



Norway
Gulen

Text and photos by Christian Skauge



Cold water diving will never be the same after a visit to Gulen situated north of Bergen on the Norwegian west coast. Here, history meets present day, the deep ocean meets kelp forest and the gargantuan meets the miniscule.

Whatever you want to see underwater, chances are good that you will find it at the Gulen Dive Resort. The area at the mouth of the Sognefjord is as rich in marine splendour as it is beautiful

above the surface. The world's longest fjord, it cuts some 220 kilometres into the Norwegian west coast and an area of great strategic importance during World War II. Consequently, the area is strewn with spectacular wrecks of freighters and warships and in terms of rusty WWII action, few places in the world can compete. A week at Gulen leaves one with the chance of being properly "wrecked".

Norway's best wreck

One of Gulen's signature dives is the 122 meter long German freighter *SS Frankenwald*. Practically a cliché, the *Frankenwald* is a virtual window into his-

tory, a piece of WWII memorabilia found nowhere else. Laid bare by corrosion, the deck slopes from 24 to 34 meters toward the bow of the ship. Even though bottom time is decent, many dives are required to properly explore the superstructure, cargo holds and the interior. Weighing in at 5,032 tons, the grand old lady wreck is extremely well-preserved, offering so many different dives that people come back year after year.

The stern rests on the sandy bottom 44 meters and almost resembles a submarine conning tower when viewed from behind. After spending as much time as possible on the wreck, divers can ascend

THIS PAGE: Scenes from the wreck of the *SS Frankenwald*

to the ship's spectacular aft mast for a safety stop. Rising from 20 to 7 meters, the structure is entirely encased with anemo-

nes and teeming with critters and little fish. Several years ago, the *Frankenwald* was voted best wreck in Norway by



Wreck of the *Parat*

the readers of Norwegian dive magazine *Dykking*. And rightly so! Hovering motionless above the *Frankenwald* in good visibility is an out-of-this-world experience not to be missed.

Twin wrecks at Sail Rock

Also not to be missed are the stunning twin wrecks of *SS Ferndale* and *SS Parat*. On 16 December 1944, the 116-meter long freighter *Ferndale* was heading north in the darkness when she ran aground on Sail Rock, 40 minutes north of Gulen Dive Resort. A sitting duck, the *Ferndale* came under attack from allied aircraft the next morning. In the fierce battle that ensued, the allies lost two Mosquito fighter-bombers, but still managed to sink

both *Ferndale* and the salvage vessel *Parat* which had been called in for the rescue.

Today, the *Ferndale* sits upright on a slope ending at a depth of only 8-10 meters. The bow area was salvaged after the war, with only bits and pieces remaining. In stark contrast, the intact midship and stern remain at 34 meters. From this vantage point, one can look down on the *Parat*, resting a meter or so behind *Ferndale*. It is almost a miracle that the large freighter did not crush the small salvage vessel when she sank. The *Parat* is a dive for experienced tech divers, with trimix required between depths of 45 to 60 meters.

After admiring both wrecks, deco and safety stops are done

around the spectacular Sail Rock, the sides of which are completely covered with sea plumes, dead men's finger coral, dahlia anemones and sea squirts. The quantity of fish and invertebrates found here is simply astonishing. It is wise to make room for an extra long deco stop if you don't want to miss out on the rock. Some underwater photographers have been known to ignore the wrecks entirely and concentrate on Sail Rock's colourful plethora of marine wildlife. Even with the unique twin wrecks close by, it is a world-class dive in its own right.

Rust for everyone

Gulen Dive Resort takes divers to no less than 15 different wrecks, ranging from the beginner-friendly



Divers at Sail Rock

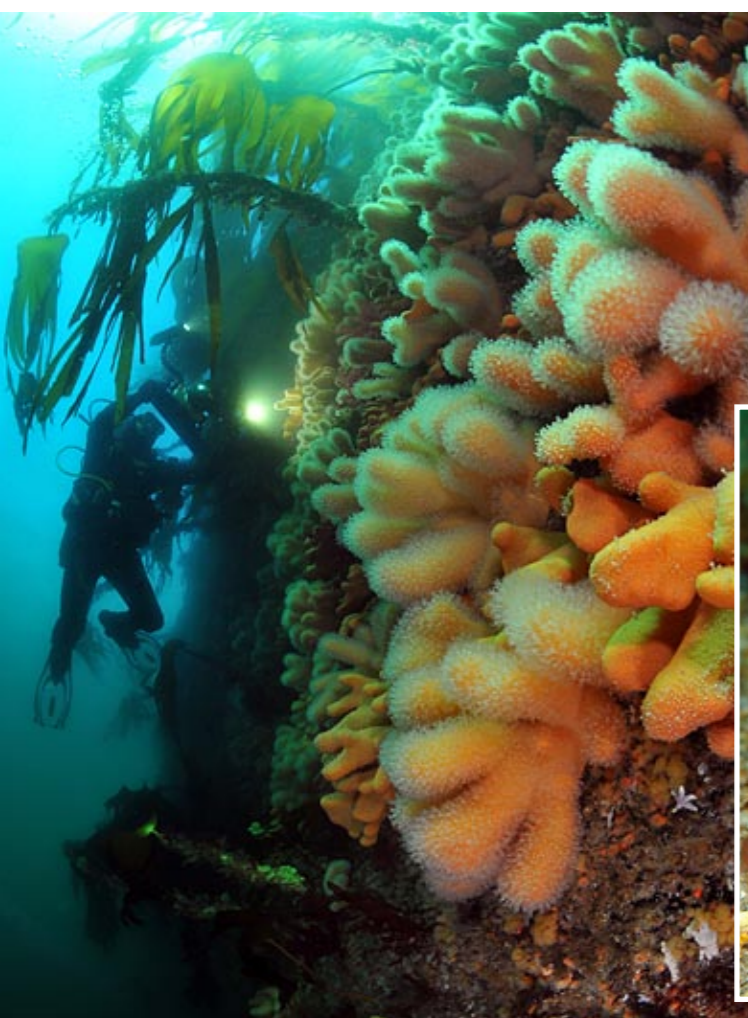
Solvang at 15 meters to the technical deep-dive of *SS Lynx* at 90-100 meters. In between, most divers will find a wreck at suitable depth, be it the *Havda*, *Bandak*, *Server*, *Welheim*, *Oldenburg*, *Inger Seks* or the newly discovered minelayer *KNM Uller* at 55 meters. The latter is the only wreck known to have been sunk by Norwegian seaplanes during WWII. Scattered on the bottom beside the beautiful 27 meter long vessel are ominous-looking mines and a cannon elevated towards the surface as if she's still trying to fend off her aggressors.

On the boat ride out, divers are briefed not only on the dive itself, but you will also the often exciting and violent history of the wrecks.

At Gulen, history is never more than a few meters below the surface.

WRECK DIVING IN GULEN				
SHIP	GRT	LENGTH	SUNK	DEPTH
<i>Frankenwald</i>	5062	122 m	06.01.1940	25-44m
<i>Ferndale</i>	4302	116 m	16.12.1944	8-40m
<i>Parat</i>	135	32 m	16.12.1944	45-60m
<i>Solvang</i>	149	32 m	12.03.1992	8-25m
<i>Bandak</i>	262	38 m	19.02.1949	18-29m
<i>Havda</i>	677	55 m	09.12.1944	16-30m
<i>Inger Seks</i>	4969	116 m	23.04.1945	30-80m
<i>KNM Uller</i>	250	27 m	01.05.1940	55-60m
<i>Server</i>	19864	179,5 m	12.01.2007	2-25m
<i>Mercantil Marica</i>	15000	280 m	21.10.1989	25-50m
<i>Welheim</i>	5455	135 m	27.11.1944	15-70m
<i>Ilse Fritzen</i>	4883	107 m	26.01.1945	45-65m
<i>Bjergfin</i>	648	54 m	25.01.1945	42-55m
<i>Lynx</i>	1366	70 m	19.09.1944	90-100m





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Videographer on house-reef; *Flabellina lineata* nudibrach; Gulen Dive Resort; Jeffrey's goby; *Eledone cirrhosa* octopus

Dive resort

Celebrating its tenth anniversary this fall, the Gulen Dive Resort comes complete with modern RIB dive boats, nitrox and trimix on demand, a great house reef, its own

pub, sauna and outdoor hot tub and a friendly and knowledgeable staff. Dive courses are offered from Open Water to Divemaster and many dive shops and clubs use the resort for their own courses. Rebreather-friendly, the resort is able to handle large groups of technical divers, as well as hosting photography and marine biology workshops every year. The post-dive Norwegian speciality waffles served at the dive shop are a good example of the effort that goes into catering for the divers and their needs.

Visitors stay in up-to-date, clean and cosy twin rooms and can swap dive stories in the spacious living room and kitchen area. A special area is dedicated to laptops, chargers

and camera gear. Editing and admiring pictures taken during the day is a popular past-time in the evenings. Most divers choose to tend to their own meals and enjoy the luxury of complete flexibility, while others prefer the all-inclusive treatment. Almost anything is possible at Gulen Dive Resort; just let owners Monica Bakkeli and Ørjan Sandnes know what you want, and they will most likely be able to provide it. If arriving by air from Bergen, group transfers can be arranged from the airport.

Nudibranchs galore

Gulen Dive Resort offers much more than great wreck diving. The house reef is world-famous for its high number of nudibranch species. Every

year at the end of March, people gather for the annual Nudibranch Safari, with scientists from the university in Trondheim teaching participants all about these exquisite creatures.

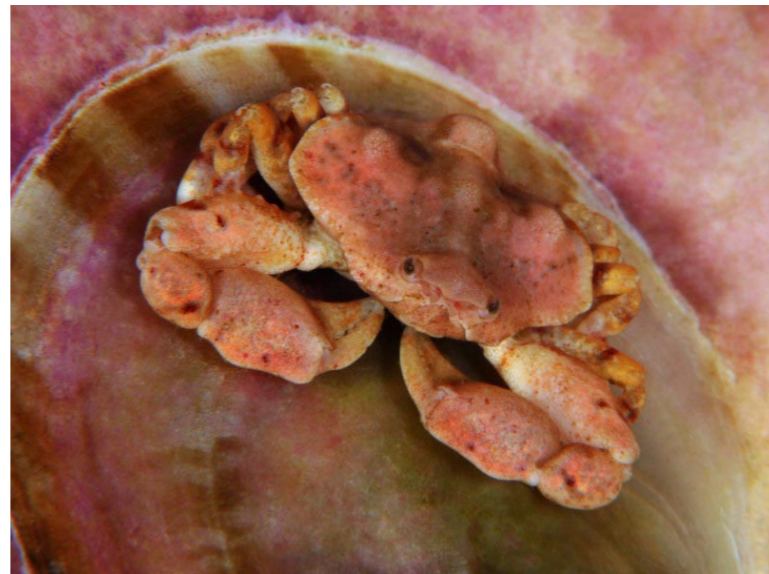
All the diving is done locally to ensure maximum time under water as well as in the classroom. Although Norway boasts close to a hundred nudibranch species, only two thirds can be found at diveable depths. At the Gulen house reef, more than 50 species have been found in just the last two years, attracting divers from all over Scandinavia.

Aliens of the deep

If you are looking for even more exotic and unique marine life experiences,



come to Gulen at the end of January. At this time, the mysterious deep-sea helmet jellyfish *Periphylla periphylla* comes to the surface to mate, an event



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sea spider, *Nymphon gracile*; Thornback ray, *Raja clavata*; Bryer's nut crab, *Ebalia tumefacta*; Crown or helmet jellyfish, *Periphylla periphylla*; Two-spotted clingfish, *Diplecogaster bimaculata*

that can only be witnessed in very few locations the worldwide. These strange creatures normally live from several hundred to thousands of meters deep in the ocean, but in the middle of the night during winter, divers can witness hundreds if not thousands of them with the bottom 300 meters below. The jellyfish grow to almost a meter across when their 12 tentacles are spread out.

Like blood-red wheels drifting in the pitch-black water, the *Periphylla* has been around for some 650 million years, with scientists only recently beginning to unlock their secrets. Many visiting divers count these dives among the best they have ever had.

Sharks and rays

Elasmobranch and cephalopod lovers will also find rare treats in the Gulen area. Although Norwegian waters are not exactly shark-infested, the summer months of June and July offer opportunities to see congregations of dogfish at some of the deeper wrecks at the mouth of the Sognefjord. They have even been spotted several times on the house reef, much to the astonishment of divers expecting nudibranchs and crustaceans. (Naturally, with the wrong lens on the camera!) I have myself been surprised by 1.2-meter-long sharks swimming close by to investigate what I am doing. The calmness and elegant grace of these apex

predators never cease to amaze me.

More cartilage can be found at Stingray City, so dubbed because of the near 100 percent success rate at finding thorny rays on the sandy bottom. These flat bottom feeders grow up to about a meter in length, and are normally not very camera shy. Depths of 14-18 meters ensure long dives even for the less experienced and smiles will be in abundance upon leaving the water.

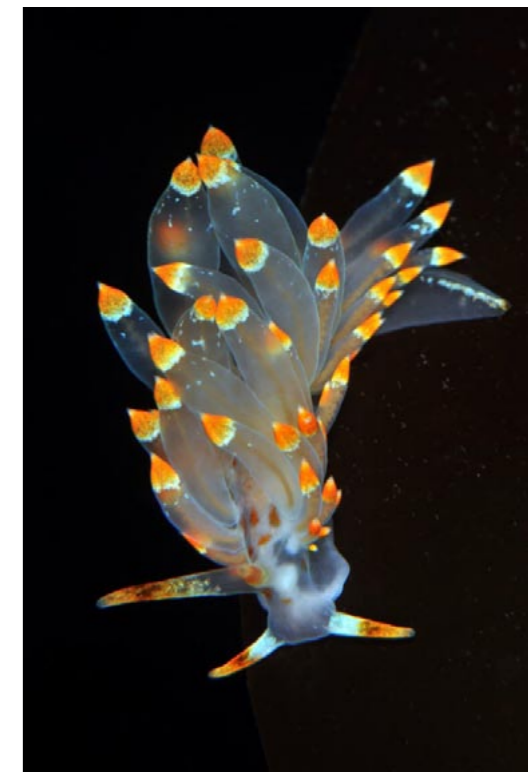
Stunning house reef

During the fall, things start to noticeably change off the Norwegian coast and Gulen is

no exception. As the days grow shorter and evenings darker, thousands of strange creatures begin to appear at nights on the house reef. Covered in spiky protrusions or algae camouflage, an army of crustaceans begin their march towards domination. With

snapping claws and glowing eyes punctuating the darkness, camouflage crabs, nut crabs, swimming crabs, spider crabs, stone crabs, hermit crabs, squat lobsters, different shrimp and sea spiders crawl and creep.

At 30+ meters on the house



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Common Bobtail squid; Diver on wreck of *Bandak*; *Eubranchus farrani* nudibranch; *Limacia clavigera* nudibranch; *Diaphoradoris luteocincta* nudibranch; Liljeborgs shrimp

shelter under the big, pink sea anemones as they wait to shed their spiky carapace when they are moult. The anemones also house whole families of bright red *Spirontocaris* shrimp, using the stinging tentacles for shelter like clownfish.

At night, little squid emerge from the fine-grained sand at the house reef's shallow depths. Patient divers can see them hunt, feed and maybe even mate, ensuring that the following year's divers can experience these delicate creatures as they flutter gently in the dark.

The house reef also features rare gobies lingering in the sand and super-cute clingfish guarding their eggs deposited inside empty



seashells. Squid's eggs are often found on the kelp during spring-time and lobsters, meter-long wolffish and large monkfish are frequent visitors. Even rare deep-sea sponges and stony coral have been found here, along with several species of nudibranchs never before seen in Norwegian waters. A macro heaven, the house reef is renowned among Scandinavian

underwater photographers. Many award-winning images have been shot here with more to come in the future.

Just off the house reef, some 200 meters from the resort pier, another signature dive awaits the visiting divers: The Troll Wall. This magnificent drop-off starts well above the surface and plummets to 45 meters and deeper, and one feels quite small next to the towering mass of granite. The wall is full of large pink and little white starry-looking anemones, and shallower the kelp harbours lumpfish guarding their eggs and thousands of

wrasse going about their business. If one does not venture too deep, it is even possible to swim all the way back to the pier where the evenings attractions are waiting—barbecue in the summer, hot-tub and a pint in the pub all year round.

New adventures

Sitting near the very end of the warm flow of the Gulf Stream, Gulen is part of an ever-changing marine ecosystem that never ceases to amaze. The seasonal changes make every visit special and the marine life is unique each time. Spring

brings excellent opportunities to discover colourful nudibranchs



reef, really lucky divers may encounter stone crabs seeking



GULEN FACTS

WHERE: Gulen Dive Resort is located two hours north of Bergen, at the mouth of the Sognefjord.

LANGUAGE: Norwegian, but English is spoken by most people.

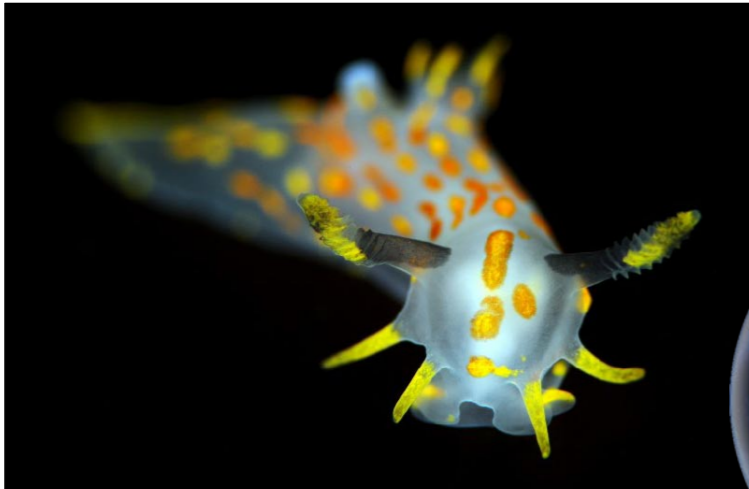
CURRENCY: Norwegian Kroner, 100 NOK = 13 Euro or 18 USD

WATER TEMPERATURE: Temperature range between 2-4°C during the winter months. Definitely drysuit territory, lots

of warm undergarments are also required. In late summer, water temperatures can reach 17-18°C at the surface, but will still be cool at depth.

DIVING: Excellent for novice divers, intermediate and experienced technical divers alike. Gulen Dive Resort offer dives of all kinds for all divers.

FLIGHTS: Getting to Norway by plane is easy and convenient with international connections in Bergen and Oslo. Gulen Dive Resort offer group transfers from the airport. ■



LEFT TO RIGHT: Chameleon prawn, Hippolyte varians; Polycera quadrilineata nudibranch; Gulen Dive Resort is located in Sognefjord, as located on global map and map of Norway



and see how the ecosystem prepares to go into high gear for mating season in the beginning of the summer. The following warmer months offer an abundance of algae, fish and plenty of action in the sea. During the fall, crustaceans and cephalopods are the main players. When winter knocks, it is time to put on extra undergarments and explore the fabulous WWII wrecks for which Gulen is justly famous. These are just a few of the highlights to be experienced during a visit to the Gulen Dive Resort. Depending on the time of year, they offer drift dives, awesome kelp forests, pick-your-own-clams, a fabulous house reef, world-class wreck diving and an assembly of

marine life most people wouldn't think possible outside the tropics. No article could ever have room for all the experiences on offer. Whenever you visit, a different adventure awaits. ■

Christian Skauge is the current Nordic Champion of underwater photography, and has won several national and international photo contests. He has previously worked as editor for the Norwegian dive magazine Dykking. To see more of Christian's images, please visit www.scubapixel.com.

„Where Ingenuity mates with Simplicity to achieve Perfection.“

W30

FULLSUIT 2.5mm

Waterproof takes the step into an exciting venture with the new Sport Series and introduces a stunning 2.5 mm fullsuit. Flatlocked seams, stretchy Microcell CR Neoprene and a streamlined design gives the Diver an edge on the beach, super comfort and mobility under water.

To keep the professional divers happy, the new W30 2.5 mm fullsuit features a unique and clever gadget, the WPAD™.

The WPAD™, or the Waterproof Personal Accessory Dock, is an artfully constructed docking station located on the right thigh for a line of new accessories.

One of the add-on accessories is the Tech Pocket, featured in this folder. The Sport Series is a full range which includes: Shorty, swimwear, hood, gloves and socks.



The new WP Accessories Docking system from Waterproof, WPAD™ is a simple, yet ingenious construction where a double Velcro layer fastener provides a rock solid anchor hold of the Tech Pocket.



This rugged Tech Pocket is expandable with two high quality zippers and comes with a Stainless Steel D-Ring. The pocket attach to the WPAD™ system.



W30 SHORTY

WATERPROOF®

Read more at www.waterproof.eu