

# Exploring the wines and waterways of France with CroisiEurope

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11-10-2016 By: Véronique Leduc

Celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, CroisiEurope is still a relatively unknown company in Canada. So with the goal in mind of learning more about the business, we boarded the *Cyrano de Bergerac* on Oct. 17, 2016 at the quays of Bordeaux. On board, passengers met the 35 crew members. For this five-day oenological cruise on the Garonne, the 150 passengers came mostly from France, with others from Sweden, Belgium, Switzerland, the U.S. and Canada, including tour operators; of these, most are American although there is one from Toronto eager to discover what CroisiEurope has to offer.

Also on board is a television crew from the France 2 channel, preparing a report about the French craze for river cruises. A few days later on Oct. 21, French passengers displayed their love of river cruises on the evening news. One is reminded of the human element of travel through this type of stay, with just one hundred passengers as opposed to several thousand. One passenger talks about the fact that they feel very little movement on the boat, and of the landscapes they see while sailing near the coast. "One feels like seeing the country," says a passenger looking on the horizon.

"These characteristics of river cruising could appeal to both Americans and Canadians alike," said Nicola Iannone, senior vice president of sales for CroisiEurope in the U.S. and Canada. Working for two and a half years as the only representative of the cruise line in America, Iannone has made it his mission to promote this form of travel to potential customers on this side of the ocean.



*Nicola Iannone, senior vice president of sales for CroisiEurope in the U.S. and Canada, speaks to the travel trade during a recent cruise in France*

After a guided night tour of the city, we take the Garonne and the Dordogne. We first visit Pauillac and taste the wines of Médoc, Libourne, Saint-Émilion, followed by Cadillac and the Sauternes during excursions into the heart of the vineyards and castles of Bordeaux.

On board, CroisiEurope offers training on local wines and an on-board competition crowns the greatest connoisseur among the passengers. And the discovery does not end there: during lunch and dinner, we also taste the wines of the region as presented by our sommelier.

While CroisiEurope is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, the company has remained family-run, and in North America, the industry is in direct contact with Iannone.

Despite the family-business feel, CroisiEurope is the biggest European cruise line specializing in river trips, while also offering some stays on the sea or in the canals, he explains. With 50 ships, CroisiEurope offers 1,700 departures a year for four- to 19-day cruises throughout Europe, as well as on the rivers of Africa, Asia and South America, in some cases being the first line to offer several of these destinations.

The line's ships are all-new and custom built for CroisiEurope, featuring cabins with large windows; CroisiEurope also features new barges that can accommodate 22 passengers for a single trip on the canals. Iannone also highlights the interest of themed cruises, including golf, hiking, wine, cycling, gastronomy, art and Christmas markets.

But more than anything, Iannone emphasizes the value for money of the company's cruises, offering prices up to 50 per cent cheaper than the competition and where everything is included: alcohol, WiFi, some excursions, tips, breakfast buffet, à la carte lunch and dinner. This is the case for all trips except for Christmas cruises.

"You will not find better prices elsewhere," he recalls several times.

It is thanks to the large fleet that the company owns that the prices can be so low. "We have 50 boats while our competitors are under twenty. We offer 1,700 departures while they offer about 400," Iannone explains.

At this price, Nicola is convinced that the product can be of interest to Canadians.

"They know about it in terms of cruising and precisely, our offer is for those who want to try something different," he said in an interview with *PAX*. "My goal is to interact and talk about CroisiEurope. I know the product can appeal to Canadians; they are ready for something else."

For the moment, the Quebec market is the most developed because of the shared language. However, since 2014, CroisiEurope has been trying to make inroads in English Canada and the U.S., offering English-speaking crew and staff on all boats.

In addition to attracting this new clientele, Iannone wants "to change the idea of river cruises.

"We want to attract baby boomers with more active excursions of hiking or biking for example. And for the younger ones, what's interesting is the price!"

Agents can also book directly on CroisiEurope's website, where there is a special travel agent section which includes the Mon Ami Club rewards program. There is also a group policy where if booking 11 passengers, the 12th passenger is free.

More information is available at [www.croisieurope.com](http://www.croisieurope.com).

