

**DOING THE EUROPEAN CIRCLE BY FERRY**  
**STARING POINT, RHODES, GREECE**  
**FINISH: TALLINN, ESTONIA**



This is mad. Possible, but mad nonetheless: taking public ferries (that means no commercial freight ships) from the south-eastern fringes of Europe to its north-eastern counterparts. The big conundrum is to identify where the journey should precisely start. Cyprus, an EU member since 2004, could most certainly be considered a European country. And while there is no ferry connecting it to the Greek mainland or any of its islands, there is a link from Kyrenia (in Turkish occupied North Cyprus) to Taşucu in Turkey. But can Turkey be really included in the European circle? Given the arduous schlepp that one has to make in order to reach a Greek ferry port (which involves overland travel to reach Bodrum on the Turkish riviera), we ought to bypass this politically charged debate and refer to travel practicalities. So, Greece and the island of Rhodes could be regarded as the south-eastern most part of this trip.

How about the southern end? Geography has been exceptionally kind to travellers: Valetta, Malta's capital has a latitude of  $35.8989^{\circ}\text{N}$ , which is only marginally further north than Heraklion on the Greek island of Crete ( $35.3387^{\circ}\text{N}$ ). So the latter is the southernmost spot. Or is it? El Hierro, a small island of the Canary archipelago (which belongs to Spain) lies even further south ( $27.7255^{\circ}\text{N}$ ). It is also the western most spot ( $18.0243^{\circ}\text{W}$ ) and therefore ought to be included in the itinerary. And how

about the North? The Norwegian port of Kirkenes, far inside the Arctic circle and close to country's borders with Russia and Sweden gets that accolade at 66.7269°N. But Iceland, with the capital Reykjavik coming in at 64.1466°N really ought to make our list too, given that it is so precariously located on the outer fringes of Europe.



Start/Finish and south-easternmost point: Rhodes, Greece

As to the north-eastern edge, St. Petersburg (with ferry links to Tallinn in Estonia and to Helsinki in Finland) would make perfect geographical sense, without even mentioning its impressive European architectural heritage. So here is your hardcore trip with the following cornerstones: Rhodes, El Hierro, Iceland, Kirkenes, St. Petersburg. This would be a truly EPIC journey. But it would take a considerable amount of time: The leg from Cadiz in Andalusia to the Canary island of Lanzarote takes a cool 35 hours. And from there, several inter-island ferries are required to reach El Hierro. Then it's all the way back to the Spanish mainland, and you would be hard pressed to do this journey in less than one week. Iceland can be reached via ferry from Hirtshals in Denmark with a stopover on the Faroe Islands. The trip takes three days one-way but can also be undertaken as a cruise (if that is the accurate word when sailing stormy Northern seas), which brings you back to Denmark one week later. Kirkenes also would require careful planning. The town can be reached via the famous Hurtigruten ferry which straddles the entire Norwegian coast from its starting point in Bergen. The journey is spectacular – one of the most scenic boat trips there is - but going up and down takes 22 days. So, in short, doing the hard-core version will add 5 weeks to your travels, and that is before you even start to deal with clumsy Russian immigration and visa procedures. Go ahead, find your inner Phileas Fogg (and tell us all about it), but for us common travellers, maybe a gentler approach would be more feasible.

European integration might come to our rescue in defining our journey: Neither Russia, nor Norway, Iceland, or the UK are part of the European Union. And although the Canary islanders are EU citizens, the archipelago is outside the bloc's VAT area. So, the islands are EU territory, but not fully... That will do for me, and thank you Brussels for coming up with the categorisation of so-called 'Outermost Regions', which also saves me considering such places as the Portuguese Azores and Madeira, as well as French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, Réunion, and Saint Martin. So there you have it: We can call this journey 'Doing the EU circle by ferry', and I would be happy to kit myself out with blue and yellow luggage, containing promotion material of the European Commission (no, seriously Brussels: send some stuff over, preferably with application forms for a travel grant). Our revised

cornerstones are therefore: Rhodes, Crete, Cork in Ireland (our new westernmost point), the Swedish port of Umeå (the new northernmost destination), as well as Helsinki (the easternmost spot on this trip) before finishing in the Estonian capital of Tallinn. Hang on a minute. How do I get to Cork in Ireland? There is a ferry link from Roscoff in Brittany, but that can only be accessed by taking the ferry from Santander in Spain via Plymouth in the UK. How can I call this an EU circle when the journey involves a stop-over in an entity that has non-EU Brexit credentials? Well, it can't be helped, so I just have to trust Boris Johnson's promise of working together with our 'European friends'. That means that travelling with EU-coloured luggage and Brussels promotion material might not be such a good idea on this occasion.



Southernmost point: Heraklion/Crete, Greece

I am writing this during the Corona pandemic, and like many others, I am more of an armchair (or PC bound) traveller. But when looking at websites ([www.directferries.co.uk](http://www.directferries.co.uk) for instance), it is not too difficult to draft an itinerary. For the occasional overland journey by train or bus, you might want to consult [www.rome2rio.com](http://www.rome2rio.com). When starting the journey in the Spring, it might be best to do this clockwise. You will avoid the mid-summer heat in the Mediterranean, whilst also enjoying Scandinavian summers when the sun hardly sets. Should you take off in summer or early autumn, then the opposite direction seems more feasible, as it can get distinctly chilly when arriving in northern Sweden in October for example. Also, I have merely noted down the number of travel days, charting the amount of time it will take to get from A to B (and I have avoided listing back-to-back ferry rides on the same day). The journey starts in Rhodes (with an international airport and numerous ferry links from Athens and the Greek islands) using a 24-hour clock.



Westernmost point: Cork, Ireland

**Greece:**

- Day 1: Rhodes to Heraklion (Crete), Anek Lines, 13½ hours: 03.30 to 17.00
- Day 2: Heraklion to Piraeus, Minoan Lines, 9 hours, 21.00 to 06.30
- Day 3: Piraeus to Patras: overland bus: 2 hours

**Onto Italy (and maybe Malta?):**

From Patras in Greece, you can travel to the ports of Ancona, Bari, and Brindisi on the Italian Adriatic coast. From there, you have to travel overland to Naples on the country's west coast. All three ferry ports would do, but Bari offers the shortest onward journey. Should you wish to include Malta, then you ought to get a bus from Bari to Salerno (instead of Naples), from where there is a link to the Sicilian port of Catania (13 hours), and on to Valetta in Malta (7 hours). You can get back to Italy via Catania, then an overland bus or train to Palermo. This leg of the journey adds 3-4 days. If this sounds too ambitious (it does for me), then you could just stick to this itinerary.

- Day 4: Patras to Bari, Grimaldi Lines, 17.00 – 09.00
- Day 5: Overland to Naples: train approx. 4 hours. Bus approx. 3 hours.
- Day 6: Naples to Palermo, GNV lines, 20.00 – 07.00
- Day 7: Palermo to Civitavecchia, GNV lines, 18.00 -07.45



Northernmost point: Umeå, Sweden

## Itinerary:

### **Onto Spain:**

- Day 8: Civitavecchia to Barcelona, Grimaldi, 22.15 – 18.15
- Day 9: Barcelona to Palma de Mallorca, Trasmediterranea, 23.00 – 07.00
- Day 10: Palma de Mallorca to Ibiza, Balearia and Trasmediterranea, 3 times a day: 2 – 3 hours
- Day 11: Ibiza to Valencia, Balearia, 13.15 – 18.15
- Day 12: Overland train to Santander, 8 hours

### **Onto Ireland:**

- Day 13: Santander to Plymouth, Brittany Ferries, 15.30 – 14.15
- Day 14: Plymouth to Roscoff, Brittany Ferries, 22.00 – 08.00
- Day 15: Roscoff to Cork, Brittany Ferries, 20.30 – 09.30



Easternmost Point: Helsinki, Finland

### **Onto Scandinavia**

We are stranded in ferry no-man's land. While there are plenty of boats crossing the Channel between France and the UK, there is none connecting Britain with Scandinavia since the link to Esbjerg in Denmark was discontinued. From Cork you could take a bus to Dublin, from there a ferry to Liverpool, a train to Newcastle and then the ferry to Amsterdam, with another overland journey to reach northern Germany with access to Sweden. This adds 5-6 days to your journey, so your better bet might be a long overland journey from Brittany to northern Germany, which you could do in three days.

- Day 16: Cork to Roscoff, Brittany Ferries, 16.00 – 07.00
- Day 17 and 18: Overland to Travemünde (Germany) train/bus (20 hours) or bus (28 hours)
- Day 19: Travemünde to Trelleborg (Sweden), TT Line, 09.30 – 19.15
- Day 20: Overland to Stockholm, train, 6 hours
- Day 21: Overland to Umeå, train 7 hours
- Day 22: Umeå to Vasaa (Finland), Wasaline, 13.00 – 18.30
- Day 23: Overland to Helsinki, train (4 hours) or bus (7 hours)
- Day 24: Helsinki to Tallinn, several connections per day, 2 hours



Finish/Start: Tallinn, Estonia

I counted 10 night-journeys in this itinerary, so your balance might be a little off once you return to terra firma after some three weeks. But the journey can be shortened further: You could start in Piraeus near Athens in Greece. Then travel by bus to Patras, take the ferry to Ancona followed by an overland ride to Civitavecchia near Rome, followed by a ferry to Barcelona, then another overland trip to Santander to catch the ferries to Plymouth and Roscoff. A dash across the lowlands to reach Travemünde in Germany from where there is a direct link to Helsinki and then Tallinn. If you hurry, you can make that journey in under 2 weeks. If Phileas Fogg (or Monty Python's Michael Palin for that matter) travelled around the world in 80 days, you could claim to journey around the perimeters of Europe (or the European Union if you wish) in 12 or so days. Anyone up for a race?

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