



How River Cruises Are Winning Over Curious Travelers

By Zachary Laks

Sometimes the best view when traveling is one that's ever-changing, new places ahead, and that's delivered on river cruises. As with ocean cruises, you unpack once and you're off on a journey navigating storied waterways. From Europe's Rhine, Danube and Seine to Portugal's Douro, Egypt's Nile to Asia's Mekong, and even along the mighty Mississippi, river cruises are your front row seat to spectacular inland sights.

The River Cruise Boom

River cruising has experienced a surge in popularity in recent years, particularly among travelers seeking a slower, more immersive alternative to traditional land-based tours involving buses, planes, or trains. According to Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), river cruise bookings continue to rise as travelers discover the unique appeal of journeying through the heart of countries on water. CLIA member lines offer a diverse array of itineraries that cater to travelers seeking cultural immersion, scenic beauty, and luxurious comfort including; AmaWaterways, American Cruise Lines on the Mississippi, Avalon Waterways, CroisiEurope, Scenic and Uniworld; European-centric operators such as A-Rosa, Amadeus River Cruises, Emerald Cruises, Riviera River Cruises, Tauck, Trafalgar, and Viva Cruises; and small luxury lines APT and Riverside Luxury Cruises.

Some river cruise guests are new-to-cruise, just discovering the joy of waterborne experiences. Others are ocean cruisers, looking to easily experience inland sights on one trip.

The River Cruise Experience: Easy, Intimate, and Immersive

Think of a river cruise as a floating boutique hotel, offering an intimate experience with fewer guests and attentive service. Staterooms are thoughtfully designed, often with views of passing riverbanks from your bed or sitting area. In Europe, head to your ship's top deck for 360° views as you glide past storybook towns, pass through locks (essentially water elevators), and under majestic bridges. Sail the Nile and you'll see why it's often referred to as a floating museum tour. You'll coast by 5,000+ years of history from grand temples and tombs to vibrant local villages.

The vibe onboard river cruises is casual and relaxed, with no formal dress codes. River cruise fares cover meals, enrichment activities, shore excursions, WIFI, and entertainment. Chefs onboard draw inspiration in local flavors and ingredients, and infuse them into every meal,

from buttery croissants on the Seine to phở, the traditional Vietnamese noodle soup, on the Mekong.

Activities onboard aim to deepen guest connection to the region. Sailings often feature guest lecturers, local artists, and wine tastings from nearby vineyards – select AmaWaterways sailings feature visiting wine experts who share fascinating insights into the region's viticulture. Scenic's Specialty Cruises host distinguished authors, historians, and celebrity chefs.

Destinations at the Heart of It All

River ships often dock within steps of enchanting villages, exciting cities, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites. You'll be treated to complimentary shore excursions every day, led by local expert guides. The group sizes on these tours are deliberately kept small, allowing for more time to engage with the guide and making navigation easier. Complimentary headsets are provided, allowing you to hear your guide clearly, even if you stray a few steps behind.

Shore experiences are designed to cater to a range of activity levels and interests – with active, leisure, and immersive options. You're also free to explore on your own. Consult the Wellness Hosts on AmaWaterways for fitness-forward excursions, such as bike tours and guided runs. Avalon Waterways' Avalon Choice Program offers guests the option of three daily excursion choices at different levels of activity. Experience the magic of a destination after dark with Uniworld's "Nights Out" experiences, which can range from illuminated city strolls to private evening palace visits on select itineraries.

New routes continue to expand the breadth of inland reach, such as CroisiEurope's itineraries on the Loire River in the Loire Valley, a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its historic towns, architecture, and natural beauty. Stateside, American Cruise Lines features a dozen thoughtfully crafted itineraries along the Mississippi – as well as river journeys on the Hudson and the Pacific Northwest's Columbia and Snake rivers.

On a river cruise, there's time to experience destinations. You're en route on an expertly crafted itinerary that focuses on the best of (and freshest flavors from) the local region. When you aren't off the ship exploring, enjoy sitting back and watching the world go by.

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