

NORWAY'S GOVERNMENT AIMS FOR DIESEL-FREE FJORDS



By 2026, Norway's government plans to ban diesel-powered cruise ships from entering Geiranger Fjord to protect the environment and combat climate change. However, this sudden decision has caused concern among some in the tourism industry.

Norway's western coast is a popular tourist destination known for its majestic mountains, stunning waterfalls, and deep blue fjords. Most visitors arrive on cruise ships, docking at the small harbor of Geiranger. This influx of tourists provides many locals with jobs, making the ships and their guests a vital source of income for the town.

However, Norway's government aims to reduce the number of cruise ships visiting the area. The primary reason is to ban the exhaust gases that these ships emit—gasses full of carbon dioxide, soot, and nitrogen oxides. According to Norway's former Environment Minister and current Foreign Minister, Espen Barth Eide, cruise ships produce the highest emissions per passenger per distance traveled of any form of transportation globally, polluting the fjords. In response, all parties in the Norwegian parliament have agreed that no more emissions should be allowed in this area.

Is LNG propulsion the solution?

Achieving zero emissions in three years poses a significant challenge for the cruise industry, given that most ships still run on diesel. However, a few cruise ships have managed to operate without it. LNG, or Liquefied Natural Gas, is a big step forward. This is an important milestone on achieving zero emissions for cruise operations.

Using LNG instead of marine diesel could be the future. This means significantly fewer exhaust gases. For example, heaters and pools are heated by the ship's engines. However, LNG is far from emission-free and would only reduce CO2 emissions by 20 to 25 percent.

The Diesel-free fjords decision came very suddenly

The only way to enter the fjord without harmful exhaust fumes is through smaller ships that use electric propulsion. However, these ships can only operate for a few hours due to the limited battery power, and they must run on liquefied natural gas (LNG) for the rest of the time. While there are approaches for greener cruising, they are not yet fully developed. The sudden decision by Norway's government to be stricter on emissions has experts worried about the consequences, as significantly fewer tourists may come to Geiranger in the coming years. As a result, residents of Geiranger Fjord hope for a transitional period before the new regulations take full effect.

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