

Dinner

By Joy Vik

in a Norwegian Lighthouse

There is a saying in Norway — “Don’t sleep away your summer nights.” The sun sets around 11 p.m., and then it is dusk for two or three hours before an amazing sunrise. These evenings are magical, and no one wants to go to sleep and miss out on the beauty.

Perhaps this is why I found myself on the last Saturday of June standing in my Norwegian kitchen with the same feelings I experience all winter long while running the Viking Yurt in Park City. Guests were coming to dinner. Guests with high expectations. Far-flung guests who had committed to this party many months before. Most of all, I was worried about the weather. I laughed at the irony. How had I gotten myself into this situation again during the summer months when I’m supposed to be recharging my batteries for another long winter season taking care of dinner guests at The Viking Yurt?

On Park City winter days, I receive phone calls from our reliable Viking Yurt chef. He reports on the snow traction after he hauls up his food supplies by snowmobile. The yurt sits at 8,200 feet, accessed by one of The Canyons Resort’s steepest runs. That daily phone call gives me a feel for how good our snowcat’s traction will be in the evening when pulling up a heavy sleigh containing 32 paying guests. Though my staff and I suffer some pretty major stress to pull it off each night, after eight years of being in business, The Viking Yurt has never canceled on guests due to bad weather.

So there I was, on a gorgeous Norwegian summer day, preparing dinner for 17 people with a knot in my stomach. My husband Geir and I had booked the Lille Torungen Lighthouse Station for a private dinner party for dear friends. The lighthouse sits on a tiny, rocky Norwegian island neighboring the one

Art by Bob Commander

Party



our summer vacation home is on.

My dear friend Sverre Helsem was out surveying the ocean's waves in his boat. Sverre was in charge of shuttling our friends to the lone island where the lighthouse sits. Large waves would mean canceling the event as there is no protected spot or proper dock for the boats, only a cement wall exposed to open ocean. Instead of a winter afternoon snow and traction report, I was anxiously awaiting Sverre's phone call on the size of the waves.

The lighthouse's brick tower was built in 1843, is 87 feet high, and provides a stunning view of the surrounding islands, the ocean and its currents, and passing ships. From its heights, you can see the earth's surreal curvature all the way to Denmark. The lighthouse was taken out of use in 1914, and since has been protected and preserved as a valuable historic treasure. It can be rented out for a day for those who wish to provide their own transportation by boat and haul out their own food ... all at their own risk. Considering that we wanted to rent it on a Saturday night during a summer month, we had committed our \$200 a year in advance. The light has been removed from the glass room at the top and replaced with a round wooden table that comfortably seats 12 people. We had lost control of the numbers attending our dinner party due to a few surprise RSVP's from teenage sons and daughters who didn't want to be left out. That brought our guest total to 17. Once again, just like during yurt season, I had more people wanting to attend than I had room for. Oh, dear.

Geir had ordered 10 kilos of fresh, unpeeled shrimp caught that morning by local fishermen. We were to pick it up by boat on our way to the island. Fresh shrimp is a classic summer meal in Norway. It takes a long time to peel each shrimp, but they are tasty. Our family is mad for the milk products in Norway, so while it may sound disgusting to some, we love the tradition of squeezing mayonnaise from a toothpaste-like tube onto a slice of white bread, and then filling it with peeled shrimp and topping it with fresh squeezed lemon and dill. Our friends were bringing their own drinks and

thermoses of coffee. Neurotically caught up in details, I was stressing over preparing the kabob appetizers, dessert and decorations for our long-awaited event.

First, I made melon with mint leaves and prosciutto kabobs covered with poppy seed dressing. Then came the Italian kabobs of tomatoes, mozzarella balls, olives and fresh basil drizzled with our famous Utah Voelker dip bought at the Park City Farmers Market. Dense and rich chocolate cake, made in a huge form for dessert, would

have to somehow survive the trip over to the island via boat.

It had rained the night before. We watched the skies obsessively all day. The weather seemed to be clearing. Our family hauled all of the food down the hill from our house and onto our boat for the trip to Arendal, a quaint old fishing village on the coast. Last minute supplies were purchased, and then we bounced over the waves to the island, watching the lighthouse grow taller as we approached. After throwing out the anchor and securing



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the boat, I laughed at how our arrival seemed to bother the hundreds of seagulls that inhabit the island. They were all screeching at us to please leave, right this minute! With food and goodies hauled to the top of the lighthouse, we began setting up in anticipation of our guests.

Our friends showed up in three different boats promptly at 6 p.m. as requested. (I didn't have to threaten to leave them behind if they were late, as I sometimes do with paying Viking Yurt guests.) These Norwegian friends have lived in this area for generations. They were as excited as we were and amazed that it took their friends from the States to provide them this experience in their own country! Guttorm Guttormson is a policeman and has been the body guard for three generations of Norwegian kings and royalty. But on this night, his qualification as a professional sailor comforted me most. After he approved of how all the boats were anchored and tied up, we marched toward the lighthouse.

Climbing the steps inside the lighthouse was an experience. My older

daughter had lit the stairs at the base with tea candles, but to her dismay, they blew out each time the huge wooden door was opened. So for those first flights, our guests had to feel their way up in the dark. The steps were a tight squeeze, and we gained elevation quickly. Higher up, the windows are in three-foot deep window wells. There are displays on the walls showing the history of the lighthouse, so excitement mounted as we did. Finally, we reached the level that has a balcony outside with views that literally took our breath away. On this evening, the winds were brisk enough that after a quick survey of the balcony circumference, every one preferred going back inside to the very top and taking a seat around the table. There we enjoyed the stunning views from behind the glass.

Our friends were in top form and willing to squeeze into too small of a space so that no one was left out. The guests facing the sunset had to wear sunglasses and almost needed sunscreen, too! There were crazy Norwegian drinking songs and jokes cracked

at each other's expense. Our youngest daughter's IPOD provided background music, but we were thrilled that we also had two women attending that night who were professional singers — one only 15 years old. When she sang, everyone got emotional. We were all willing to join in singing where we could, so the lighthouse really "rocked" that evening.

Just after sunset, with darkness encroaching, we decided it would be wise to leave the island. Our special evening was sadly over, but everyone was ecstatic at how much fun was had by all. As we rounded off the tip of the island in our boats, the moon came up over the ocean from the south and put on quite a show. It was huge and an incredibly soft yellow color; the grand finale to an evening that was worth every bit of effort we had put into it — just like The Viking Yurt, after all! ☺

Joy Vik, the owner of The Viking Yurt, has been a season pass holder in Park City since the age of 6. She and her Norwegian husband had a mid-life crisis that produced The Viking Yurt.



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