A photograph of the Lindesnes lighthouse, a tall white tower with a red lantern room, situated on a rocky cliff overlooking the sea. A small white building is visible to the left of the lighthouse. The sky is blue with some clouds.

FIVE COASTAL
BEAUTIES TELL THE
TALE OF NORWAY'S
SEAFARING PAST.

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BY AMANDA SCHUPAK

Over the course of nearly four centuries, the jagged, rocky coast inscribing Norway has been dotted along its length by more than 200 lighthouses, which together paint a pointillist tribute to the legacy of a seafaring people. Majestic or humble, tenderly preserved or crumbling from the ravages of waves and time, they call out to the sea, beacons of the past, heralds of the here and now, the manifest iconography of a nation's character. A marriage of utility and splendor, Norway's lighthouses have guided countless ships to safe harbor, and today their picturesque charm attracts vacationers from around the world to visit. Some even stay the night.

But their importance goes beyond symbolism, even beyond navigation. Lighthouses played a vital role in the rise of Norway as a sovereign nation. In the second half of the 19th century, a swell of new lighthouses—more than 100 built in the late 1800s alone—buttressed the massive growth of the Norwegian shipping industry while the country was still under Swedish rule. Soon, Norwegian trade far exceeded Sweden's, and it became imperative that Norway assert control over relations with its foreign trade partners. But the Swedish king refused to cede authority. So in 1905, precipitated by the king's resistance and laying to rest decades of political disquiet, the Storting made a proclamation declaring Norway's independence. Finally, the lights shone on the shores of a free Norway.

Viking looks at five historic lighthouses, each one an important part of Norway's national and cultural identity.

THE LIGHTHOUSE



Lindesnes

LOCATION: Lindesnes

The first lighthouse in Norway began burning at the country's southernmost tip in 1656. For ships traveling between the North and Baltic seas, Lindesnes was a crucial and foreboding landmark. High winds, dangerous currents and shallow waters near the Danish coast earned the area a reputation as a maritime graveyard. The Lindesnes lighthouse was commissioned by the Danish King Frederik III, and the original structure consisted of a tower with 30 candles shining behind glass. The meager light was soon replaced with a coal lantern, but the second iteration didn't last long. The lighthouse stood dormant for nearly 70 years, until, in 1725, the coal fire was rekindled. In 1915 a new steel tower was erected with a large glass lens dispersing a more powerful paraffin light. That tower still stands today, and the modern lamp can be seen 19 nautical miles into the rough waters that crash on Lindesnes' craggy shores.



Lista

LOCATION: Farsund

Farther west along the southern shore stands Lista lighthouse. Before the light was built, cargo ships rounding Lista on their approach into Flekkefjord would often run aground. In a single winter month in the late 1700s, no fewer than eight ships went down in the area. Poor farmers nearby delighted in the occasional crash—they salvaged wood and food from the wrecks—but the merchants of Flekkefjord demanded

that a lighthouse be built. A 112-foot stone tower was erected in 1836, one of the first of a national network of

lighthouses. Two more towers were built at Lista between 1851 and 1853, making it the largest lighthouse station in the world (though only one remains today). As more lights sprouted up along the coast it became necessary to devise a system for identifying individual towers, and each was assigned its own unique pattern of blinking to help ships' crews discern exactly where they were. Today, the Lista tower is a popular tourist spot because, while many other lights stand on small islands, visitors can drive their cars right up to Lista's impressive base—as long as the weather cooperates.



Lista

Lighthouses played a vital role in the rise of Norway as a sovereign nation. Many were built to accommodate the robust shipping industry in the late 1800s.



Accessible only by boat, Oksoy lighthouse sits at the outermost point of a collection of small rocky islands at the entrance to Kristiansand fjord. Standing nearly 120 feet high, it is one of the tallest towers in all of Norway. The first lighthouse at the site, dating back to 1832, was replaced decades later by the one that stands today. From that lofty cast iron tower a light blinks twice every 45 seconds to announce entry to the harbor. The original lens from when the lighthouse was built in 1900 is still in use. Where-

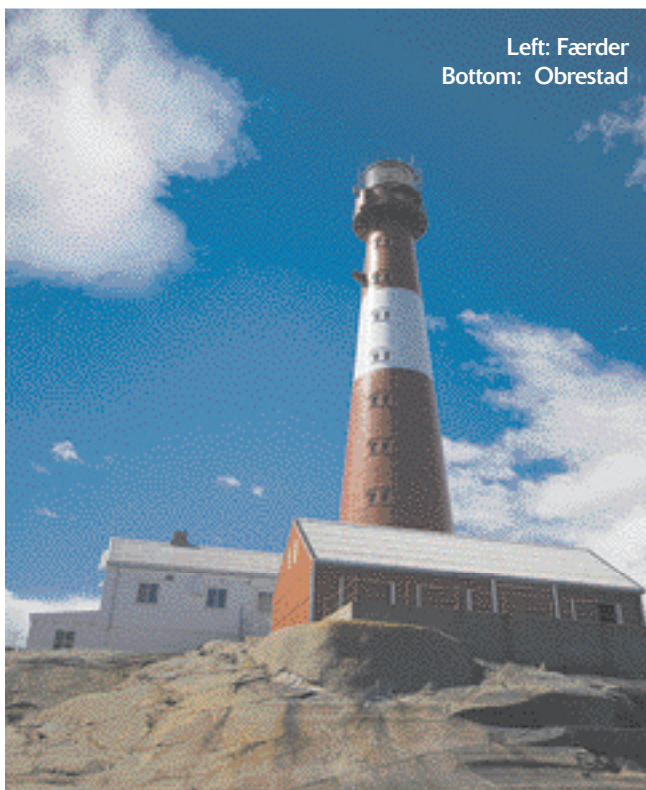
as new technology allows for small, finely focused lenses made of acrylic plastic and often no more than a foot and a half in diameter, Oksoy's heavy glass lens is roughly 12 feet across.



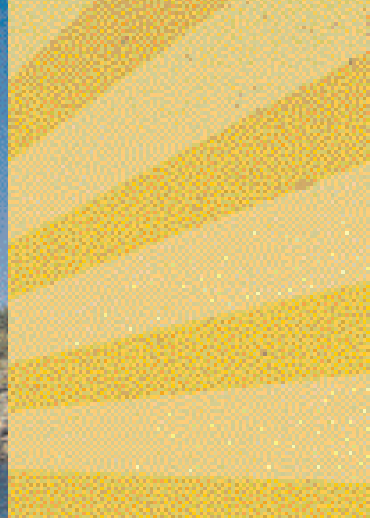
When the Obrestad lighthouse was built in Rogaland in 1873, Norway was on its way to becoming the third largest maritime nation in the world, behind Britain and the United States. The solid stone tower was carved in granite as part of a national effort to make Norway's coast

safer for its burgeoning fleet of nearly 8,000 ships. Decades later, after the outbreak of World War II, the lighthouse was used by occupying Germans as part of their defense system. The soldiers stationed there decorated the walls with racy murals of scantily clad women, which have been preserved in Obrestad's lighthouse museum.

The lighthouse was automated along with many others around the country in 1991. That year, the lighthouse keeper, Rolf Kristensen, hung up his saw and screwdriver as he always did, and left the lighthouse for the last time. Today, visitors to Obrestad can see his tools hanging just where he left them.



Left: Færder
Bottom: Obrestad



Though Lindesnes is widely known as the oldest lighthouse in Norway, Færder is in fact the light that has been in continuous use the longest. Færder was built in 1697—41 years after Lindesnes—on the island Store Færder. A replacement tower was later built on the nearby island of Tristein, and when it was completed in 1857, operations were moved there, where landing conditions were much more hospitable. It is a cast iron structure, representative of a style found often in Norway and the Netherlands but very rarely in other parts of the world. The “landfall” light is visible far out to sea to signal ships’ arrivals at the Oslo Fjord. Both the original station and the newer one have been carefully preserved, and the rich plant and bird life on the islands are nationally protected.

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RESOURCE GUIDE

1. Lindesnes

www.lindesnesfyr.no • +47 38 25 54 20

2. Lista

www.lista-fyr.com • +47 38 39 77 76

3. Okseøy

www.fyr.no/fyra/oksoy/oksoy-e.html
+47 38 02 12 69

4. Obrestad

www.hagamleprestegard.no
+47 51 79 16 60

5. Færder

www.fyr.no/fyra/lille-farder/lille-farder-e.html
+47 33 06 78 00

For a list of lighthouses across Norway that are open for visitors and overnight accommodations, go to www.lighthouses.no.

