

Cruises

Europe's River Cruise Lines Ramp Up Culinary Sailings for 2017

by Susan Young | Jan 9, 2017 11:10am



Scenic will soon debut Scenic Culinaire, a private emporium with cooking stations, classes, viewing screens and more, on three of its rebuilt Space-Ships.

As 2017 begins, river cruise lines are gearing up for the spring sailing season, with many new culinary and wine options throughout the summer, fall and beyond. Here are some of the top new savory experiences afloat on European rivers.

Fresh and Healthy: For all European sailings, **Avalon Waterways** will launch its “**Avalon Fresh**” program this year in partnership with two of **Europe’s** rising culinary stars — the **Wrenkh** brothers. Beyond all of Avalon’s regular menu and wine choices, the river line will add new healthy, locally sourced food options, including vegetarian and gluten-free dishes. Guests can indulge in Leo and Karl Wrenkh’s creations for continental breakfasts, buffets, four-course dinners, al fresco lunches at **Sky Bistro** and, as petite portions, in the **Panorama Bistro**.

Private Wine Tastings: Barge cruises give clients a slower and a more intimate river experience, often on smaller waterways that are off the beaten path. **Abercrombie & Kent** has introduced a new 14-day “**Paris, Champagne & Alsace: Villages & Vineyards by Barge**” itinerary. Guests will peruse idyllic scenery as they float along the **Marne River** from **Paris** through the **Champagne** region onboard the six-cabin canal barge **Panache**. Highlights include private wine tastings at wineries from Champagne to **Alsace** and dining ashore in **Michelin**-starred restaurant. Added bonus? Cruisers can craft their own perfume at the **Fragonard Museum**.

Sip & Sail: With details still being developed at press time, **AmaWaterways** will introduce a new “Sip & Sail” program across its European fleet for 2018. Guests will receive drinks within the hour before dinner at no extra charge.

We took a sneak peek at the proposed Sip and Sail menu and noticed that it will likely include white, red, rose and sparkling house wines; classics like gin fizz, Margarita, whiskey — both sour and cosmopolitan; a classic martini, lemon drop martini and Manhattan; Bitburger draught beer; sodas, mineral water, tonic water and juices; other select mixed drinks; and shots of rum, American whiskey, Scotch, vodka and gin.

Cooking Classes: In southern France, **Scenic** will debut “**Scenic Culinaire**,” a private cooking emporium with tailored classes, new cooking stations, real-time cameras, viewing screens and a cheese and wine center on three of its rebuilt Space-Ships. Also planned are new shore-side foodie excursions, including lunch at the Michelin three-star **Maison Pic in Valence**; a **Chateau Phelan Segur** wine tasting and food pairing event in the **Medoc** region; and a visit to **Baltard Market** in **Arcachon** on the **Atlantic** coast.

The **Scenic Culinaire** experience will kick off on the 13- and 14-day “**Tastes of Southern France**” cruises on August 18 and August 19 and the 11- and 12-day “**Tastes of Bordeaux**” itineraries with July and August departures.



An Avalon Waterways chef consults with European culinary stars Leo Wrenkh and Karl Wrenkh for the line's new “Avalon Fresh” program.

Michelin-Starred Restaurants: Last year, **Crystal River Cruises** set up a savory program ashore for *Crystal Mozart* guests — providing each guest with dining in one Michelin-starred restaurant per cruise. The special culinary experience was included in the cruise fare. The good news is that Crystal plans a similar program on its entire European fleet. That will include the new 110-passenger *Crystal Bach* and *Crystal Mahler*, which will sail the **Rhine, Main** and **Danube** rivers and will be launched on June 18 and August 29, respectively. Specific Michelin-starred restaurants had not been announced at press time.

New Seine Voyage: Guests will learn about art, history, the French lifestyle, and culinary treats, including cheeses, cider and calvados, by sailing on **A-ROSA Cruises'** new **Seine River** voyages in France this year. Three new itineraries include the seven-night “**Seine Experience the Normandy**,” five-night “**Rendez-Vous on the Seine with Paris**,” and four-night “**Seine Mini Cruise with Paris**.”

Wine Dinner: For its 10-day “**Portugal’s Rivers of Gold**” itinerary this year, **Viking River Cruises** is preparing a new port wine dinner for connoisseurs through an exclusive agreement with **Symington Family Estates**. *Viking Torgil*, *Viking Hemming* and *Viking Osfrid* operate this itinerary from **Lisbon to Porto, Portugal**.

New Horizons: Additional river vessels on European rivers this year create more opportunities for clients to go ashore and sample dining in some of the world’s great “foodie” destinations. For example, in April, **Emerald Waterways** will launch the 138-passenger *Emerald Liberte* on an eight-day “**Sensations of Southern France**” itinerary between **Arles** and **Lyon**, France’s gastronomic capital. This ship is a smaller version of Emerald’s **Star-Ships**, but has a similar design.

In addition, the new 112-passenger *Emerald Radiance* will launch on **Portugal Douro River**; it too is a smaller version of Emerald’s **Star-Ships**. And the 182-passenger *Emerald Destiny* will sail the **Rhine and Danube Rivers**.

24-Hour Room Service: Starting this year, when travelers get hungry and it’s after hours, they can just pick up their stateroom or suite phone and order food or beverages — if they’re sailing on ships of **Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection**, which will be launching both 24-hour room service and concierge service throughout its European fleet.

Foodies will also appreciate a cruise on the new 128-passenger *S.S. Joie de Vivre*, the first of the line’s **Super Ships** to sail the **Seine River**. It will operate the line’s popular eight-day “**Paris & Normandy**” itinerary.

Updated Dining Afloat: Guests on all of **Tauck’s** Seine and Rhone river cruise itineraries in 2017 will be sailing aboard newly reconfigured vessels, *ms Sapphire* and *ms Emerald*, respectively. In addition to stateroom reconfigurations and updates on the **Ruby (middle) Deck**, on the **Diamond (upper) Deck** of each reconfigured vessel, the ship’s second dining venue, **The Bistro**, will be upgraded with its own dedicated kitchen and chef. The **Bistro** will be renamed **Arthur’s**, in tribute to Tauck’s chairman **Arthur Tauck Jr.**

The expanded **Arthur’s** menu will continue to provide more casual alternatives to the fine dining selections offered in the vessel’s main **Compass Rose** restaurant. Tauck first introduced the concept of a second onboard dining venue in 2006 with the launch of the *ms Swiss Emerald*, and the dedicated kitchen and **Arthur’s** name are already included on Tauck’s 135-meter (443-foot) ships.

Belgium's Liquid Gold: A five-day CroisiEurope cruise on *Victor Hugo* departing Brussels on August 28 will introduce clients to Belgium's world-renowned beer. In addition to savoring the line's onboard French cuisine, guests will head out to **Liege, Hasselt, Antwerp and Brussels** for excursions that include beer tastings, product presentations and visits to Belgium's most famous breweries and landmarks, including the **La Maison des Brasseurs Museum**.

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LGBT Themed Voyage: Emerald Waterways is planning its first ever lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender river cruise. The eight-day "LGBT Danube Explorer" sailing will depart **Budapest** on July 29, 2017, and call at **Bratislava, Slovakia; Vienna, Austria; and Passau, Germany**, before ending in **Nuremberg, Germany**. It will include gay-themed tours in **Vienna and Budapest**; a gay film festival in the onboard cinema and an LGBT quiz night. The price, \$2,545 per person double, includes a free premium drinks package, a per-person savings of \$175, entitling cruisers to free beer, wine, cocktails and soft drinks throughout the sailing.



Passau, Germany, is a featured port on Emerald Waterways' "LGBT Danube Explorer" cruise.

New Active Excursions: Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection will introduce new active excursions for its 2017 "Paris & Impressions of the Seine" itinerary. Among them? Guests can row a boat on the **Grand Canal** of the gardens of **Le Notre** at **Versailles** or bike through riverside **Vernon** to the **Chateau de Bizy**.

Spanish Language Cruises: CroisiEurope recently launched a series of dedicated Spanish-language departures for several of its itineraries. These allow Hispanic-American couples, families and groups to enjoy CroisiEurope's voyages knowing that all information, menus and guided excursions will be available in Spanish. Upcoming itineraries for these clients include "Springtime in Holland" (four- and five-day sailings), "The Seine Valley" (eight days roundtrip from Paris), and "Picturesque Holland and the Magnificent Valley of the Romantic Rhine."