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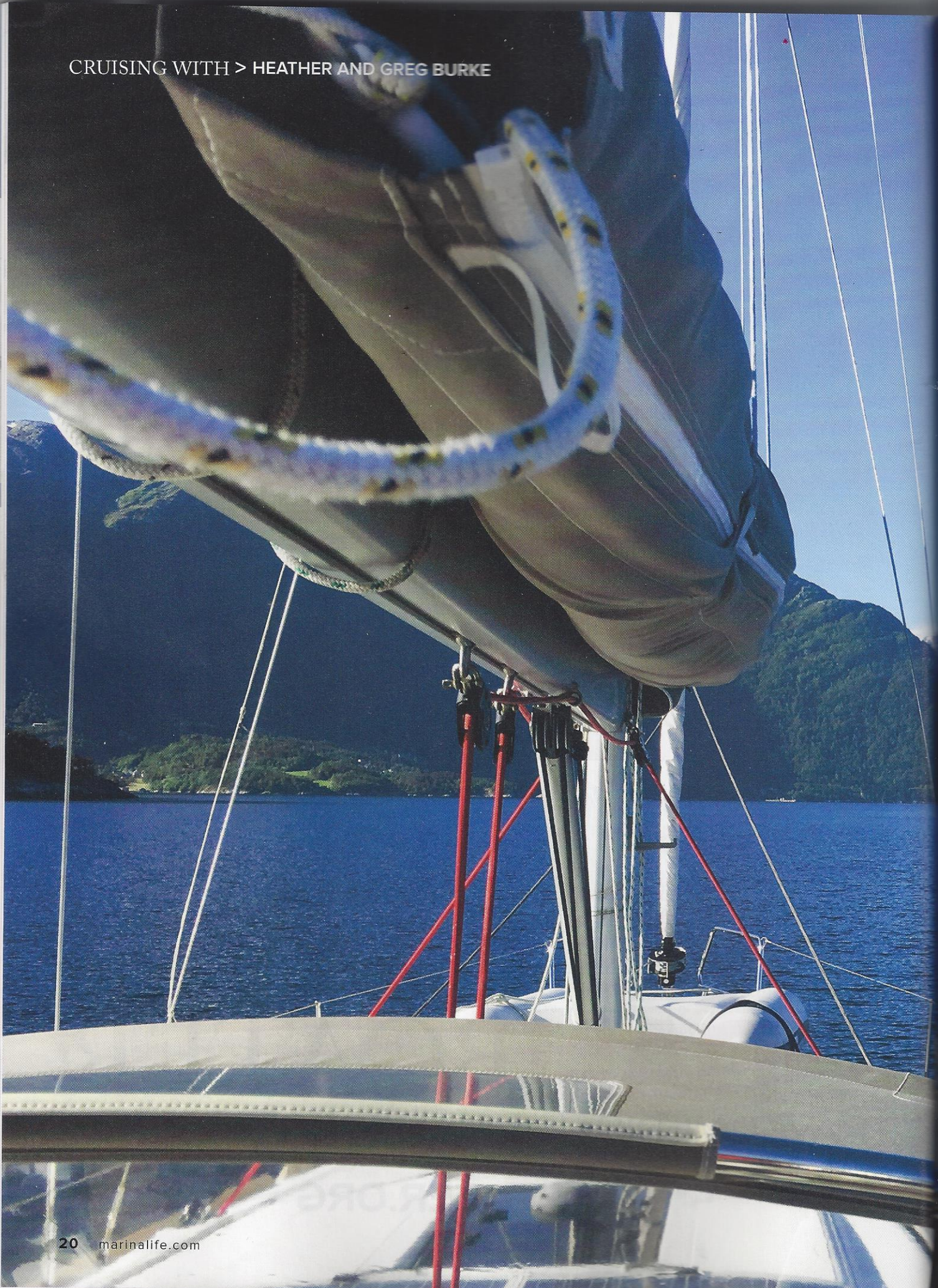
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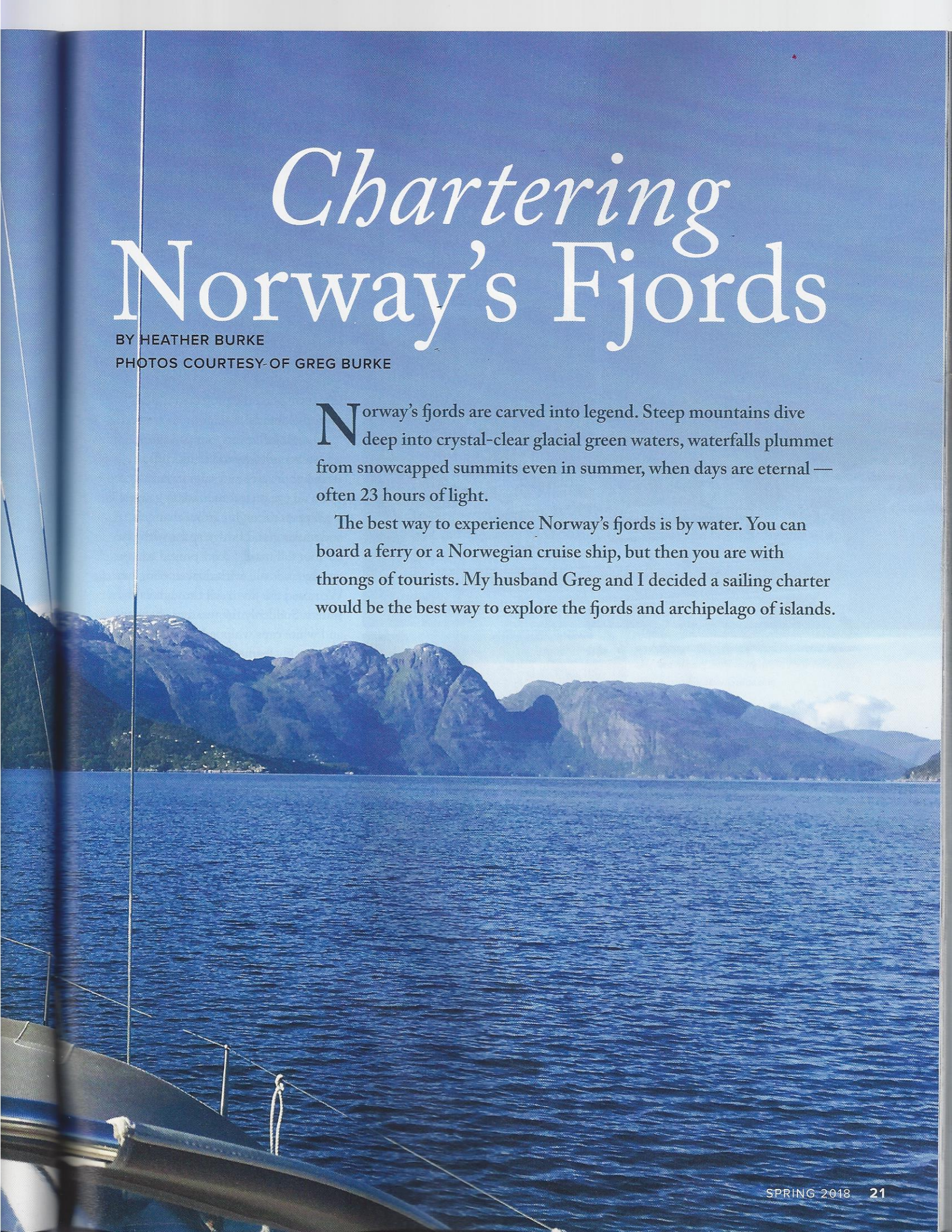
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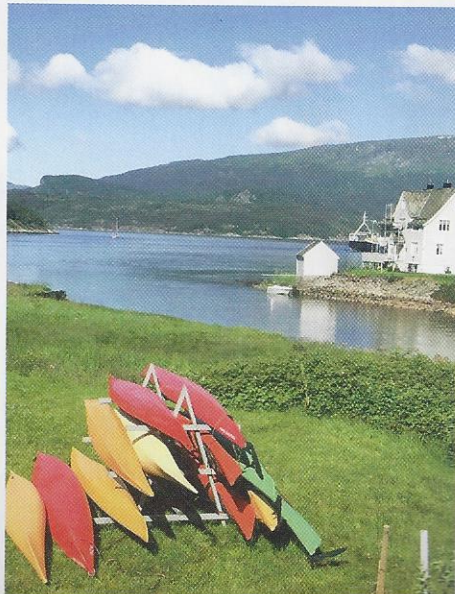
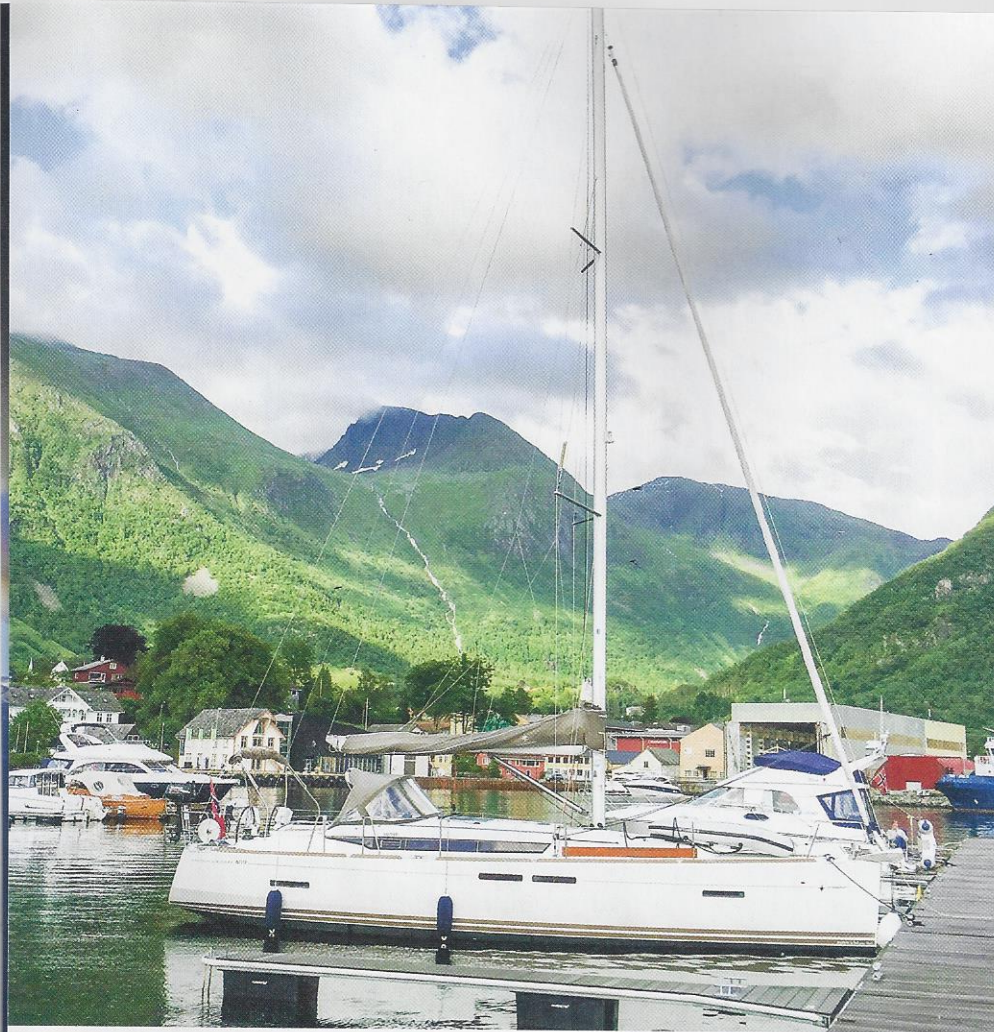
# Chartering Norway's Fjords

BY HEATHER BURKE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREG BURKE

Norway's fjords are carved into legend. Steep mountains dive deep into crystal-clear glacial green waters, waterfalls plummet from snowcapped summits even in summer, when days are eternal — often 23 hours of light.

The best way to experience Norway's fjords is by water. You can board a ferry or a Norwegian cruise ship, but then you are with throngs of tourists. My husband Greg and I decided a sailing charter would be the best way to explore the fjords and archipelago of islands.



We soon learned that chartering a yacht in Norway requires gusto, sailing experience, research and preparedness for the variable weather you will encounter. You need to be adventurous, just like a Viking.

We chartered *Vivace*, a 40-foot sailboat from Nautic Charters out of their marina in Hjellesstad. After an orientation on our well-equipped modern vessel, we set sail with our Navionics smartphone app with boat's GPS plotted south toward Hardangerfjord. Since it had been an unseasonably cold damp June, we were delighted to have sun as we plied the protected waters toward Rosendal.

Dodging showers, our passage was surrounded by towering cliffs, stark lighthouses and salmon farms. With an eye on our redundant gauges, we slipped through narrow channels and under grand bridge spans with our 60-foot tall mast. *Vivace* proved trustworthy and true, with dual steering wheels. We raised the jib to sail through calm waters. Suddenly the weather changed and white caps whipped up around us. We quickly learned that fjord sailing could bring huge gusts, to no breeze, in a span of seconds.

Sailing into the valley of Rosendal, the rain caught up with us, and the wind lashed our sails, but we spotted the village docks and managed to bring our big pendulum of a boat to an inside slip.

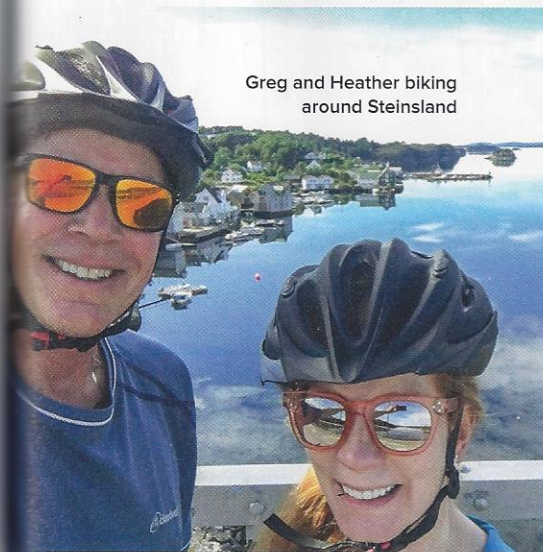
We explored Rosendal village that evening, still broad daylight. Locals were celebrating their "end of summer" just days after it began with summer solstice. This tradition marks the end of Norway's longest days — as it now has diminishing hours of daylight.

Next morning in Rosendal, we strolled the quaint town, and then hiked Baroniet Rosendal — a palace with gorgeous gardens and views of the fjord and waterfalls. Walking back, we stopped for lunch at the Rosendal Fjordhotel and savored delicious soup, full of local mussels, scallops, lobster, salmon and cod.

Clockwise from top: *Vivace* docked at the valley of Rosendal. View of Folgefonna Glacier from Jondal. Heather sailing into Hardangerfjord.

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Greg and Heather biking around Steinsland



The next morning, we headed to Norheimsund, deeper in to Hardangerfjord. A beautiful sail brought us into a protected harbor, lined with antique boats and a grand waterfront hotel.

After provisioning in Norheimsund's, we enjoyed cocktails on our sailboat before dinner. An impressive buffet of salmon, shrimp and mussels at the historic and gracious Sandven Hotel was the perfect finale to our day, complete with a stunning view of our yacht.

The next morning we plied across to Jondal to ski. We could see Folgefonna, Norway's third-largest glacier, shimmering in the sunlight above the bay.

After a scenic bus ride to Fonna Glacier Ski Resort, we were outfitted with skis from the resort's humble chalet. It was a perfect blue-sky day and the resort was packed with race teams from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe.

The views from atop Fonna Glacier were spectacular. This monstrous glacier the northern most of four in Folgefonna National Park, covered with sparkling fresh snow. Dropping thousands of feet to the East, we could see the fjord we had sailed that morning — strikingly blue in contrast to the winter wonderland glacier. We were delighted by the winter-like conditions, despite the sunny summer temperatures.

The next morning we sailed wing on wing down Hardangerfjord, with an unusual westerly wind propelling us on our return voyage toward Bergen. A long sail, down just a third of Hardanger's 68-mile fjord, entertained us with more

waterfalls, soaring mountains, views of the glacier we had skied, with frequent spotting of birds, porpoise, and colorful fish houses that cling to the otherwise pristine green and granite shores.

Between islands we were exposed briefly to the North Sea, for a swelly pass, then to Bekkjarvik, and docked in a well-protected harbor on Selbjorn Island.

The port of Bekkjarvik has a mix of modern docks and features sleek condos and a shopping mall, with a more historic waterfront lined with quaint cafes. The Bekkjarvik Gjestgiveri is a highlight here — this hotel has extraordinary dining by some of Norway's top chefs. That night was a special culinary treat for us.

Our final two days of sailing brought glorious sun and consistent wind. Several Norwegian sailors remarked on our good fortune. My Captain, my husband, had one more treat in store, docking at the swank Panorama Hotell & Resort on Steinsland — a beautiful modern resort with quiet docks — just an hour's sail away from our final marina the next day. After securing our sailboat at the posh resort, we enjoyed stretching our sea legs on a hike around the peaceful island.

The next morning, we rented bikes from the resort to explore more of this outlying

island. Riding along lupine-filled hills over spanning bridges brought us to a spectacular vantage looking out to the North Sea, and to the gorgeous Fonna Glacier in the distance. Our Norway weather had progressed from cold and wet to warm and sunny, so it was time to swim in the fjord as our grand finale.

We sailed reluctantly back to Hjellstad, our boat's hailing port. A quick inspection determined we'd returned *Vivace* in perfect order, and we toasted to a most epic sailing adventure in Norway. We highly recommend setting sail through Nautic Charter, and experiencing Norway's fjords as the Viking did centuries ago.

To charter your own sailboat in Norway, you should have significant sailing experience, knowledge of Norwegian charts, a proposed voyage plan, and a dose of courage plus plenty of warm clothing. Norway can be unpredictable when it comes to weather, but it also offers a sailing adventure unlike any other to make it worthwhile. **ml**

*Heather and Greg Burke are both travel journalists and photographers that explore the world by boat, skis and bikes. Learn more about their travels at [TheLuxuryVacationGuide.com](http://TheLuxuryVacationGuide.com)*



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Heather and Greg skiing at Fonna Glacier Ski Resort

