



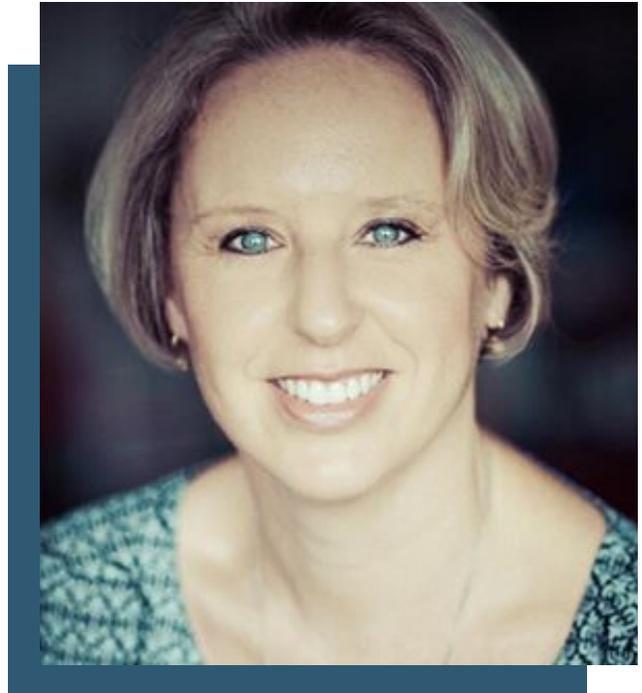
River Cruising

A first timer's guide to the rivers of Europe



Welcome!

If you have spent any amount of time watching PBS, you are likely already familiar with Viking River Cruises. As the sponsor of such shows as Downton Abbey, The Crown and others, they are front and center among anglophiles.



While Viking may be the most well-known, they are certainly not the only choice when it comes to river cruises and, much like ocean cruises, there is definitely something for everyone. The (mostly) all-inclusive nature of a river cruise can be a refreshing change from the sometimes overwhelming 'nickle and diming' of the larger ocean vessels. However, if you are not a huge consumer of alcohol, or the thought of paying out gratuities at the end of the cruise makes you uneasy, there are still options available to you.

This guide will give you a brief overview of the best known river cruise lines highlighting what makes them different from each other so you are armed with the basic facts to make an educated decision on what is the best river cruise line for your travel style. And when in doubt, the input of a river cruise specialist, such as myself, will give you even better insight.

Come on over to Facebook and join my free group where we discuss everything river cruising. Share your experiences or learn from those who have traveled before you: [River Cruise VIP Lounge](#) is where you can find us!

Emma

10 things to know before you go

1. *Visas*

A visa is not required for US or Canadian Citizens until at least 2022 when the European Union will be requiring a visa waiver authorization, called an ETIAS (similar to the ESTA most nations are required to have upon entry into the US). You can find out more by visiting etiasvisa.com

2. *Currency*

Most cruise lines use either Euros or US dollars on board. Payment of gratuities, if applicable, can either be charged to your on board account or settled in cash (dollars or euros are generally accepted) at the end of your cruise. Euros, for the most part, is the local currency. Be sure to bring a variety of denominations and include smaller bills/coins for tipping in restaurants & bars as well as for your guides. Budapest, Romania, Turkey and the Czech Republic do not utilize the Euro however most do accept Euros, but change is usually given in local currency. It is recommended to get a few small bills of the local currency for tipping and small purchases. These can be obtained at your local bank, the airport and most in-country bank machines (check for bank fees first!)

3. *Motion Sickness*

If you were plagued by motion sickness on a large ocean cruise, there is no need to worry about feeling sea sick on a river cruise. The rivers are generally very still and experiencing motion sickness is extremely rare.

4. *Electricity*

Voltage in Europe is 220v with European 2-pin power outlets. Most river ships will have European voltage and power outlets, so be sure to bring a 2 prong adapter and a converter for any small appliances, such as a hairdryer. Curling irons may be prohibited. Please check directly with your travel agent or cruise line for up-to-date information regarding your ship.

5. Mobility

River cruises do require a certain level of mobility. Wheelchairs, while not prohibited, generally become more of a hindrance than a help, especially while on board. Collapsible wheelchairs are requested (easily foldable for lifting off the ship). Only a handful of ships have elevators, and they don't generally go to all floors due to design specifications. Ports of call along the rivers are small and during peak season you may find it necessary to dock alongside another river ship (or 2 or 3!), and you will need to climb stairs, walk through lounges or sun decks of other ships to get to shore. Plus, once you finally make it to land, you must deal with the very bumpy cobblestone streets often found in small European townships.

6. Activities

River cruise lines put an enormous amount of effort into their excursions and are working very hard to shake the stigma of only being for "older folks". The offerings run the gamut from the usual walking tours geared not only for slow-walkers, to those for active travelers as well. There are wellness cruises, culinary excursions, bike tours, running tours, painting classes, truffle hunting and so much more. If you are an active traveler and concerned about the lack of activity - don't be. There is something for everyone. If you are REALLY adventurous, but still want the experience of a river cruise, check out Backroads. Backroads offers active adventure trips of all kinds, including river cruising where they have partnered with AmaWaterways to offer the river cruise experience you crave with the active adventure lifestyle you enjoy.

7. Touring on your own

Do you like cycling? Do you like exploring on your own? If the answer is yes, be sure to look for a cruise line which offers bikes. When not being used for an excursion, borrow a bike and head out on your own. Some are even equipped with GPS navigation so you don't need to worry about getting lost! It's even possible to leave the ship in one port, cycle along the river and meet up in the next port - and not miss a beat.

8. Ship size

Despite their varied names (Long ships, suite ships, space ships, etc.), most river cruise ships are exactly the same size. Why? Locks. Depending on the itinerary, all ships must pass through a vast amount of locks along the Rhine-Main and Danube canals. These locks prevent ships from being any larger than 443 ft. long and 38 ft wide. Only the AmaMagna and Crystal Mozart are wider than the others (almost double). This, however, limits their itineraries to cruise sections of the Danube without any locks.

9. Docking

There is a lot to be said about docking on a river cruise. It comes with its pros and cons for sure! Probably the most convenient part is actually docking in the center of town. It's very rare you need to hop a bus or taxi to get anywhere when you are smack dab in the middle of the action. Buuuut, that also comes with a couple of cons: First, if there are multiple ships in the same town on the same day, and only one spot to dock, then you will likely need to moor next to one, two, or possibly even three other ships, making it somewhat of an obstacle course to get off. And, if you had any interest to stay behind and sit on your balcony admiring the scenery, you might just end up staring into someone else's cabin! This scenario is highly unlikely because the beauty of a river cruise is the excursions are already included, so why skip something you already paid for?

10. Water levels

Water levels can be of particular concern for river cruisers, and it can make or break your trip. Sadly, the one thing we can never predict is the weather. While spring rains can bring high water levels; hot, dry summers can dry up even the most fluid of rivers. And to top it all off, those levels can fluctuate on a daily basis, making it even more frustrating. There is some assurance in knowing that no matter the issue, the cruise lines always have a contingency plan in place to get you from A to B. Obviously, no one wants to be bussed around from place to place, and just because the water is problematic one day, it doesn't mean the next day will be the same. Conversely, one stretch of the river may be problematic, but the water upstream or downstream could be absolutely fine.

So, what IS included with my river cruise?

ALL MEALS

Yes, all of your meals are included. Much like ocean cruises, and despite their smaller size, most lines offer multiple dining venues, available to you at no additional charge - unlike the specialty restaurants aboard ocean cruises. Most offer a farm-to-table approach sourcing many of their ingredients from local markets along the route.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Some lines, such as Crystal, Scenic, Tauck & Uniworld offer unlimited alcoholic beverages around the clock.

Others, such as AmaWaterways, Avalon, Emerald and Viking offer wine and beer with lunch & dinner and most serve sparkling wine at breakfast.

Riviera is the only line which does not include alcoholic beverages up front, however, a beverage package is available at an additional cost.

Viking offers an add-on package whereby enabling unlimited drinks.

WIFI

All lines offer unlimited wifi while cruising the rivers of Europe. Stream live video sailing past the Parliament buildings in Budapest or FaceTime your kids/grandkids before going to bed.



EXCURSIONS

One of the strongest allures of river cruising is the fact all excursions are included in the cost of the cruise. And it isn't just one option in each port. There are several to choose from making it one of the most difficult decisions you will need to make during the entire process!

Keep in mind, while each port includes a free excursion, some lines will offer additional tours - at an additional cost.

GRATUITIES

There's a fairly even split when it comes to gratuities, but you will find the majority of luxury cruise lines do include them.

Who includes gratuities: Scenic, Emerald Waterways, Crystal, Uniworld and Tauck.

Who doesn't include gratuities:

AmaWaterways, Avalon Waterways, Riviera, and Viking do not include them, however, some lines allow you to pre-pay before you sail, if you wish.

AmaWaterways



5 Reasons to Cruise with AmaWaterways

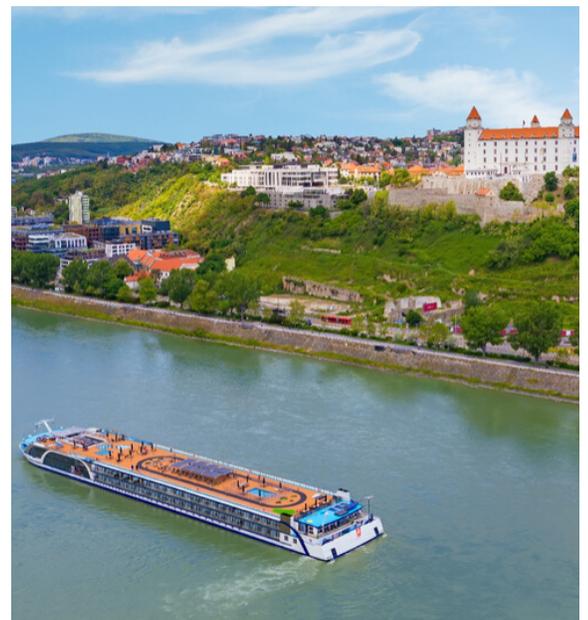
1. **Signature Twin Balcony staterooms:** Ama's unique design - a combination of French & outside balcony so you can enjoy the view no matter the weather.
2. **La Chaîne des Rôtisseurs:** Award-winning dining. A prestigious culinary society by invitation only certifying their culinary excellence.
3. **Chef's Table:** The only venue of its kind in Europe. Watch the chef prepare your meal before your very eyes.
4. **Design:** Single, triple and quad occupancy staterooms for solo travelers and families. Ships are designed with shallow draft to enable cruising during periods of low-water.
5. **Shore excursions:** An enhanced choice of excursions to accommodate any fitness level or cultural interest.

Inclusions: Beer and wine with lunch & dinner as well as sparkling wine at breakfast, pre-dinner cocktail hour, multiple choice of shore excursions in every port, bicycles, wellness center/classes, multiple choice of dining venues including one night at the Chef's table, wifi.

Rivers

- Dutch and Belgian Waterways
- Rhine, Moselle and Main
- Danube - Upper and Lower Danube cruises
- Rhône/ Saône (Provence cruises)
- Seine (Normandy cruises)
- Garonne/Dordogne (Bordeaux cruises)
- Douro (Portugal)

"Oceans take you to destinations, rivers take you through them"



Avalon Waterways



5 Reasons to Cruise with Avalon

1. **Signature Open-air balconies:** Wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling windows, blurring the line between outside and in.
2. **Avalon Fresh:** Fresh ingredients sourced daily from small farms and local producers, bringing farm-to-table to the river cruise industry.
3. **Active Discovery Cruises:** Canoe down the river or take art classes in a local studio. Destination immersion at its finest.
4. **Design:** Beds facing the windows allowing guests to lay in comfort and watch the passing scenery.
5. **Excursions:** 3 types of shore excursions on every trip - Classic, Discovery and Active.

Inclusions: Beer and wine with lunch & dinner as well as sparkling wine at breakfast, choice of shore excursions in every port, bicycles, wellness center/classes, wifi, multiple choice of dining venues, optional excursions offered for a fee.

Rivers

- Dutch and Belgian Waterways
- Rhine, Moselle and Main
- Danube - Upper and Lower Danube cruises
- Rhône/ Saône (Burgundy & Provence cruises)
- Seine (Normandy cruises)

"The world is a book and those who do not travel only read one page"



Crystal River Cruises



5 Reasons to Cruise with Crystal

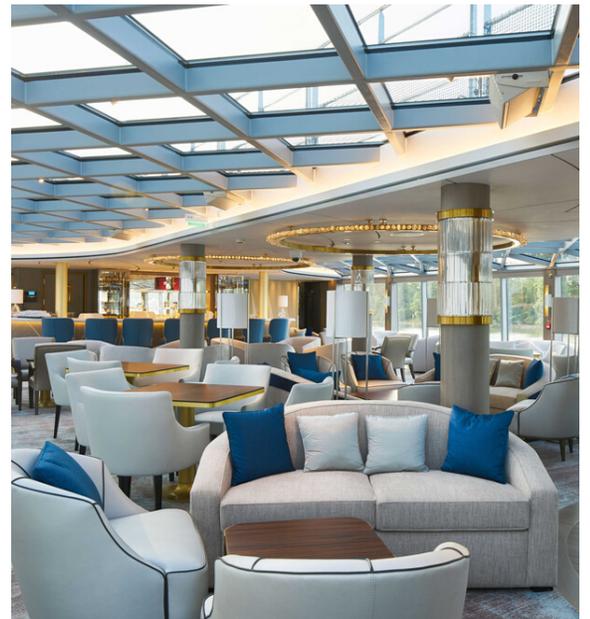
1. **24 hour butler service:** European butler service for every category.
2. **Culinary Mastery:** Michelin-inspired, farm-to-table dining features Crystal's acclaimed cuisine with regionally inspired menus. Crystals offers up to six dining options on most ships.
3. **Largest suites on the river:** Includes amenities such as king sized beds, walk-in closets and ipads in every room..
4. **Design:** 6 star Luxury design
5. **Excursions:** "Design Your Time" concierge service allows you to customize your experiences ashore to very personalized wishes.

Inclusions: Alcoholic beverages available 24/7, choice of shore excursions in every port, bicycles, wellness center/classes, room service, multiple choice of restaurants, personal butler for every room, wifi, gratuities.

Rivers

- Dutch and Belgian Waterways
- Rhine, Moselle and Main
- Danube - Upper and Lower Danube cruises
- Rhône/ Saône (Burgundy & Provence cruises)
- Seine (Normandy cruises)

"You don't have to be rich to travel well"



Emerald Waterways



5 Reasons to Cruise with Emerald

1. **EmeraldValue:** Contemporary finishes and deluxe service without all the bells and whistles.
2. **All-weather balconies:** At the touch of a button, the two-panel glass window retracts to create an open-air balcony.
3. **EmeraldPlus:** If you are craving more in-depth experiences outside the regular excursions, consider a deep-dive into history and culture with additional optional tours.
4. **Design:** Daytime heated pool with retractable roof converts to a cinema for the evening.
5. **Emerald Active Excursions:** Activities on board including yoga, pilates and aqua aerobics or on shore activities such as hiking the city of Budapest or a guided bike tour along the Danube.

Inclusions: Soft-drinks, beer and wine with lunch & dinner, choice of shore excursions in every port, bicycles, wellness center/classes, multiple choice of dining venues, wifi, gratuities.

Rivers

- Dutch and Belgian Waterways
- Rhine, Main and Moselle
- Danube - Upper and Lower Danube cruises
- Rhône and Saône (Burgundy & Provence cruises)

“People don’t take trips, trips take people.”



Riviera River Cruises



5 Reasons to Cruise with Riviera

1. **Alcoholic beverage not included:** If you are a teetotaler and frown upon other cruise companies including alcoholic beverage you won't drink then Riviera might be the right fit for you.
2. **Money back guarantee:** They are so confident in the quality of their cruises that they guarantee, if you're not happy by day two, they'll bring you home and offer you a full refund too.
3. **Value for money - Guaranteed:** Should the cost of your holiday go down after you've booked, they will pass the savings on to you.
4. **No single supplements on select voyages:** Nothing irks a single traveler more than paying double for their vacation!
5. **Excursions:** Authentic travel experiences.

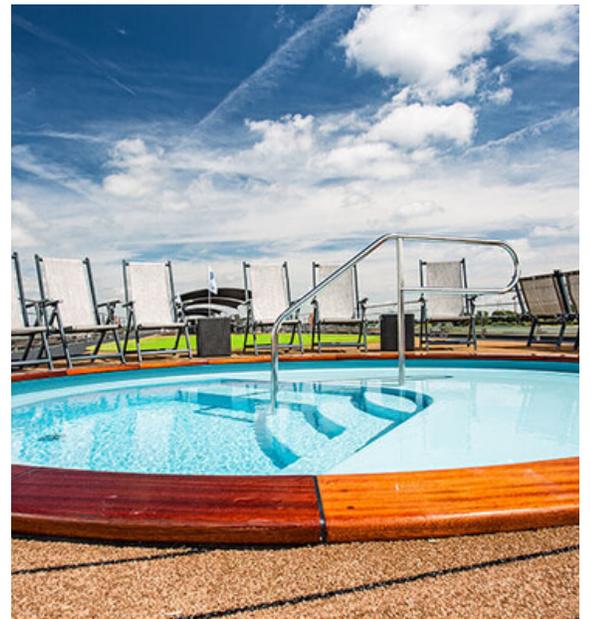
Inclusions: Choice of shore excursions in every port, wellness center/classes; multiple choice of dining venues, wifi.

Extras: Beverage Packages available for purchase, gratuities.

Rivers

- Dutch Waterways
- Rhine, Main and Moselle
- Danube - Upper and Lower Danube cruises
- Rhône (Burgundy & Provence cruises)
- Seine (Normandy cruises)
- Douro (Portugal)

“To travel is to discover that everyone is wrong about other countries.”





5 Reasons to Cruise with Scenic

1. **Scenic Sun Lounge:** A touch of a button transforms your windows into a magnificent open-air balcony and sun lounge.
2. **Butler:** Need a late night snack, a limousine for an evening in town or theatre tickets? A personal butler is at your service.
3. **Scenic Enrich:** Delve deeper into the history and culture with a unique handpicked local experience on each cruise.
4. **Scenic TailorMade:** Download the app to enjoy an in-depth audio guide and river view commentary straight from your device.
5. **National Geographic Partnership:** Select cruises will combine the river cruise experience with NG's expertise in science, conservation and exploration.

Inclusions: Truly all-inclusive. All meals, alcoholic drinks (including top-shelf liquor) all day, complimentary mini-bar re-stocked daily, excursions, e-bikes, wifi, gratuities, butler service in every room. Scenic also provides each guest with a Tailormade GPS device allowing guests to explore on their own without fear of getting lost.

Rivers

- Dutch and Belgian Waterways
- Rhine, Main and Moselle
- Danube - Upper and Lower Danube cruises
- Rhône/ Saône (Burgundy & Provence cruises)
- Seine (Normandy cruises)
- Douro (Portugal)
- Volga (Russia)

"I'd rather have a passport full of stamps than a house full of things"



Tauck



5 Reasons to Cruise with Tauck

1. **Exclusive Special Evenings:** Each cruise features a special dinner at an historic private palace, castle, château, museum or estate.
2. **Fewer passengers:** Maximum capacity of 130 passengers, less than most lines.
3. **Family Friendly:** Only Tauck has "family only" voyages designed for you to bring along the entire family. All activities are designed with the entire family in mind.
4. **Design:** With cabins offering 3rd and 4th occupancy, inviting the whole family to come along won't break the bank.
5. **Excursions:** Opportunities to dine ashore and get immersed in the destination. From meals in medieval castles to lunches and tastings for an authentic taste of daily life.

Inclusions: Alcoholic beverages included 24/7. Choice of shore excursions in every port, bicycles, multiple choice of dining venues wifi, gratuities.

Rivers

- Rhine and Moselle
- Danube - Upper and Lower Danube cruises
- Rhône (Provence)
- Seine (Normandy cruises)
- Douro (Portugal)

“You must go on adventures to find out where you truly belong.”



Uniworld Boutique River Cruises



5 Reasons to Cruise with Uniworld

1. **One-of-a-kind ships:** Each ship is a stylish, destination-inspired floating hotel with inviting spaces, exquisite antiques, custom fabrics and original works of art.
2. **Design:** Every stateroom has a distinctive theme and color palette with custom-made fabrics and sumptuous furnishings.
3. **Culinary Excellence:** When dining onboard, you'll be treated to world-class cuisine made from fresh ingredients, locally sourced from the destinations you visit.
4. **All-inclusive:** 24/7 beverage service, excursions, wifi, wellness classes and all gratuities included. Always.
5. **Outstanding Service:** Uniworld's motto: No request is too large, no detail is too small. I can't have said it better myself.

Inclusions: All drinks included 24/7, mini-bar stocked daily, choice of shore excursions in every port, bicycles, wellness center/classes, gratuities, butler service included for suites only.

Rivers

- Dutch and Belgian Waterways
- Rhine, Moselle and Main
- Danube - Upper and Lower Danube cruises
- Rhône/ Saône (Burgundy & Provence cruises)
- Seine (Normandy cruises)
- Dordogne & Garonne (Bordeaux)
- Po (Italy)
- Volga (Russia)

“Better to see something once than hear about it a thousand times”



Viking River Cruises



5 Reasons to Cruise with Viking

1. **Familiarity**: If there's only one name you've heard in river cruising, it's probably Viking.
2. **Clean Scandinavian design**: Bringing Viking's Nordic culture and heritage to the rivers of Europe.
3. **The Viking Way**: Local Life and Working World excursions as well as optional Privileged Access® experiences in places otherwise difficult to visit.
4. **The Elbe River**: The only river cruise company to cruise the Elbe River in Germany - a very difficult river to navigate.
5. **Onboard enrichment**: Cultural enrichment programs to supplement your onshore experience.

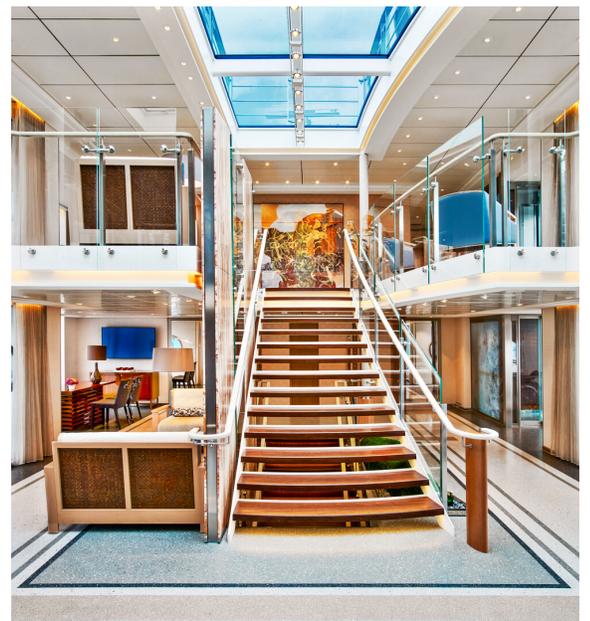
Inclusions: Beer, wine and soft drinks available at lunch & dinner, choice of shore excursions in every port, multiple choice of dining venues, wifi.

Extras: An "add-on" beverage package can be purchased to make drinks completely all-inclusive, gratuities

Rivers

- Dutch and Belgian Waterways
- Rhine, Moselle and Main
- Elbe (Germany)
- Danube - Upper and Lower Danube cruises
- Rhône/ Saône (Burgundy & Provence cruises)
- Seine (Normandy cruises)
- Volga (Russia)
- Douro (Portugal)

"Jobs fill your pocket, but adventures fill your soul"





Which river should you choose?

The charming castles and picturesque vineyards of the Rhine, the iconic imperial cities along the Danube, the vibrant lavender fields blanketing the South of France or the hilltop wineries along the spectacular route of the Douro River Valley. Europe's rivers host an eclectic mix of medieval, majestic and magnificent sites to behold any river cruiser. The only question to ask yourself is which one first? Below are the five most popular rivers for cruising in Europe.



The Danube

Probably the number one choice for new cruisers. Why? The Danube offers many first time cruisers the opportunity to cross several iconic cities off their list including the majestic imperial cities of Budapest and Vienna (and the option of Prague if time permits). The Danube is also home to many UNESCO heritage sites including Český Krumlov , Old Town Regensburg and the Wachau Valley.



The Rhine

Another popular river for first timer cruisers, the Rhine will fulfill your desire to see medieval castles, picturesque vineyards and charming villages synonymous with the European countryside.

Coupled with the hustle and bustle of Amsterdam's rich art and cultural sites, the Rhine is a very good choice, particularly if it is your first trip to Europe.



The Seine

Seine river cruises are generally roundtrip from Paris. itineraries and highlights include stops at Giverny to see Monet's home and gardens, the medieval city of Rouen and an excursion to the Landing Beaches in Normandy. A few companies are even expanding their itineraries to this region or tacking on additional days exploring the areas around Mt. St. Michel.



The Rhône

Not to be confused with the Rhine. If you have wanted to explore Provence and the South of France, this is the river for you. Trace the footsteps of Van Gogh, experience the unique business of truffle hunting or wander the ancient pathways of the Papal Palace in Avignon. A cruise down the Rhône is a sensory delight, and if you plan your trip well, an epic opportunity to see the infamous lavender fields of Provence.



The Douro

The Douro isn't usually known as a river for first time cruisers. If you have already traveled extensively in Europe and looking for something different, or you have a keen desire to explore the verdant valleys and wine regions of northern Portugal, the Douro will not disappoint. Most itineraries generally are round trip from the picturesque city of Porto and focus on wine and port - Portugal's most renowned contribution to wine.



Thank You...

Whether you're thinking about your first river cruise, or have sailed before and are considering trying another cruise line or river, I do hope you found the information practical and enlightening. While not entirely comprehensive, it does cover the most elementary facets of cruising.

It is not uncommon to plan a river cruise 12-24 months in advance. Seasoned cruisers understand this and book early to get the best offers and the best suites, especially during peak season.



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Ready to start planning?

Call today and let's get you booked!