

Evangelizing for CroisiEurope in North America



Nicola Iannone - CroisiEurope's scale and the fact that it does everything in-house allows the company to price its cruises lower than many others while including more

With a fleet of 50 vessels carrying 210,000 passengers a year, CroisiEurope is big on the continent but not so known stateside compared to brands like Viking River, AmaWaterways, Uniworld and Avalon. That's the challenge for Nicola Iannone, evp sales-USA and Canada.

He's tackling this by educating the trade on CroisiEurope's points of differentiation, including value, all-inclusive pricing, variety, French cuisine and European flair.

A 20-year sales veteran who previously worked with national and key accounts at MSC Cruises USA, Uniworld and Costa Cruises North America, Iannone's used to touting European travel to North Americans and has solid relationships with major

retail groups and tour operators.

A good chunk of CroisiEurope's business from the US and Canada—which Iannone put at 20% to 25% of the company's customer base—comes from groups and packaged tours.

Tour operators, he said, welcome the options and variety. They can pair CroisiEurope's short sailings with a land program, and for travel agents whose clients have cruised the Rhine and Danube, there are many more destinations to offer.

The company has a [dedicated website for North America](#) with pricing in dollars and 24/7 booking capability. A seven-person call center is open 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET on weekdays, and the Fort Lauderdale-based Iannone has a sales manager who covers the West Coast.

'We have a commitment to the trade. We don't go to the consumer direct,' Iannone said.

Launched by the late Gérard Schmitter in 1976, Strasbourg, France-based CroisiEurope is still family-run. Unlike most river cruise lines, the company owns nearly all its vessels—and builds many of them, too, at its shipyard in Strasbourg.

Its fleet is diverse, ranging from a 16-passenger, all-suite river vessel in southern Africa and six 22-passenger luxury barges on the canals of France to special paddlewheelers designed for the shallow Loire and Elbe rivers, double-deck 110-passenger ships, triple-deck 180-passenger ships, a coastal cruise vessel and more.

Sailings stretch from four nights to 29 nights, and rivers traversed include the Rhine, Main, Moselle, Danube, Elbe, Seine, Saone, Rhone, Garonne, Dordogne, Loire, Douro, Guadalquivir, Guadiana, Po, Volga, Mekong, Chobe and Zambezi. Coastal cruises explore Croatia and Montenegro, and sail from Naples along the Amalfi coast to the Aeolian Islands, Sicily and Calabria, or to Greece.

Iannone said CroisiEurope's scale and the fact that it does everything in-house allows the company to price its cruises lower than many others while including more.

Fares include all drinks (from 'the minute the bar opens in the morning until it closes at night'), gratuities, shore excursions, Wi-Fi and port taxes.

Iannone priced a seven-night cruise on a new ship in France at \$2,891, hundreds of dollars less than Viking River and AmaWaterways, he said, though CroisiEurope includes more (like gratuities).

'We are the best value but quality,' Iannone said, citing CroisiEurope's noted French cuisine. Every lunch and dinner is a sit-down, three-course meal prepared by chefs who have worked alongside such Michelin-starred greats as Paul Bocuse and Marc Haeberlin. Besides French cuisine, regional specialties are served in the areas where the ships operate.

Many theme cruises are available, from gastronomy and wine to history, art, hiking and biking. Some departures are specially designated for Spanish-speakers, which appeals to a number of Florida- and California-based tour operators. Some river lines don't encourage children; on CroisiEurope, certain summer cruises in Italy, Spain and Portugal are designated 'Family Club' sailings where kids up to 16 sail free.

Iannone said 40% of CroisiEurope passengers are English-speakers (Britons, Australians but also nationalities like Dutch and Norwegians, typically fluent in English), and all the staff and crew speak English. English news and television channels are offered. Excursions are bilingual (French and English) for groups of up to 15. For 15 or more, the company runs a separate tour in English.

So Americans are welcome on this European giant. That said, CroisiEurope provides a European experience, drawing travelers from many lands.

'If you want to be with just Americans, why go to Europe?' Iannone said.

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