

Impaired mobility doesn't mean impaired experience, as Vision of the Fjords wins universal accessibility award from DOGA

Vision of the Fjords unlocks the jaw dropping beauty of West Norway's fjords for everyone, regardless of mobility. That's the message from the jury of this year's Norwegian Centre for Design and Architecture (DOGA) Universal Design awards, which



today chose the stunning hybrid electric vessel as the 2017 'transport' winner for its commitment to optimal passenger accessibility, experience and environmental sustainability.



Owned and operated by The Fjords DA, Vision of the Fjords is as unique as the UNECSO World Heritage listed habitat it travels through. Designed to mirror the mountain paths that zigzag alongside the fjords themselves, the 400-passenger tourist vessel offers comfortable and accessible lounges, sweeping panoramic windows and low emission operations, with silent running electric motors carrying its carbon fibre hull through the spectacular Nærøyfjord. However, it's the unparalleled functionality of the design, allowing all passengers to literally 'climb' over it, which really hit home with the DOGA jury.

"We, and our owners Fjord1 and Flåm AS, are not only committed

to safeguarding our fjords, but also to ensuring that absolutely everyone can enjoy an experience of a lifetime on board our vessels,” states The Fjords CEO Rolf Sandvik. “As such, we ensured that the ‘path’ passengers use to ascend the ship, and really immerse themselves in the sensory delights of the nature here, is as accessible to those in wheelchairs, or of limited mobility, as it is to all. There’s no stairs, no elevators, no obstructions, just a gently sloping surface leading everyone to unforgettable views.

“The recognition from DOGA is, of course, very pleasing, but the real prize is in seeing the reactions of the passengers who take one of the 700 yearly trips on Vision of The Fjords. They have the ability to lose themselves in, and really be a part of, the nature here – using the vessel, both inside and out, to connect to it in a way that has never previously been possible.

“We’re delighted to be able to offer this standard of environmentally responsible, high quality and accessible service to *all* visitors from all over the world.”

Designed and built by Norwegian shipyard Brødrene Aa, Vision of The Fjords was conceived with the aim of universal accessibility from the outset. Consultations during the build process ensured that all passenger groups would be accommodated, with the Norwegian Handicap Society bringing a user group on board once completed to test the concept worked as well in practice as in theory.

DOGA was equally as impressed as the users, with the jury commenting that the design was both “radical and groundbreaking”, addressing the mobility issue with true innovation and creating a vessel with the potential to become genuinely “iconic”.

The Fjords, with the financial backing of Fjord1 and Flåm AS, is now seeking to build on the success of the vessel with a

new ship, Future of The Fjords, in 2018. This vessel shares the design of its predecessor but actually improves the experience and environmental performance, as Sandvik explains:



“Vision of The Fjords marked an important step forward for ourselves, and for all operators and passengers interested in environmentally responsible, accessible and high quality tourism. However, we have, and our world needs, even greater ambitions.”

He continues: “Our new ship, Future of The Fjords, replaces its sister ship’s diesel-electric hybrid solution with pure electric propulsion. This means absolutely zero emissions, zero noise pollution and the most immersive experience possible for passengers. Basically the ship will just ‘melt away’ as we pass through the fjord panorama, allowing those on-board to escape into the purity and magic of their surroundings.

“This marks the fulfilment of our vision. Showing the world that it is possible to open up natural beauty to all, while safeguarding it for future generations and still providing the optimal passenger experience today. This is truly sustainable tourism, designed for everyone to delight in.”

Vision of The Fjords sails between Flåm and Gudvangen, a 90-minute journey, and is the only tourist vessel in the region to operate year round – opening up the area in off-peak periods to expose the breath-taking beauty of Winter, Spring and Autumn months. The Fjords operates a fleet of seven tourism vessels in the area, with the Future of The Fjords due

to set sail in May next year.

The Fjords

The Fjords is dedicated to moving its passengers. Operating a fleet of seven tourism and transport vessels on the Western Norwegian fjords of Nærøyfjord, Geirangerfjord and Lysefjord, the company aims to connect customers not just to their destinations, but also to the unique natural beauty that surrounds them. The Fjords is co-owned 50/50 by Fjord1, Norway's largest ferry company, and Flåm AS, which works to promote Flåm's world-class tourism opportunities.
www.thefjords.no

The Fjord1 Group

The Fjord1 Group is one of the major transportation companies in Norway. The core operational area for the company is sea-based transport, by ferries- and passenger vessels. In addition, the company has operations in relation to catering, travel agency and property management. Fjord1 AS is owned by Havila AS and the County council of Sogn and Fjordane.
www.fjord1.no

Flåm AS

Flåm AS is a leading provider of tourist attractions in the fjords and mountains of western Norway and the global marketing and sales arm of the Flåm tourist business cluster including world class attractions such as the Flåmsbana railroad and The Fjords' cruises in UNESCO world heritage fjords. Flåm AS is owned by SIVA (a Norwegian state business development company), Aurland municipality and Aurland Savings Bank. www.visitflam.com

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