rivers accessible for the landed gentry of England as the sport of salmon fishing became popular in the 1840s. But why should they head to Norway for weeks of salmon fishing when there were plenty of salmon rivers in Scotland easily reached by another 19th century British invention, the railway system?

Englishmen introduced fly-fishing

Partly it was down to people like James Randell, an English artist, whose paintings of Norwegian scenes were popular in London galleries in the mid-19th century. These paintings fostered an interest by the wealthy for rugged and untamed countryside. It was, indeed, the English who introduced fly fishing to Norway. As wealthy English anglers flocked to Norway’s rivers, some wrote books about their activities which again served to popularise the sport. These fishermen and women were English aristocrats, hailing mainly from families with large landed estates, although there were some who were self-made men, the entrepreneurs of the Industrial Revolution who owned factories.

Flåmselvi rivers first angler

One of the first anglers who hired the Flåmselvi river and lodge with the farmers at Fretheim was Charles Henry Spencer Georg Canning (1823-1871), the 2nd baron of Garvagh in Londonderry, North Ireland. From 1873 Charles Wigam hired the river and in 1885 he gave his hired rights over to Charles Ingram. Charles Ingram was a popular man in the villages, he was kind, generous and gave away all his catch to the local inhabitants.

Fretheim farm

The farm at Fretheim is for the first time registered in 1350, and has through the years been run as a large farm by West Norwegian standards. Looking at the documents one finds that the farmers have been very much engaged in society. One was a Member of Parliament and another visited the Kong of Demark twice.

The first tourists who came to Flåm was anglers. The Flåmselvi river was rich in sea trout and salmon, one could catch up to 10 large salmon a day. This was tempting for many wealthy Englishmen and later also people from Bergen. The anglers stayed at the farm owned by the wealthiest man of the village, Christen Fretheim.

The “English villa”

Christen Fretheim (1848-1916) took over the farm in 1879 after his father. Christen built a summerhouse for the fishermen in 1882. A two floored house with an area of 108 m². This beautiful house was built in a Swiss style, and was called the “English villa” among the locals. Christen Fretheim also made sure that he got a licence for serving wine and beer to his guests. This was the first start of hotel management at Fretheim. In 1894 a transport route between the fjord and the mountain was established and in 1897 Christen Fretheim expanded with a new building consisting of 15 double rooms and a basement.

Flåm became an important communication point

Christen Fretheim was a active man who established a quay for the steam engines with a small general store, storehouse and waiting room. He also got a contract with the Norwegian Postal Service and became postmaster for Flåm Post in 1890. Christen also made sure that Fretheim Hotel was the operator for the telecom central when that came to Flåm.

Marthe Fretheims spirit

Marthe Fretheim, Christens cousin came to Flåm in 1909 to take care of the hotel management. Marthe was a friendly and very efficient lady, and took command outside and inside. She established a beautiful hotel garden and was known for her roses. She cared for her guests in a special way; she could not do enough for them or her staff. She walked her guests to their room with a candle in her hand. Even today you can feel Marthe Fretheim presents at the hotel and many claim to have seen her walking the corridors.

New owners

The Fretheim family owned the hotel until 1977 when Hans Petter Thorrud who already had run the hotel for the family for the last 20 years bought the hotel. He owned Fretheim Hotel until 1998 when the present owners Aurland

Ressursutvikling bought the Fretheim Hotel. Aurland Ressursutvikling AS is SIVA, Aurland Municipality, Aurland Sparebank and Hurtigruta Group ASA. Aurland Resursutvikling owns the Fretheim Hotel, Flåm Utvikling who market and sell the Flåm Railway, Sognefjorden as a supplier of tours by boat and coach. The purpose of the company is to consolidate and further develop the Flåm Railway and the Flåm- Aurland region into one of best tourist destinations in Scandinavia.

The last time Fretheim Hotel was expanded and further developed was in year 2000 when the hotel capacity was considerably enlarged. Today, the building combines modern and traditional style in an elegant way. The new hotel is now of a highly modern and international standard with 121 bright and comfortable rooms, including 17 historical rooms, and the hotel includes a conference centre. The hotel is proud of their history and in a modern setting it is important to emphasize Norwegian culture and food traditions.

Fretheim Hotel

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