

We're normally not in a big rush to get up, as sunrise happens so late. But today was an early start as we had a 7:57am train to catch. We had a choice of three trains to Oslo, but that one maximised the daylight. The seven hour journey time was longer than the length of the day, so some of it had to be in the dark. The first hour of the journey was mostly in tunnels, so it made sense to get the early train.

Fortunately our hotel was 70 metres from the train station entrance, so there was no connection time to add. The reviews of the train food were pretty dire, so our challenge was to organise some food. With supermarkets closed on Sunday and no fridge anyway, making a picnic the day before wasn't a great option. Zander K solved the problem with their "breakfast bags". Buying a bag allowed you to fill it with goodies from the breakfast buffet, and also included a giant orange and a carton of apple juice. At 95 kroner (NZD16) it was great value for Norway - a BK meal was over a hundred kroner. With such a great breakfast selection, we all left with a pretty yummy selection of goodies, including freshly baked pain au chocolat. Yum!



Bergen Railway Station

We'd splashed out on first class tickets as it wasn't much more. I booked the train so early that I got great "Minipris" fares at about one third of the normal ticket price. Adding on first class was only a few dollars more, and gave us more room and the all important free WIFI. I had great intentions of doing some work during the dark part of the journey, but forgot that the WIFI would drop out in the tunnels. It was actually really nice to just sit back and relax for seven hours of incredible scenery - just what we all needed after an exhausting two weeks.

The journey goes through steep terrain and climbs up to 1,237m, making it the highest railway in mainland Europe. Even after the first hour of constant tunnels, we spent a lot of time in avalanche shelters before the summit. In between, we could enjoy spectacular snowy scenery. It crossed the Hardangvidda Plateau and stopped at Finse, the highest railway station in Europe which gives access to an area that has no roads.







Finse - the highest train station in Europe

Going down the other side we passed skifields, towns and endless snowy scenery. We had expected the snow to disappear as we got down to sea level in Oslo, but the white stuff remained. I had emailed our hotel a few weeks ago and asked about walking to the hotel. They replied it was many years since they'd had snow in December, so walking shouldn't be a problem. We were surprised when we walked out of the train station to snow everywhere! Not all of it was white, the footpath snow was either slushy brown or hardpacked grey, but the rest looked magic. We walked the 1.5km to our hotel anyway, getting a good workout dragging the suitcases through the snow, ice and grit.



Geilo Skifield





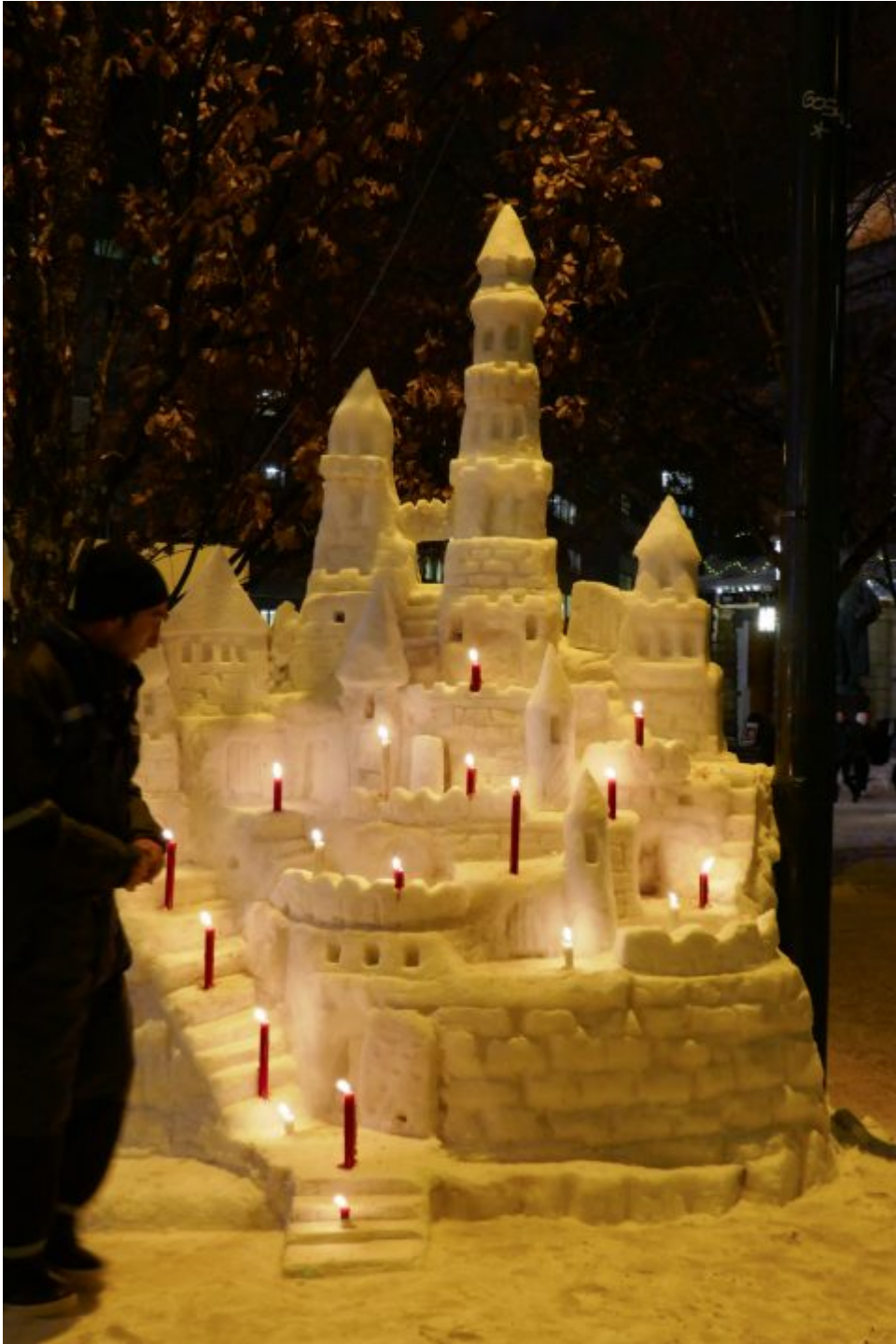
Getting dark again

After settling in to the hotel, we braved the chilly weather again to explore some of Oslo. There were beautiful Christmas markets just near our hotel so we wandered through them on the way to dinner. The quickest way to town is a five minute walk through the beautiful snowy park in front of the Royal Palace. We finished the day with a visit to a nearby Rema 100 supermarket to get some snack supplies.



Oslo Christmas Market





Ice Carving at Christmas Market



Lots of yummy salmon here

