

# The Tourist Itinerary Travel Loop Historical and Contemporary Travel Characteristics

Jan O. Lundgren

Volume 22, numéro 2, été 2003

Les Routes à thèmes

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1071593ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071593ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Université du Québec à Montréal

ISSN

0712-8657 (imprimé)

1923-2705 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Lundgren, J. O. (2003). The Tourist Itinerary Travel Loop: Historical and Contemporary Travel Characteristics. *Téoros*, 22(2), 28–33.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1071593ar>



# The Tourist Itinerary Travel Loop

## Historical and Contemporary Travel Characteristics

**Jan O. Lundgren**

Regardless of which historic era of (tourist) travel one studies, the tourist/traveler tends to arrange his/her itinerary as a round trip—a “circuit.” Sometimes the designated itinerary constitutes the principal and underlying purpose of the travel experience; witness, for instance, the European continentally extensive Grand Tour of the 18th and early 19th centuries (The Age of the Grand Tour, 1967), which, in terms of purpose, travel time, distance, dimensions, and costs was an impressive, often once-in-a-life-time, individual undertaking. The automotive 1950’s witnessed the cheaper alternative to the Grand Tour—the continental bus/train tours or the ten-day European round trip popular among North Americans coining the famous statement: “if it is Tuesday, it must be Munich.” Also in today’s tourist travel, the travel loop represents a very popular itinerary design, although the circumstances under which it is applied, as well as its geographic scale, often differ from the grandiose loop designs of centuries past. In fact, the modern circuit tends to take the shape and form of:

- a recommended “walking tour” by the tourist in downtown Manhattan (New York City Michelin, 1991), starting at the visitor’s hotel and ending at the same place;
- a slightly more extensive Circle Line boat tour around Manhattan Island, which clearly saves a weary tourist from excessive walking while offering impressive and varied scenery; or

- a walk around to a set of important tourist sites in the historic city of Bruges (Belgium) or Boston (USA), sites listed in guidebooks or suggestively highlighted on the local tourist map. Even tourists not destined for the urban experience, rather aiming toward the natural landscape, often carefully design a “loop” itinerary.

Such loops usually consist of three time–space components: i) the approach journey (leaving) executed in a time-saving manner—often by air or by rail; ii) the bulk of vacation days enjoying the landscape’s “attractions” on foot, hiking, biking, or canoeing; and iii) the swift return trip to home base (Clawson and Knetch, 1966). During the past couple of decades, a popular kind of new travel has emerged, the cruise-ship travel phenomenon, which often is arranged as quite an extensive itinerary loop. Travel publications abound with general or thematic cruise recommendations: the East Mediterranean or the Baltic cruise, or a more linear coastal voyage, where the sea journey often starts and ends at a major port—Bergen for the Norwegian coastal sea voyage, London for the Scandinavian/Baltic Sea cruise, Miami for the Caribbean Islands/Central America cruise. However, the cruises can also be transoceanic, even global, with the tourist flying out to the port hub, joining the cruise, and having his/her return flight waiting at the final cruise port of call. That is a common arrangement for truly “long haul,” “long duration” open sea voyages, be they across the Pacific, involving Atlantic crossings, or the South Seas in general.

### The Emergence of the North Atlantic Cruise Phenomenon

Among the various loop itineraries involving cruise travel, the presently operating North Atlantic Viking Heritage voyages, transatlantic crossings, are newcomers on the tourist market, especially if one compares them with Caribbean cruises or the classical Mediterranean equivalent of, for that matter, the Baltic Sea cruises of the late 40’s and 50’s, all of which have been operating since the early 70’s (Lundgren, 1994). However, it is only in the past decade that the North Atlantic Viking Heritage has been recognized as an up-and-coming international tourist attraction of major dimensions, which today warrants its keen interest from cruise line companies. One reason behind this newfound market interest rests with the constant interest among cruise ship entrepreneurs to develop new forms of cruises using larger or more specialized ships, formulating new tantalizing travel themes, and thus diverse and exciting alternative tourist experiences in increasingly remote waters, all driven by the insatiable demand of the modern tourist.

Another explanation, more particularly related to the rise of the Viking Heritage attraction, lies in the widely published works in the last decade of the 20th century for the 2000 Millennium celebration of the discovery of North America by the Norse Vikings around year 1000, which honoured and officially recognized the dramatic and impressive seafaring “first,” occurring almost 500 years before Columbus’ first successful Atlantic crossing (Vikings – the North Atlantic Saga, 2000).



Hence, in only a few years' time, an increasing number of cruise ship enterprises became involved in various loop-based cruises northward, into the chilly waters of the North Atlantic. The itinerary domain staked out by the cruise ship operations lies roughly on the latitude range of Newfoundland/Labrador and Greenland in the West via pivotal Iceland in the centre to Southern Norway, including the Vikings' Mare Nostrum—the North Sea basin—in the East (Haywood, 1995). In overall terms, the crossing is hardly a comfort cruise, but rather the opposite—but still with all the comforts a cruise ship could offer. To replicate the impressive North Atlantic crossings under square rigged sail in basically undecked ships, the Viking way has yet to emerge as distinct commercial enterprise. It is doubtful that it will happen: comfort wins, as the wind and waters are indeed chilly—even in the summertime!

This paper has two objectives: the first constitutes an interpretation of the history behind the North Atlantic Viking heritage phenomenon per se—especially as it relates to early Norse navigational and transport operations and their subsequent influence upon the contemporary cruise ship itinerary travel arrangements. That will be done by tracking the historical development of the original Norse transatlantic and regional itineraries, the very first original travelers on the North Atlantic run. Thus, having established the early travel patterns, the second objective includes the study of contemporary cruise travel itineraries of recent datum in order to establish the extent to which the cruise travel planners indeed have been influenced by historical evidence of the Viking era transportation when designing the modern North Atlantic cruise travel experience.

### The Historic Setting of Viking North Atlantic Crossings

In Eric Wahlgren's opus "The Vikings and America" (1986) the chapter entitled "The Stepping Stones" describes the significance of convenient sailing distances—and sailing times—that the Viking seafarers experienced in their discovery

quest along the Vester vegen—the Western Route—as well as with their subsequent development of the transatlantic, and predominantly inter-island based Viking North-Atlantic shipping/trading system. Rather than the time wise endless and lonely hauls experienced by Columbus and his crew establishing the more southerly east-west Atlantic traverse, the North Atlantic did offer tantalizing advantages—during Summertime—with its relatively short inter-island distances, thanks to the existing strategic island "stepping stones" en route, the steady winds, and daylight "round the clock." Thus, we may reconstruct the transatlantic crossing route by listening to the experienced Norse skipper of a fully loaded knarr (the workhorse of seafaring Viking as opposed to the sleek design of the dreaded Viking warrior ships that raided Paris, as described in Vikings – the North Atlantic Saga, 2000) as he fictitiously addressed crew and passengers alike with his "sailing order of the day" in the-mid Summer of 1050 before the ship cast its moorings, hoisted sail, and gently drifted out of the sheltered harbour bay at Knarrevik—a modern place name, a Viking village just outside Bergen—toward the open sea and the long-haul Greenland passage, some 1821 nautical miles westward:

*We depart the Hordaland fjord heading for the Shetland Islands 195 nautical miles due West; from there we aim for the Faeroes, a similar distance further West; thereafter, we embark upon the longest leg of the voyage to Iceland, almost 300 nautical miles, on a slightly more northerly course, which will take us more than halfway across the North Atlantic.*

*We then follow the shoreline of Iceland toward Reykjavik, another 270 nautical miles west before reaching that port, where we re-virtualize, and combine work with the pleasure of visiting old relatives and friends. From there we strike out anew, westward past the landmark of Snaefellsjökull Mountain (1446 m. elevation) northwest of Reykjavik for another 325 nautical miles. Our*

*first Greenland landmark will most likely be the indirect shine of its huge ice cap, in less than a day's sailing. We expect to make our Greenland landfall at the Angmagsalik mountain (elevation 3.483 meters).*

*The rest of the voyage is tedious and chilly, even in the Summer, chilly due to the huge Greenland ice cap, the many drifting icebergs and the cool Greenland current—all easy coastal sailing southward, though, for some 400 nautical miles until we round Cape Farewell.*

*From thereon, we are in Erik the Red's home waters, at the southern edge of the Eastern settlement, a short sail of some 100 nautical miles from Eiriksfjord and the Brattahlid settlement. Approximate total sailing distance: 1820 nautical miles!*

*Good sailing and good luck to us all!*

Thus the Viking transatlantic route was established.

### The Viking Era Transport Patterns – Cruise Itinerary Implications

Assuming an overall sailing distance of some 2000 nautical miles for the Norway – Iceland – Greenland crossing and sailing at steady 6 knots gives us a total sailing time of 333 hours, excluding land visits. Using the 24 hours a day—the Norse doegr measurement for sailing—the number of sailing doegr involved amounts to a fortnight (333 hours/24 doegr = 13.8), less than half the time it took Columbus' Santa Maria to reach the New World. The knarr's voyage must have been easy, offering safe navigation due to the three island stops en route—at the Shetlands, the Faeroes, and then that famous Reykjavik on Iceland. Making the most of steady favourable south-westerly winds, which after Iceland gradually change to north-westerly upon approaching the "Greenland High," the stepping stones strategy made the voyage a "piece of cake," swift but cool even in



the height of Summer with temperatures hovering from 5 to 10 degrees Celsius, as is still the case.

For those Europeans who chose the North Atlantic as the regular transatlantic sailing route, notably the Norse Vikings, uncertainty and boredom must have been less of an irritant thanks to the “stepping stone” navigation, except, perhaps, for the first couple of crossings before the sailors acclimatized to travel time and sailing distances. Therefore, as the Norse crossings transformed from exploration and discovery to more regular and administered “standard route passages,” similar to the scheduled and transatlantic packet shipping of the 19th century and even modern cruise ship itineraries, traffic must have increased as a function of the principal needs of the various settlement participants and navigational knowledge. A loose trading network emerged. Among the Norse North Atlantic islands, Iceland, the largest after Greenland, was a pivot for traffic due to its location and general agricultural/seafaring provisioning economy. The smaller “stepping stone” islands—the Faeroes, and the Shetlands, as well as faraway Greenland—were also active. They had to be—in order to survive! The larger European mainland units in the network—the Norwegian coast, Denmark and the North Sea coast of the British Isles—also participated, but for them the North Atlantic sector was only one of many active trading links.

Trade with northwestern Europe in general was growing in importance, and through territorial conquest Viking domains existed for a long time in the British Isles, Ireland, Isle of Man as well as on the Channel coast, notably Normandy, all participating at varying degrees in the overall North Atlantic Viking derived trading system. Iceland was a “nearby” *entrepôt* and important trading partner for the Greenland settlement further west, but also a long distance trader in general. The island was the North Atlantic linchpin in the trading due to its resource base and “halfway” location.

The fact that both Iceland and other Norse island settlements, already at an early

stage of colonization, developed deficiencies in the most important of strategic resource for a sailing/trading society—shipbuilding timber—must have made regular eastward trading a matter of survival (the primeval tracts of forest vegetation were already decimated quickly by the first waves of Iceland settlers). Thus, only imports from Norway could solve the timber supply problem. For the second largest participant in the trading system, the Norse Greenland settlement, the strategic resource situation was even worse. Shipbuilding timber could be obtained from the Labrador coast, some 550 nautical miles (return), a major seasonal undertaking in its own right. The Norse Greenlanders also had a second major problem: the marginal environment with a climate that made the survival of the settlements as a sedentary society at the rim of Greenland’s continental ice sheet hazardous. Also, the extreme western position of the settlements toward the North American continent, being the “last” in the ocean spanning transport/trading chain, resulted in long lines of communications to other trading partners for both imports and exports. Stated in modern international trade terminology: the terms of trade for the Greenlanders were always negative—they had to pay proportionally more for every imported item than what they earned for each export item. In addition, the level of interaction is always a function of distance and accessibility. On both points the Greenlanders suffered.

To our modern world, clearly, the adventurous and skilful long distance seamanship and North Atlantic sailing by the Vikings in open or half-decked boats, and with less than adequate navigational aids, constitutes a fascinating and drama-filled real-life “adventure” tourist attraction, which, since the first crossing in a replica Viking ship in 1893, has been repeated many times. Those re-enactment “sailings” can be seen as precursors to today’s commercial cruises with itineraries that, over the past couple of years, have stretched far into remote and peripheral seas. In our case, they have preferred going North rather than continue to sail repetitive and well-trodden routes in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, or do

coastal hugging continental cruises elsewhere, usually in regions, where weather conditions are balmy, land visits more history laden, and, above all, where the cruise experience in general is more comfortable than that found on the higher latitudes of the North Atlantic.

In contrast, Denmark Strait, Cape Farewell with the sculptured icebergs drifting by, the other side of Greenland and Baffin island, or north of Iceland toward Spitsbergen, or the western edges of the North Sea, or the Norwegian Sea off a fjord-perforated Norwegian coastline, represent to most potential tourists “journeys into the unknown”—daring exploratory tourism travel at its best, on the edge—a truly different experience!

There is a considerable interest in incorporating the North Atlantic and its Viking heritage into modern tourism travel—and it has been partially achieved through various forms of cruise ship travel. Finding the convenience of the island stepping stone route may have been of help even a millennium after the route was first discovered!

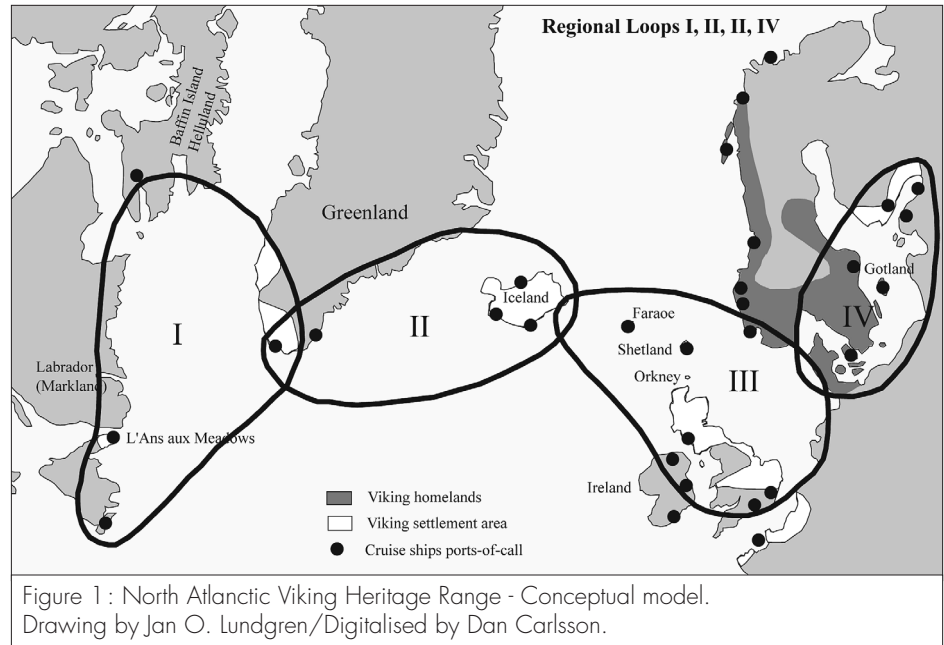
### **Tourist Use of Viking Cultural Heritage Resources in the North Atlantic**

The history of the North Atlantic Viking heritage galaxy lies at the root of today’s interest in Viking cultural heritage as a tourist product and tourist destination “system.” The Millennium celebration in Year 2000 of Erik the Red’s discovery of the New World has accelerated the general public’s interest in the Viking phenomenon. Thus, the North Atlantic Viking heritage today is a first class internationally-based tourist product/attraction ready to be more systematically harvested. During the past decade, the Western Viking Route corridor straddling the North Atlantic has increasingly been identified as a principal tourist target, albeit spatially dispersed, for commercial tourism, but notably accessible, as it should be, through cruise ship operations. Since cruise travel started to become popular in the 1970’s, that mode of travel has successfully conquered most international waters, but usually on latitudes



having more congenial weather and more pleasant sailing conditions than those found on more northern Atlantic latitudes.

However, in the past few years, numerous cruise lines have specifically targeted the far-flung North Atlantic Viking heritage, launching cruises from both the North American and European sides of the Atlantic. Figure 1 approximates the contemporary spatial relationship between cruise ship ports of call and the historically defined North Atlantic Viking heritage range. A distinct historically derived regionalization of the North Atlantic Viking phenomenon reflects partly the historic Scandinavian homelands of the Vikings, partly well-known regional Viking “action thrusts,” partly the trading links discussed above.



A) **Regional loops:** Four regional sections—regional loops—developed on the basis of historic proximity of historic trading movements and contemporary cruise itinerary operations—can be visualized:

**The Baltic Sea Basin** – the historical staging area for eastbound Viking forays via the river systems eastward and southeast toward the Black Sea, combined with considerable east-west long distance trading via famous trading centres, Birka, Gotland, Hedeby, Ribe etc. The Baltic Sea has experienced cruise ship operations since the 1950’s. Nowadays, most Baltic cruises include a minimum of six ports of call—from Copenhagen in the Southwest to St. Petersburg in the Northeast. The number of cruise ship arrivals for the port cities involved can be quite impressive considering the short summer tourist season: Hanseatic Visby on the Viking Island of Gotland, strategically cantered in the middle of the Baltic, scored over 100 landings last year (2002). Stockholm, with major Viking sites such as Birka in its surroundings, scored 168 for the same year. But only a few years after the dissolution of the Soviet

Union, St. Petersburg has emerged as the major cruise ship player among Baltic port cities with 212 cruise ship callings in 2001 (Cruise Europe News, 2002).

**The North Sea** – a historic Viking transport surface that brings together numerous national shorelines of today with substantial Viking heritage resources. Surprisingly though, the present cruise ship services greatly underutilize North Sea facing coastal areas/regions, rather preferring the “outside” Atlantic side of the British Isles, the Irish Sea, on the whole bypassing, with some exception, the Norwegian Viking coast (the Stavanger – Bergen section). However, Oslo is a popular stop with 88 cruise ship visits in 2001 (*Ibid.*) and so are the “stepping stone” islands North of Scotland. Remarkably, there are more cruise ship ports of call along the Norwegian coast going North than between ports around the shores of the North Sea.

**The Iceland – Greenland Regional Loop** – has a reputation of unreliable summer weather at best, as well as remoteness in the eyes of the Europe-based cruise itinerary planners.

However, if you go the distance to Iceland, you might as well continue westward “all the way” toward the Greenland and Labrador shores and the haunting Viking history site at L’Anse aux Meadows, and finish the cruise in the cruise ship hubs of St. John’s Newfoundland, Boston, or New York City. Cruise ship sailings from European ports into the North Atlantic usually head for Iceland with its obvious Viking heritage, and from there follow the old Icelandic Saga routes of Norse–Icelandic voyages to the Greenland east coast before turning Southwest toward journey’s ends in North America.

**The Davis Straits Greenland/Labrador Region** – is the remotest and Northernmost destination region from a European perspective. However, that very Arctic itinerary loop offers convenient access for cruise ship travelers starting their voyage from the Northeastern US and Canadian Seaboard. The region is vast in its geographic dimensions, however, involving long coastal hugging voyages alternating with long sea voyages. The itineraries tend to focus upon exploring the easternmost regional loop all the

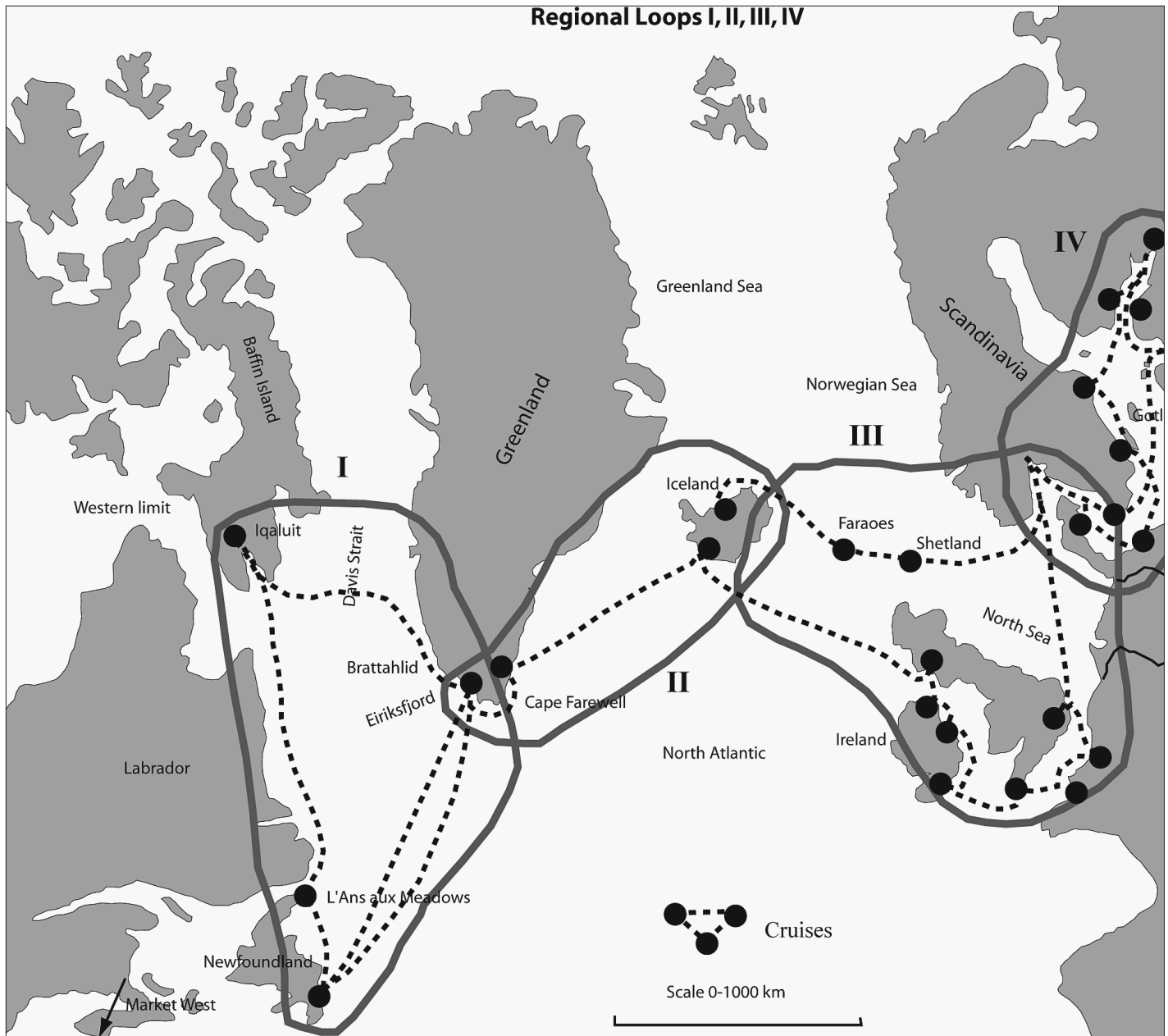


Figure 2: Regional loops - Cruise itineraries.  
 Drawing by Jan O. Lundgren/Digitalised by Dan Carlsson.

way to Baffin Island, with the Arctic town of Iqaluit and beyond, as well as Greenland’s long west coast, from Cape Farewell to Disco Island. However, Lat. N. 76 Degrees is an obydin (uninhabited) in the extreme that is rarely visited for pleasure!

**B) Types of Cruise Itineraries:** Obviously, a modern “Viking cruise” can be either regional/loop-based or trans-

atlantic in scope (Fig. 2), depending upon the tourist market segment one is aiming for. The regional cruise can be done in a relatively short period of time, 10-12 days maximum, depending upon the point of departure; the longer cruises typically last 14-15 days (as could be read on a 2002 tourist cruise ship pamphlet). The shorter regional version usually departs from the Copenhagen cruising hub, the longer from London,

England. Before entering the Baltic with its standard set of port visits, the shorter regional cruise usually crosses the North Sea for Oslo (Fig. 2). Surprisingly, the Oslo visit is short on land time and does not seem to offer land excursions to the rich Viking heritage in the nearby Vestfold shore, with the famous Oseberg mound, the world’s best-preserved Viking grave which included the Oseberg Viking ship found in 1904 and nu-



merous other archaeological sites along the fjord coast (Destination Viking, 2001).

*In the Baltic Sea basin, the typical ports of call hardly qualify as major Viking locations, Stockholm and Gotland being the exceptions. The longer westerly North Atlantic cruises—also twelve-day affairs—overlap the North Sea regional loop with that of Iceland/Greenland (Fig. 2). They tend to follow in the footsteps of the historically developed “stepping stone” Viking sailing strategy with stopovers in the smaller islands groupings of the outer North Sea before encircling Iceland. Usually, there are two Iceland locales visited, a special fjord sailing at Akureyri on the North coast, and, of course, a full day—twelve-hour land visit—at Reykjavik. From Iceland, the cruise sails back—south-eastward—toward Irish port areas, Viking Dublin in particular (founded as a Viking settlement), and the Channel Islands, before reaching home bases in London/Copenhagen. For the fifteen days’ North Atlantic traverse—the true transatlantic voyage—homage is paid to the Irish Sea Viking heritage—Dublin, but not the Isle of Man—from where the ship travels directly to Iceland and Reykjavik, and a half-day land visit. Continuing westward, landings are made in southern Greenland before heading South toward Newfoundland and Boston/New York City. This tour features limited Viking heritage content—only Reykjavik and Dublin, plus Herjolfsnes in southern Greenland qualify. Too little coastal hugging and generally long sailing days reduce the experience to a small time portion of Viking content and a very long portion of open sea sailing.*

*A final itinerary sample, the Canada-based Atlantic Saga voyage with a regional focus on the Canadian Sea board: Canadian Arctic – the Greenland west coast –*

*Iceland – back to home port (St. John’s, Nfld.). Here, one is making maximal use of the Viking heritage as it is represented both by major archaeological finds and by the Iceland Sagas’ fascinating storytelling of Norse sailings in the area, all the way north toward Baffin Island, both shorelines of the Davis Strait, the Greenland Viking settlements plus Iceland and L’Anse-aux-Meadows. Of all examples of cruise itineraries, this westerlymost of cruise voyages is making the most of a quite limited archaeological Viking material, but nevertheless provides the tourist plenty of visual representations of the environments experienced and lived in by the Norse settlers in the region, as well as fascinating historic and archaeological evidence.*

### Conclusions

The Viking North Atlantic Heritage represents an exciting historical resource for contemporary tourism, especially in the form of cruise ship operations and new cruise routes. The fact that the heritage is far flung, transatlantic, and usually difficult to access, makes the tourist attraction even more tantalizing and adventure-coloured, especially in a shrinking world, where most attractions are easy to come by. Here lies—perhaps—the appeal of the Viking North Atlantic heritage as a tourist resource! The effort to shape the Viking tourist resource into a tourist experience has been tried most recently by the modern cruise ship industry, with some success, as witnessed above. However, considering the archeologically- and historically-evidenced Vikings, improvements could be made, especially as regards the way the heritage is used as a tourist attraction by the cruise ship industry involved. There are glaring examples of underutilization of the Viking locales accessed by the cruise ships. The main reason seems to lie in the “over reach” in terms of overall voyage dimensions. In the case of Gotland in the Baltic, the land visit amounts to 5-6 hours, approximately 10 hours for Dublin, and a variable 6-12 hours in Reykjavik. Much

land time is wasted on traditional—and obvious—tourist pastimes rather than Viking heritage—a city bus tour, look-out visits, a general round trip in the area—often at the expense of a more serious effort to link into the local Viking heritage. In order to accentuate the local Viking Heritage attraction more effectively, the tourist gaze, as designed by the tour organizers, must be more clearly focused than in the past—and better explained and presented—so that the tourist can truly appreciate the historic past of the Viking Heritage in the North Atlantic, thus getting a bigger bang for his/her buck as he/she cruises the Viking routes. They are there for the curious-minded traveler!

**Jan O. Lundgren** est professeur en géographie à l’Université McGill.

### Bibliography

- «Destination Viking – Western Viking Route» (2001), edited by Marita Engberg-Ekman, Viking Heritage, maps by Dan Carlsson, Viking Heritage, published by North Sea Viking Legacy Project in collaboration with Viking Heritage, Gotland Centre for Baltic Studies, Gotland University, Sweden, 184 pages.
- Clawson, M., and J. Knetch (1966), *The Economics of Outdoor Recreation, for Resources for the Future Inc.*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, USA.
- Cruise Europe News (2002), December, Vol. 9, N° 4.
- Haywood, John (1995), *The Historical Atlas of the Vikings*, Penguin Books, London, UK.
- Lundgren, Jan (1994), «The Transformation of a Geopolitical Space into a Tourist Space: The Case of Passenger Shipping in the Baltic Region», paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, May 17-21.
- New York City Michelin Tourist Guide* (1991).
- The Age of the Grand Tour Era* (1967), New York City.
- Tourist Cruise ship pamphlets* (2002).
- Vikings – The North Atlantic Saga* (2000), The Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, USA.
- Wahlgren, Eric (1986), *The Vikings and America*, Thames and Hudson Ltd., New York City.