

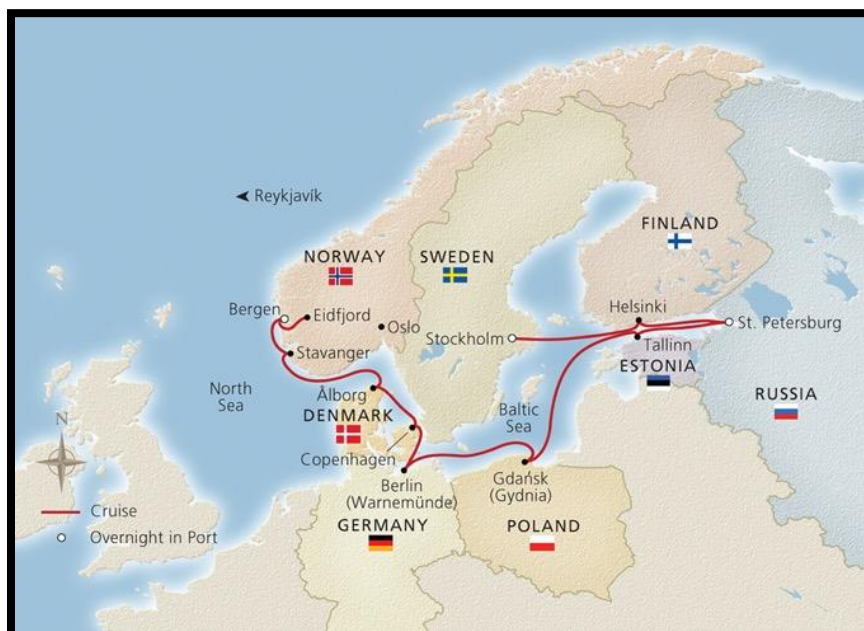
## Review – The Viking Homelands Cruise – AKA Tom and Song “Go A’ Viking”!

August 13th to August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019



We just returned from our latest Viking Cruise – The Viking Homelands aboard the Viking Sea. I'm just going to hit the highlights if anyone has specific questions please contact me and I will do my best to answer.... If I know the answer of course!

If you want to read no further, then here is the short of it.... This was the best overall cruise experience we have yet experienced on the cleanest, most comfortable (overall) and well-run ship we have sailed upon. There! I said it! Now if you want the “long of it” please carry on :-)



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## **The Itinerary**

Our trip started with a two-day extension in Oslo Norway before taking the Oslo to Bergen train and joining our cruise in Bergen Norway.

Our ship, the Viking Sea was in Bergen overnight and was slated to leave Bergen at 6:00PM the next day.

The full Itinerary looked like this;

August 13<sup>th</sup> – Oslo, Norway

August 14<sup>th</sup> – Oslo, Norway

August 15<sup>th</sup> – Bergen, Norway

August 16<sup>th</sup> – Bergen, Norway

August 17<sup>th</sup> – Eidfjord, Norway

August 18<sup>th</sup> – Stavanger, Norway

August 19<sup>th</sup> – Alborg, Denmark

August 20<sup>th</sup> – Copenhagen, Denmark

August 21<sup>st</sup> – Warnemunde (Berlin), Germany

August 22<sup>nd</sup> – Gdansk, Poland

August 23<sup>rd</sup> – At Sea

August 24<sup>th</sup> – Tallinn, Estonia

August 25<sup>th</sup> – Saint Petersburg, Russia

August 26<sup>th</sup> – Saint Petersburg, Russia

August 27<sup>th</sup> – Helsinki, Finland

August 28<sup>th</sup> – Stockholm, Sweden

August 29<sup>th</sup> – Stockholm Sweden

***All ports were entered on time and all departures were on time.***

## **Purchase and Payment**

This was not our first Viking Cruise, so I just called the “Cruise Consultant” we had used previously, and all of the purchase and payment details were handled flawlessly.

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### Pre-Cruise Extension – Oslo, Norway

We did the Pre-Cruise Extension in Oslo Norway just to ensure a little safety buffer between arrival in Norway and embarkation to the ship. Since this was booked thru Viking airport pickup and transfer to the hotel was handled by Viking with “No Muss... No Fuss”.



The hotel was the Thon Opera Hotel very conveniently located across from the Oslo Opera House and next door to the Oslo Central Train Station. The hotel itself was nice enough. It was clean and tidy.... and while the hotel public areas were modern and spacious the rooms were tiny. Our tiny room had almost zero closet space and little storage space. But it was spotlessly clean and was certainly adequate for the two days we would be there living out of our suitcases.

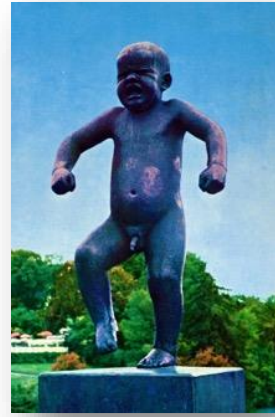
One thing to note if you are planning a stay at the Hotel Thon Opera for more than a day (and if you are US based) is to NOT FORGET YOUR VOLTAGE ADAPTER PLUGS. Knowing that the ship would have both US and Euro style plugs I didn't really think of bringing my goodie bag of various adapters. Well... I should have! Luckily the front desk had a spare adapter that I could borrow to charge my arsenal of devices! Once topped off I returned the adapter, and all was again right in the world.

The first night we were on our own, so we just wandered about Oslo and the area. The next day there was a very nice included (but optional) tour of Oslo that included the Vigeland sculpture park (Hey! Look Martha, all them there statues are Naked!) and the Viking Ship Museum as the highlights of the tour. The afternoon was on our own and we enjoyed a great walk around the Oslo Opera House area, the Central Train Station and the shopping area beyond.



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The next morning, we walked to the train station and boarded our train bound for Bergen, Norway. The train ride was very pleasant in a First-Class car. A nice scenic ride and seven hours later we were in Bergen and being bussed to the Viking Sea.



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### Embarkation

Embarkation was painless and quick. Our room was ready, and we took our time to explore the ship a little before heading to dinner followed by checking out some of the entertainment options.



### A bit about the Viking Sea

Overall, we were both impressed with the “fit and function” of the Viking Sea. It is a beautifully appointed ship decorated in a lovely understated, elegant Scandinavian style. Never cluttered and always comfortable we never felt confined or that there was “nothing to do”.

Built in 2016 the ship is by no means one of the new generation of “Mega-Ships” (and that’s perfect for me!!), Weighing in at 47,800 tons (gross tonnage) and holding right at 930 passengers in 465 cabins and 500 crew it is a very comfortable size.... Not too big.... Not too small... *but just right!* It’s length is 745 feet and the beam is 94.5 feet and it is spread out over 14 total decks of which there are nine (Kind of anyway) full access passenger decks. The passenger cabins are on decks 3, 4, 5 and 6 for the most part with a small number of the deluxe suites on decks 7 and 8.

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We requested and were given a nice Bridge tour hosted by one of the Second Officers, Sigund. The bridge is spotlessly clean and organized and certainly inspires confidence!



There are no inside passenger cabins and all cabins are “Veranda” cabins, or suites.

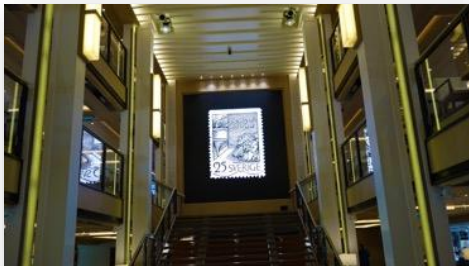
The ship's passenger decks are numbered one through nine and are either staterooms or public access. The infirmary is located on “A” deck forward below deck one. Otherwise there are no public area areas on the “A” deck other than exit/entrances sometimes utilized for shore excursions.

The public areas, restaurants, lounges and entertainment areas were well designed, always inviting and comfortable. And were on decks 1, 2, 3 (Living Room and Atrium), 7, 8 and 9 (Sports Deck).

The main public area that includes reception and guest services is called the “Living Room” (Deck 1) by Viking. It's deceptively big and spread across three decks and houses the central “Atrium” (Decks 1, 2, and 3) and grand staircase. There is a full-service bar and usually entertainment that ranges from a solo pianist, to a classical string duo, to a solo acoustic guitar. All of these performers rotate around the various venues of the ship.

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Other nicely appointed public gathering areas are the **Wintergarden** amidships (Deck 7), and the **Explorers’ Observation Lounge** on decks 7 and 8.



Afternoon Tea in the **Wintergarden** was always well attended. The items served were somewhat lackluster and we quickly ditched Afternoon Tea for treats at Mamsen’s Deli in the Explorers’ Lounge. The Sukkessterte (Success Cake) and the Epleterte (Apple Cake) were the stars and I found that if I wasn’t careful, I would overload on just the Success Cake and eat myself into a food coma spoiling the wife’s dinner plans :-).



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**The Explorers’ Observation Lounge**, besides containing the best deserts in the world, is a two-story affair with a 180-degree view over the bow and sides of the ship. It’s not only spacious but very neatly and comfortably furnished. With hundreds of books, plenty of “things” to peruse, and lots of interesting seating options for just chilling it’s a very classy hangout. On the second level along with the books are plenty of artsy models and knick-knacks to enjoy.

There is a full-service bar and, in the afternoons and evenings there is light entertainment from the resident pianist, guitarist, or the classical string duo. Nighttime features cool lighting effects like constellations around the lounge area.

The Explorers’ Lounge is also where you can get fresh-squeezed orange juice every morning (Shhhh! Don’t tell anyone else!)



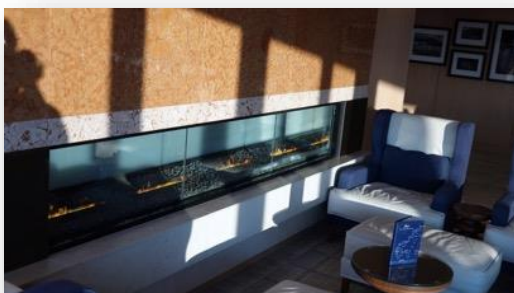
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There are two pools, both with hot tubs attached, on the Viking Sea. The main pool is on deck 7 midships and is flanked by the Wintergarden and the Explorers’ Lounge forward and the World Café Restaurant aft. There is a Pool Bar and the casual Pool Grille eating venue at the main pool and the aft infinity pool has direct access to the World Café Bar and eatery. The main pool area uniquely has a retractable roof that can pull back almost the entire area over the pool. During our time on the Viking sea the roof was never fully opened but was rolled back by ten-twenty feet several times.



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The second pool is aft on the Aquavit Terrace and is an infinity pool overlooking the ocean.



Neither pool area was ***ever crowded*** and are well stocked with plenty of deck chairs and clean towels. Interestingly, the ship itself ***is the Library*** and there many books in the wings around the pool and in the main pool area itself. And while I didn't count them.... There are easily a thousand or more books scattered around the entire ship!

The other entertainment areas on the ship from the main venue, The Theater, to the Torshavn Night Club (Both on deck 2) were comfortable and well appointed. The Theater is the main entertainment venue and featured the enrichment lectures and the nightly shows as well as being the gathering point for many shore excursions. The much more intimate Torshavn Night Club featured musical entertainment in the evening only and is the “Late Night” venue for the ship.



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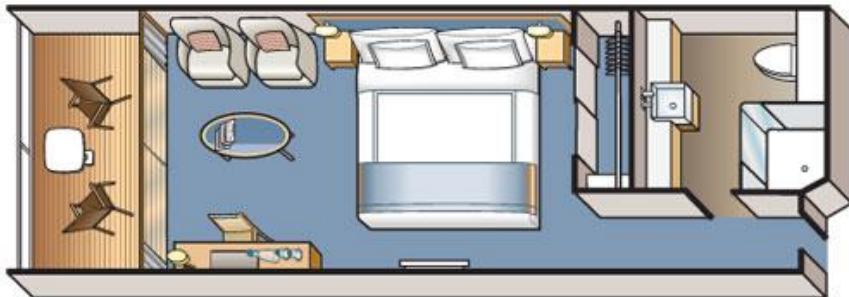
A note about the Viking Cruises idea of “Inclusiveness”. Wine, beer and soft drinks are included with lunch and dinner. Any other time in on your dime. There is a “Beverage Package” available for purchase. Just be aware that every adult in the same cabin must buy the same package.

Tips are NOT INCLUDED and are automatically added to your trip at the end of the cruise. If you have a real beef with the amount of the tips, or just want to add more, simply go to Guest Services and let them know how much you do want to leave in tips.

All food is covered in all restaurants. While allowed a limited number of reservations in the “specialty” restaurants prior to sailing you are welcome to make more reservations at your favorites once onboard for no additional charge.

There is at least one free shore excursion in each port.

### Stateroom



Our 270 square foot (including Veranda) cabin was a “Deluxe Veranda Stateroom”. The “Deluxe Veranda” is basically the same as the “Veranda Stateroom” just better positioned and with a couple of more “Perks”. Other cabins range from the 270 sq ft Veranda and Deluxe Veranda to

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the 338 sq ft Penthouse Veranda all the way up to the 1448 sq ft Owner’s Suite (the likes of which I’m sure I will never see :-)

It was spotless, well appointed, and fairly spacious. The King-Sized bed was comfortable with the high-quality linens fresh smelling and clean. Two chairs and a coffee table with a desk/vanity area opposite completed the cabins small sitting area.

The closet and storage around the cabin were adequate for our two-week voyage.

The bathroom was fine, if a bit cramped, with a good shower, single vanity sink and plenty of room for all of our toiletries.

There were adequate AC outlets in both US and Euro styles with a few extra USB charging outlets in the small desk area.

The 42” TV was of a decent size but with very limited volume.

The small, teak floored, veranda contained two chairs (not loungers) and a small table and was of a comfortable size.

We were introduced to our steward who made us feel right at home explaining the features of the stateroom before moving on to his next guests.

For cleanliness and thoughtfulness of design our cabin gets an “A+” with spaciousness coming in at a solid “B”.

### **Entertainment**

I spoke briefly earlier about the entertainment venues around the ship and what follows are my impressions about the various onboard entertainers and how they fit in the different venues they performed in. But first a few notes on the Venues themselves.

**The Theater (Deck 2)** is the largest venue on the ship. All of the big talks, lectures, and shows are performed there. Many shore excursions also gather and leave from there. Seating is comfortable chairs and couches with small cocktail tables to handle your drinks.

The sound system is very good over the main theater floor. Not so good in the two “Wings” that serve as small movie theaters during the day and can be opened (via a sliding curtain wall and raising the screen) to serve as additional seating in the evenings for the main shows. We made the mistake of sitting in that area one night and the sound was terrible, thin and dis-jointed. Stage lighting and effects were excellent across the board.

There is a full-service bar just outside The Theater that also serves light snacks.

**The Livingroom (Deck 1 with the Atrium stretching it to Decks 2 and 3)** is the central gathering spot that is open to the Atrium. Entertainment in The Livingroom included the resident pianist, solo guitarist and the classical duo.



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Located in the open space at the foot of the stairs is a Grand Piano where the performers would gather and perform. Acoustics were good for this type of area! The entertainment is very low key and not meant to interrupt conversations.

**The Wintergarden (Deck 7)** is included as an entertainment venue because there was always something during the Afternoon Tea. The pianist playing amplified electronic keyboard , or the solo guitarist, also amplified, or the string classical duo (not amplified).

The acoustics in the Wintergarden sucked as the room was all hard surfaces of glass and decking. Coupled with the loud chatter of the passengers the addition of the music, especially the amplified music, was irritating at best and unpleasant at its worst!



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**The Explorer’s Lounge (Deck 7)** featured low key entertainment in the afternoons and evenings by the Classical String Duo, Solo Guitarist, or the resident pianist. The Explorer’s Lounge also featured a interesting light show at night that consisted of constellations and star fields projected onto the ceiling and walls at night... Kind of cool! Acoustics were good in this space.



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The Lounge contains a full-service bar almost always open and for those late-night snacks Mamsen’s Deli reopens after ten!

**Torshaven Night Club (Deck 2)** was a nice intimate space with comfortable seating and a small dance floor that usually featured the Viking Band sometimes with the two singers Sammy and Annalynn. Occasionally that would be changed up a bit featuring the solo guitarist Choi.

Lighting was appropriately “Night Club-ish” (dark) with decent stage lighting. The sound system was small but adequate for the space and the acoustics were good for the performers that played there. Complete with a full-service bar and wait service.

**The Acts** were all centered around music, at least on this cruise. No ventriloquists, comedians or jugglers for Viking!

Special acts on this voyage included a vocalist Helen Wilding of whom I heard was fabulous but missed both of her performances because of dinner reservations :-), A violinist Jaran Apold who was very good and a special performance by the new Assistant Cruise Director Michael Restaino which we gave a miss. All of these folks performed in the main venue, The Theater.

**The Viking Sea house performers in no particular order;**

**The Classical String Duo** – A cellist and a violinist that performed regularly in the Livingroom, The Wintergarden and the Explorer’s Lounge. Two talented young ladies that played beautifully! The Explorer’s lounge and the Livingroom were the best venues for the Classical Duo. Occasionally the Violinist would team with guitar player Choi to good effect.

**Tetiana – Solo Pianist** – Playing all of the venues excepting The Theater, Tetiana was a very good pianist that played everything from pop to classical wonderfully. Normally playing one of the grand pianos in the Livingroom or the Explorer’s Lounge she would occasionally play afternoon Tea in the Wintergarden on an electric keyboard that was amplified. She was the only musical

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act that could overcome the crappy acoustics (and the passenger chatter that those acoustics amplified) of the Wintergarden by simply turning it up!

**The Viking Band** – These guys were everywhere! They played every venue including Torshaven Night Club sometimes with vocalists.... Sometimes without. The band was competent and always sounded good whether as the featured act or as the backing band for the Viking Singers or soloists. A five-piece band that sounded bigger than it was!

**Sonny and Annalyn - House Vocalists** – Sonny and Annalynn were purportedly a brother and sister who were the house vocalists and performed with the Viking Band most often in Torshaven. They did perform with variable results in some of the big multi-variety shows in The Theater. We heard them in the welcome production, and they were very good. We heard them in the farewell production, and they were terrible.... Very pitchy and all over the place. It could have just been they just couldn't hear themselves through the monitors, but it went bad in a hurry and stayed there. They were much more consistent in the smaller Torshaven Night Club.

**Choi – Solo Guitarist** – A very good guitarist that played mostly pop and light rock selections along with a smattering of country. He performed on both Acoustic and Electric Guitar to good effect... and as a welcome extra he had very pleasant, and solid, vocal chops as well! Choi performed in all venues on the ship at different times with the only stinker being the Wintergarden because of the piss poor acoustics. He did a very nice job in Torshaven as a solo act in a venue where that might have been hard for some to pull off.

**The Viking Singers** – The Viking Singers were four young people who performed the main stage at The Theater most evenings. We noticed they also worked for Cruise Director Arron (also a singer with a passable baritone suited to show tunes :-)) when not on stage. These four were very good performers with great vocal abilities and good dance skills. Each of their shows were well choreographed and well sung. Nice, tight, harmonies and great phrasing were the highlights. While I didn't care for every selection performed, they did a very nice Beatles night, songs from ABBA and even some Bee Gee's and (Gasp!) a Styx number!

All-in-all the entertainment was of a high caliber with great performers and high production values.

There was, of course, other entertainment options such as the obligatory shuffleboard and mini-putting greens. Tennis (Pickle-Ball?) on deck 9 and other activities organized by Cruise Director Arron. The ship also had plenty of quiet corners to enjoy a book from the library that was shattered all throughout the ship. Two movie theaters and occasional film “under the stars” at the pool as well as a very large selection of movies on the stateroom TV.

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**Eidfjord**

**Shore Excursions** – Viking supplies at least one free/included shore excursion in every port. These are usually walking tours preceded by a bus trip if required. One thing to note is the sometimes included “Panoramic” bus tours can be a bit superficial. Think being in a bus going 30 miles per hour and the local guide telling you “Look right at this building, look left at that building, if the weather or traffic had cooperated you would be seeing this building or that building....” Well, you get the picture.



**Eidfjord**

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Viking also offers excursions at extra cost that are much better curated and meaningful. These excursions range from \$50 per person to several hundred dollars per person. It’s easy to strike a good balance between the included and the extra cost excursions.



Bergen



Stavanger

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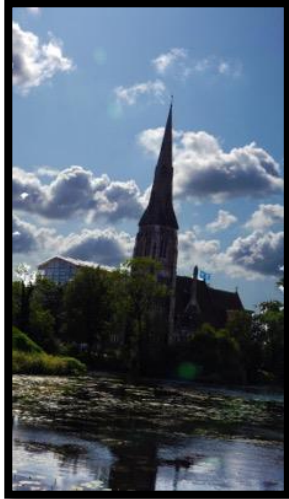
**Alborg Denmark**



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Copenhagen



Copenhagen



Warnemunde Germany



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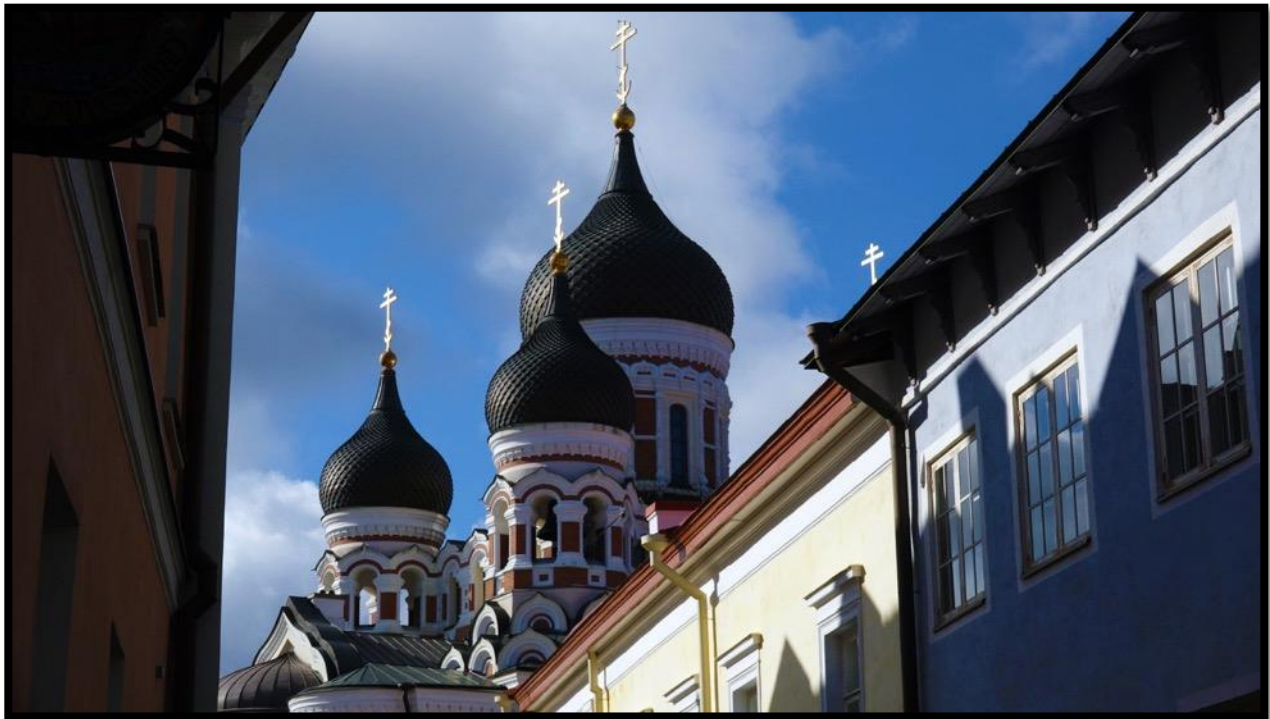
**Gdansk Poland**



**Another Happy Day at Sea**

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Tallinn Estonia

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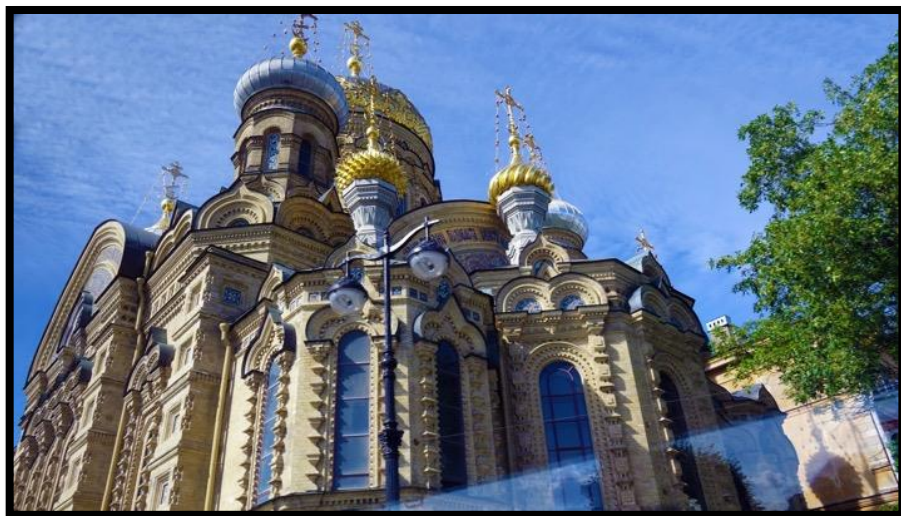
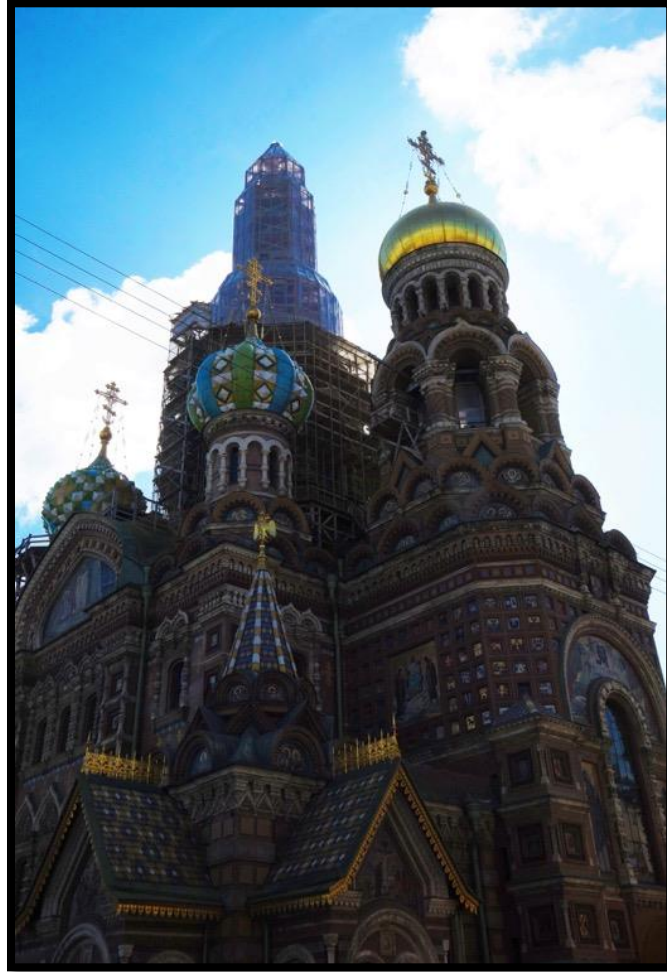
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St. Petersburg Russia

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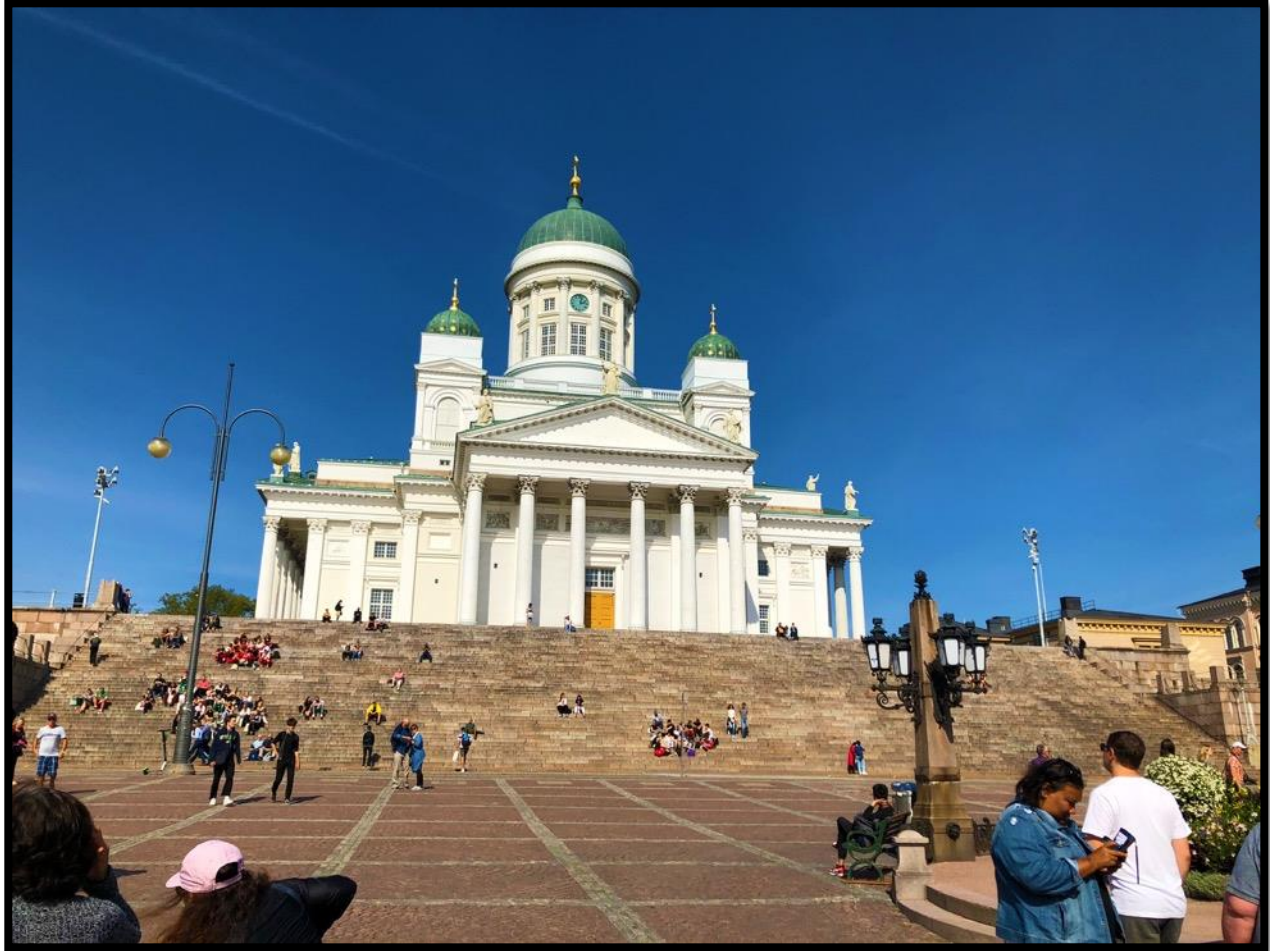
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**St. Petersburg Russia**

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Helsinki Finland



Stockholm Sweden

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Stockholm Sweden



Stockholm Sweden

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### The FOOD!



Well here it is... the part most of you have been waiting for! The FOOD!

I will mention here that Viking cruises are “partly inclusive” serving complementary red/white wine and beer selections at both dinner and lunch. The complementary selections also include soft drinks if wanted. We found that the nightly selections were usually fine for our rather unrefined palates. There is a much wider beer selection available for the asking. If you are a wine connoisseur or a cocktail/liquor fan, then there is a drink package available at extra cost that offers you a much wider selection at any time you would care to indulge. To enjoy the benefits of this package everyone in your stateroom must purchase the drink package... whether they drink or not.

Viking Sea, as all of the Viking ocean ships, has a few different dining options. I’m save a lot of time by just saying they were all worth a visit and had consistently great food. In fact, unlike my last cruise (not on Viking), I had NO BAD MEALS for the entire voyage. There might have been a couple plates that were less than stellar... but in no way were they a bad meal! What follows is a very short (for me anyway) review of the dining venues...





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**The Restaurant (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)**, located on deck 2 Aft, is the main dining room for the ship. The Restaurant is open seating and no reservation is required. It is dressed out in a very pleasant Scandinavian style both simple and elegant at the same time. Very comfortable and spacious it can seat 200+ at any given time. Wait staff were wonderful, helpful and always courteous. The menu changed nightly with a standard selection remaining always available. Every meal we experience in The Restaurant was consistently well prepared and tasty. Steak or other meats that were ordered with a specific temperature were always spot on! Fish were also cooked correctly and never over cooked as is sometimes the case in large kitchens.



**The Pool Grille (Lunch, Dinner, Snacks)**, located on Deck 7 amidships near the main pool is the “Come as you are” restaurant on board. Casual buffet service and seating around the pool area specializing in burgers and hotdogs for the most part they would occasionally add some BBQ and had a massive “seafood buffet” night as well that spilled out in the seating area with additional serving stations. A great lunch casual alternative!





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**Mamsen’s (Early Breakfast, Lunch, Afternoon Snacks, Late Night Snacks)**, Deck 7 forward in the Explorer’s Lounge area. Named for Viking’s CEO’s mom this unusual eatery held the most delicious treat imaginable.... Suksesterte, or Norwegian Success Cake! Oh my! I ate way more than my fair share of this buttery, creamy, masterpiece once we discovered it!



### Epleterte and Suksesterte

In any event Mamsen’s, named so in honor of Viking CEO, Thorstein Hagen’s mother was open for early breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea (usually) and late-night snacks (10pm-12am) serving light breakfast waffles, sandwiches, salads and desserts! Did I mention the Suksesterte?

\*\* this is the only place on the ship to find fresh squeezed orange juice in the morning :-)

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**The Chef’s Table (Dinner Only)**, located on Deck1 Aft (port), is one of the two by reservation specialty restaurants on board. It is a beautifully simple space very comfortable and charming. The wait staff were well informed and helpful.



The restaurant serves a menu that rotates throughout the voyage. We experienced the “Erling’s Scandinavian Bistro” Menu. It was a three-course meal with an included wine pairing. A premium wine pairing was available for those that wanted it and were willing to pay an upcharge, or those that had the beverage package.

Salmon for the first course and Lamb for the second. Both were done to perfection. The Salmon was poached to perfection and had a wonderful flavor and a marvelous creamy soft texture. I ordered my lamb at medium-rare and that is how I got it and my wife ordered at medium-well (criminal :-)) and that is exactly how she got it.

The wine pairings were all suitable and very good with each dish.

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**Manfredi’s Italian Restaurant (Dinner Only)**, located Deck 1 Aft (starboard) is the second by reservation specialty restaurant on the Viking Sea. Serving Italian fare, it is decorated in a style reminiscent of the great New York and Chicago Italian family eateries. A wonderful, comfortable venue to enjoy a meal in.



We enjoyed two meals at Manfredi’s during our voyage. Both were excellent! One very minor slip was my Rib Eye. I had ordered it Medium-Rare, but it was served just north of Medium. A minor infraction and I enjoyed it all the same :-). All other meals and service was impeccable.

*Note: In the specialty restaurants, at least in our class of cabin, you are initially allowed one booking per voyage in each. But once on board you can use your in-stateroom interactive TV to book as many reservations as you would like and are available.... EZ-Peasy and done!*

There is one more Specialty restaurant on board called **The Kitchen Table**. It is a teaching restaurant where you go shopping for your own ingredients in port and are taught by one of the ship’s chefs how to prepare a complete meal. We did not indulge in this option.

Coffee available several places around the ship including the Livingroom Bar which also had a few snacks and pastries available.

## Review – The Viking Homelands Cruise – AKA Tom and Song “Go A’ Viking”!

August 13th to August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019

### Spa – Deck 1 Forward

One more cool area to report on before closing and that is the Spa. Normally I’m not much of a spa kind of guy but this was a treat. While I never availed myself of the spa services I did use the thermal suite that is complimentary to all passengers and the spacious, well-equipped fitness center.



The thermal suite on the Viking ships is open to all passengers 8:00 am to 8 pm. No reservations are necessary. The Thermal Suite consists of a large Thermal Resistance Pool, large jacuzzi pool, a dry sauna, a steam sauna, a purported cold plunge pool which we never discovered, a therapeutic multi-head power shower and a cold (really cold) water bucket that dumps one big shot of cold water over the head kind of shower device. There is a very unique “Snow Grotto” that pumps snow into the room and maintains a nice brisk, bracing temperature. You can even scoop up handfuls of the “snow” and rub it on yourself.... I tried it and while I’m all about a little self-flagellation some might consider it extreme. It was... “Bracing to say the least!

The fitness center is well equipped with several bikes, treadmills and elliptical trainers and several resistance style weight machines along with a good selection of free weights. There is a separate room to practice yoga or dancercise if into that sort of thing. Many classes were available from Spa personnel.

There is a full-service beauty salon with Beauty Therapists (?)... I mean, I didn’t know there was such a thing!

I spoke to a couple of people who did go in for a massage or whatever and they claimed the process was well performed in a very comfortable environment.

## **Review – The Viking Homelands Cruise – AKA Tom and Song “Go A’ Viking”!**

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You are welcome to walk the ship in your bathrobe or use the separate Men’s and Women’s locker rooms complete with robes and sandals when preparing for a treatment or using the Thermal Suite.

### **Debarkation**

Purchased the airport transfer onboard. Everything was by the numbers and no problems. Just hung out in the Livingroom until our bus color/number was called. Down the gangplank and onto a bus to the airport.

### **Summary**

**As said previously... this was the best overall cruise experience we have yet had. Was it perfect? No, but very few things stretching over 17 days ever are.**

**What is was, was well organized, clean and lovely trip. Educational, mind expanding and in some ways a revelation on different levels.**

**All of this happening on the best run, cleanest ship, with an understated elegance and some of the nicest crew you could ever expect to sail with.**

***Simply Wonderful!***