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Thousands celebrated Aalesund fire

An estimated 10,000 people took part in an unusual, late-night organized stroll through downtown Aalesund. On the same night 100 years ago, the entire city was razed by a fire that's since become part of the national heritage.

The fire started in the middle of the night on January 22, 1904. To be exact, at around 2:15am on the morning of January 23, 1904. Within hours, most of downtown was in ruins and around 11,000 people were left homeless.

An international funding effort and major foreign donations led to Aalesund's reconstruction. The rebuilding left the city with a unique collection of art-deco-style buildings that now are a source of great civic pride.

Police estimated that between 8,000 and 10,000 turned out for a guided tour around the city's historic center that began, appropriately enough, at 2:15am. Festivities continued Friday to mark the anniversary.

"It was an incredible experience," said Ann Cecilie Nordstrand of the city tour. She stuck with it until nearly 5am, when she figured she'd better get some sleep before reporting to work Friday morning.

Nordstrand said it was heartwarming to see so many interested city patriots turn out on a cold and stormy night to relive the city's history and pay tribute to their predecessors. "It was a very special atmosphere, especially when everyone lit lighters and matches to mark the occasion," she said.

She explained the turnout by noting that "up from the ruins grew a new city that was completely different from any other city in Norway, and that we've become very proud of."

The fire also provided Norwegians with a new way to mark time. The phrase "since Aalesund burned" ("*siden Aalesund brant*") has crept into the language as a way of expressing a significant event, or measuring a significant period of time.

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[Nina Berglund/NTB](#)



Aalesund was in ruins after the fire in 1904.

PHOTO: ALESUNDS MUSEUM



Today, Aalesund is a proud coastal city marked by canals and art-deco architecture, with the Sunmoere Alps looming in the distance.

PHOTO: ARNFINN MAUREN

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