

Welcome to the Fortress Trail at Bergenhus Castle

The Fortress Trail takes about one hour to complete at normal walking pace. We hope you will enjoy the walk and the surroundings.



Follow us on social media
#bergenhus

Bergenhus Castle comprises three areas: Holmen with the former royal and ecclesiastical buildings, Koengen and Sverresborg. In the 1600s all three areas were joined together into one large military site.

THE MAIN GATE

Erected in 1832. It bears the monogram of King Carl Johan of Sweden and Norway.

THE PARADE GROUND

The parade ground was levelled out and received its current layout in 1787. This may have been the medieval site of an Apostle Church (the third in a series of royal churches dedicated to the apostles).

Old Bergenhus:

ROSENKRANTZ TOWER

The old medieval tower was erected by King Magnus Lagabøte (the Lawmender) around 1270, and is the core of the Rosenkrantz tower. An extension was built around 1520 which included a portcullis, a moat and a drawbridge. In the 1560s, Erik Rosenkrantz, the feudal overlord, joined all the separate structures into one building, adding three new floors reached by a spiral staircase. The tower was badly damaged in the explosion that shook the harbour of Bergen in 1944. The present-day exterior has been restored to the way it originally looked in the 1560s. The tower is open to visitors most of the year.

THE BARBICAN

The barbican is preserved as one of the two gate towers in the surrounding wall which was erected by Håkon Håkonsson in the middle of the 13th century. The tower served as the main entrance to the medieval royal palace.

THE CASTLE COURTYARD

The courtyard between Håkon's Hall and the three white 18th century houses is very much in keeping with its original design from the 1700s. Excavations have revealed traces of an earlier, royal palace in wood, as well as two previous Apostle Churches which served as royal chapels. Before the explosion in WW2, the courtyard sported flower beds and a large tree in its centre.

THE RESIDENCE OF THE CAPTAIN, COMMANDER OF THE WATCH

The Captain, Commander of the Watch, was second in command at the fortress. The residence was erected in 1714, and was later connected to Håkon Håkonsson's barbican from the Middle Ages. The building sustained extensive damage in 1944, but the exterior has been restored to its original design. Café open during the summer season.

THE COMMANDANT'S RESIDENCE

Erected in 1725 on the ruins of King Eirik Magnussons «Ladies' Hall» from the 1290s. As the name suggests, the Ladies' Hall was probably where the ladies of the court had their place of residence at the royal palace. The commandant's residence was badly damaged in the 1944 explosion, but has been restored to its original appearance.

THE SECOND STONE HALL

This hall was erected by King Håkon Håkonsson at about the same time as Håkon's Hall. The two buildings probably formed an inner courtyard which constituted the innermost core of the defensive fortifications. On display are three rooms of the lower ground floor which were preserved following archaeological excavations in the 1930s.

HÅKON'S HALL

The Stone Hall on Holmen was erected by King Håkon Håkonsson between 1247 and 1261, and is now known as Håkon's Hall. It served as a royal seat in the Middle Ages, with the king's Great Hall on the uppermost floor. The two lower floors were probably used for administrative and warehouse purposes. From 1520 to around 1860 the hall was used for storage. The Hall was restored at the end of the nineteenth century. It was badly damaged in the 1944 explosion, but was restored and reopened to the public in 1961. Today it is used for official functions, for concerts and as a museum. Visitors will find information and can join guided tours in the old stables.

THE STABLES

Two adjoining buildings that were made into one around 1730, and put to use as stables. Horses remained the dominant form of transport well into the 1900s. The building has also served other purposes. Today it serves as the public entrance to Håkon's Hall.

JØRGEN HANSSØN'S CURTAIN WALL

Jørgen Hanssøn was a feudal overlord of Bergenhus. He reduced the castle's area and constructed a shorter wall going from the barbican to Håkon's Hall around 1520. The new wall replaced sections of the medieval fortifications. The curtain wall is part of the outer fortifications in a medieval castle. The development of cannon rendered the old walls obsolete. Following the new style from Italy and France, one now built stronger ramparts, with straight curtain walls and projecting bastions (for firing positions).

Holmen (the holm or islet):

THE MAIN GUARD

The building was probably erected in the 1700s, became the main guard house as of 1835 and bears the monogram of King Carl Johan of Sweden and Norway above the gateway. Was damaged in 1944, but has now been restored to its original appearance. The plan is to turn the building into an information centre for Bergenhus Castle.

THE COMMANDANT'S GARDEN

Most fortresses included a garden for the commandant. In the 1600s, the commandant's garden at Bergenhus Castle was situated in the vicinity of today's regiment building. The style of the garden has changed over time, and photographs from the early 1900s show it to be more of an ornamental garden than a kitchen garden. But even the medieval kings had "gardens" or "grassy fields" inside Bergenhus Fortress.

THE BUNKER

The bunker was constructed by the German forces during WW2 and used as a communications bunker. The labour was performed by Russian POWs. The bunker was built of heavily reinforced concrete to withstand air attacks.

THE REGIMENTAL BUILDING

This building was completed in 1921 and served as combined living quarters and offices for the two former regiments from Western Norway; the Hordaland Ninth Infantry Regiment and the Fjordane Tenth Infantry Regiment. The building was divided in the middle, and housed one regiment in each half.

THE ARTILLERY BUILDING

This probably dates back to the 1750s, but might be even older. It may have been used as both a laboratory and a prison. Renovated after WW2. The building has also been used as a residence and offices for architect Gerhard Fischer during the archaeological surveys of Bergenhus Castle.

THE CHRIST CHURCH SITE

The outline of the large Christ Church, which in the Middle Ages served as the cathedral for the whole city, has been traced with hedges. The founder of Bergen, King Olav Kyrre, began the construction work about 1070. The church was probably completed in 1170, when the reliquary containing the earthly remains of St. Sunniva, the patron saint of Bergen, was placed inside. Two queens and five Norwegian Kings have been crowned here, and four kings have been interred inside the church. Christ Church was torn down some time around 1530. The work was done so thoroughly that archaeologists have been able to uncover but a few traces of it. At the site of the former choir, indicated by flagstone, a statue in memory of St. Sunniva has been erected, bearing an inscription to commemorate the kings and queens who were crowned and laid to rest here in medieval times.

THE RECESSED BATTERY POSITION

This is the original site of the fortress' defensive cannons. All that remains today is the descent down to the site of the pre 1680s installation. The statue is of King Haakon VII, (1872-1957), the first King of Norway following the dissolution of the Union with Sweden in 1905.

THE BASTION OF THE NORTHERN POINT

Today also known as Flag Point, because this is where the flagpole of Bergenhus Fortress is located.

THE CANNON (FLAG POINT)

Between the recessed battery position to the south and the fortress' flagpole to the north, seven old cannon are lined up, facing the seaward approach to Bergen port. They were fired at the change-of-flag ceremony following the dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905 – not in anger, but as a salute.

GENERAL MANSBACH'S AVENUE

Part of the park stretching from Bergenhus Castle to Sverresborg, which was planted by General Carl Mansbach in the 1830s. This was the only one of its kind in Bergen, and was open to the general public. Only parts of this park remain.

THE ENGINEERS' BUILDING

Originally a bakery, this house was converted into apartments and offices in the 1920s. A third floor was added after the Second World War.

THE EXIT GATE

This new exit gate in the fortress was added in 1857. During WW2, the German forces constructed subterranean shelters at Bergenhus Castle. The entry was down from the gateway and the traces are still visible in the masonry.

The Bergenhus Castle of today

The castle is open to the general public, and still has military and civilian tenants. The grounds are used as a venue for operatic performances, large rock concerts, art exhibitions and other cultural events. The castle has its own museum, and there are refreshments for sale. Bergenhus Castle is a protected historic site, and is preserved and used with respect for its national, cultural and historical importance. The site represents nearly 1000 years of Norwegian history.

Rules of conduct

This castle is one of fourteen national fortifications in Norway, and a national monument which we have been entrusted to preserve for future generations. We kindly request that all visitors show due respect for the buildings and the grounds, show caution when you move about the various parts and adhere to the rules of conduct. This way, you help ensure that all visitors get a chance to enjoy the castle. The experience of visiting a place as unique as Bergenhus Castle could easily be spoiled by litter and unintended damage to the site. We therefore have an all-year ban on open fires. This also pertains to disposable BBQs. Dogs must be kept on a leash inside the grounds year-round. Please use the litter bins. The removal of any parts of the buildings, bricks, wood or other loose objects from the fortress is strictly prohibited.

Want to see more?

There is a trail going round the perimeters which also crosses the terrain in front of the castle. This area is known as Koengen (cow's meadow). You can also follow the trail up to Sverresborg and take in the panoramic views of the city, the entrance to the harbour and the seven mountains encircling Bergen.

Sverresborg

The fortifications of Sverresborg as you see them today were constructed in the period between 1600 and the early 1800s. They are built on the exact same site where the King Sverre erected his burgh around 1180.

In the early 1100s, the royal residence on the Holm was unfortified and vulnerable to attack. During the civil wars that raged in the Middle Ages, King Sverre erected two of the first stonebuilt forts in Norway, one in Trondheim and one in Bergen. Sverresborg was the site of several battles during the civil war. The site was reinforced by King Håkon Håkonsson around 1250. The medieval fort remained until mid-1500s. Directly underneath Sverresborg lies the residence of the master of the ramparts (Vollmesterboligen), the oldest of which go back to the 18th century. As the name implies, the master of the ramparts was in charge of the maintenance and upkeep of the fortifications and buildings. The facilities include a garage and an outbuilding of more recent date.

The large yellow barracks below Sverresborg were rebuilt for use as an academy for petty officers. The building sustained considerable damage in WW2, and was later rebuilt in a simplified form. Today, it houses the accounting department of the Norwegian Armed Forces.

Koengen

The central part of Bergenhus Fortress is called the Holm, as it was originally a small islet. Gradually, a marshland formed between the Holm, Sverresborg, and the habitation to the south. The marshes were called Koengen, probably because cows were let out here to drink and graze. You will find the headquarters of the Armed Forces Band, West Norway and the Bergenhus Fortress Museum here. The museum is open every day except Mondays between 11:00 and 17:00 hrs. Koengen is today well established as a concert venue, and can take an audience of many thousand. Its location in the centre of the city of Bergen provides the concerts with an absolutely unique setting, and the venue is still being developed as a cultural arena.



We create new life on historical ground

The Norwegian Defence Estates Agency manages 15 national fortifications all over Norway. The fortifications are living cultural venues frequented by millions of people each year.

The scenic and historical surroundings provide a unique framework for experiences, parties, meetings and training courses. Here, you can enjoy large and small concerts, an outdoor opera, art exhibitions and sporting events, or delve deep into the history of the place and visit our museums. We have rental facilities for most occasions. Fortresses are located throughout the country, from Møvik Fort in the South to Vardøhus Fortress in the North.

FORSVARSBYGG
NORWEGIAN DEFENCE ESTATES AGENCY

www.forsvarsbygg.no

The history of Bergenhus Castle

Bergenhus is one of the oldest castles still in existence in Norway, with a long history as a centre for ecclesiastical, royal, and military activities. The central area of the castle was known as the Holm in the Middle Ages.

An ecclesiastical centre

In the Middle Ages, the Holm was an important centre for the church in Norway, with many buildings and functions. The construction of the medieval cathedral, Christ Church, was started by King Olav Kyrre as early as 1070. The Holm also had a bishop's palace, a Dominican monastery and a series of apostle churches. No visible traces of these remain today.

The royal centre

The Holm was one of the principal seats of the Norwegian Kings from the 12th century onwards. The first royal residence was constructed in wood and dates back to this time. In the period 1250-1300, Bergen was the biggest and most important town in Norway, and a royal, administrative and political centre. King Håkon Håkonsson was crowned in Christ Church in 1247. By 1261 he had erected both Håkon's Hall and a stone keep facing the harbour. A surrounding wall protected the royal seat. The Union with Denmark in the late Middle Ages meant that royal power was no longer concentrated at Bergenhus Castle. Instead, political power transferred to Akershus Castle in Oslo. During the Union with Denmark and, later on, the Union with Sweden, Bergenhus Castle remained the headquarters for the military and civilian administration for western and northern Norway. Bergen was still the largest town in the country until the mid-1800s.

Military history

In the seventeenth century, Bergenhus Castle was enlarged and fortified. The only time the castle was engaged in active combat was on 2 August 1665. A large fleet of Dutch vessels sought refuge in the harbour of Bergen, hotly pursued by English warships. The English attacked, but the garrison of Bergenhus Castle intervened on the side of the Dutch. A brief, but fierce battle ensued, and the English were forced to flee. The event is now known as "the Battle of Vågen harbour." During World War II, the German occupation forces used Bergenhus Castle as one of their headquarters. An explosion in the Vågen harbour in 1944 inflicted severe damage, especially on the oldest buildings of Bergenhus Castle. After the war, the Norwegian government immediately started restoration. The work was supervised by the respected architect and archaeologist Gerhard Fischer. Today most of the buildings and installations are protected as a national heritage site. After the war, Bergenhus Castle became the headquarters for the Land Command West Norway. In 1995, the Bergenhus regiment took over command of the castle. The regiment was disbanded in 2002, but the castle still has military commandant.

Bergenhus Fortress
a national fortification

Welcome to the fortress trail



www.bergenhusfestning.no