



Cruises

River Cruises for Wine Lovers, History Buffs and More

by *Susan J. Young* | Oct 4, 2017 8:00am



Pandaw offers a seven-night cruise roundtrip from Rangoon on the Irrawaddy. Seen here is RV Kalay Pandaw.

With the rising popularity of river cruising, agents likely have more existing clients and prospects who want to know more about this vacation choice. It's not a one-size-fits-all product. River lines have itineraries with eclectic routes, regions and themes.

Vineyards, Vintages and Varietals: For guests who enjoy wine tasting and exploring viniculture, but prefer to vacation within North America, American Queen Steamboat Company's "Toast to the Pacific Northwest" is an option close to home. *American Empress* sails through areas of eco-beauty, guests explore local culture and heritage, and within Washington and Oregon, cruisers can meet with local wine makers for exclusive onboard tastings and pairings of their varietals.



American Empress' Suites with Veranda offer river views from four stories above the river.

During the itinerary's time in **Portland**, for example, guests can choose the "Limited Edition Excursion: Vintages of the Willamette Valley," which is included in the cruise fare. Cruisers will travel through **Washington County** for a wine-tasting tour that visits either **Duck Pond Cellars**, **The Four Graces**, **Stoller Family Estate** or **Erath Winery**.

This voyage begins (November 12 and 19) with a hotel stay in **Vancouver, WA**. Guests then embark the ship, cruise to **The Dalles**, an area famed for its canyon walls and volcanic formations, as well as to **Astoria, OR**, and **Stevenson, WA**, home to art galleries and restaurants. The ship then sails to **Portland, OR**, and the cruise ends back in **Vancouver**.

Iberian Flavors: Cruising from **Porto, Portugal**, **AmaWaterways'** 106-passenger *AmaVida* sails on the seven-night "Flavors of Spain and Portugal." Within the **Douro River Valley**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, cruisers will see vineyards, dramatic gorges, terraced hillside and small towns like **Pinhao**, popular with wine lovers.



Within the Douro River Valley, cruisers on AmaWaterways' AmaVida will see vineyards, terraced hillside and small towns such as Pinhao, the Tras-os-Montes region and Entre-Os-Rios village.

At Pinhao, AmaWaterways' guests will experience a **Quinta de Avelada** lunch and an exclusive private tour of **Quinta do Seixo's** wine cellars before sampling some of the wines. Your clients can add a three-night **Madrid** pre-cruise stay and a three-night **Lisbon** post-cruise stay. To help guests view the region's natural beauty and viniculture, *AmaVida* features balconies in the majority of its staterooms and suites, which range up to 323 square feet.

Mark Twain Tribute Cruises: On multiple Upper Mississippi River cruises in 2018, American Cruise Lines explores **Hannibal, MO**, with strong links to Mark Twain and his characters, such as Tom Sawyer, Becky Thatcher and Huckleberry Finn. The cruise starts in St. Louis, where guests get a one-night pre-cruise stay before port calls at Hannibal as well as Davenport, IA, home to the world's largest agricultural exhibit and several musical festivals.

Next, the cruise visits **Dubuque, IA**, **La Crosse, WI**, and **Red Wing, MN** (home to bald eagles), and concludes at **St. Paul, MN**. Operating this itinerary are the 185-passenger *America*, which was launched in 2016, and the 150-passenger *Queen of the Mississippi*. Top digs on both ships include the 445-square-foot **Owner's Suite** with a private balcony, floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors, spacious seating area, desk and hotel-size bathroom. Next is the 328-square-foot **AAM** category suite with private balcony.

Rhine Journey With Jewish Heritage: In 2018, Uniworld's "Remarkable Rhine," is a new itinerary for the luxury line. This nine-day cruise on 130-passenger *River Empress* from Basel to Amsterdam offers special access to certain museums, active adventure options ashore and regional cuisine. All these cruises also feature Jewish heritage themed excursions and onboard activities.

For example, in **Strasbourg, France**, guests can choose from an exclusive "Do as the Locals Do" Strasbourg walking tour; an exclusive guided "Let's Go" Strasbourg by bicycle; or Jewish Heritage, **Alsace's** Jewish past. Among ports visited are **Speyer, Frankfurt, Cologne and Oberwesel (Bacharach) Germany**; the latter is an ancient village with a storybook feel.

Mekong Majesty: For those seeking an in-depth experience in Southeast Asia, one 2018-2019 option is Scenic Cruises' 17-day "Highlights of Vietnam, Cambodia & Luxury Mekong" itinerary between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. It begins in Hanoi with touring and a two-night **Halong Bay** cruise on the *Au Co*, before guests take a flight to **Siem Reap, Cambodia**, for a three-night stay and touring of Angkor. They then board the *Scenic Spirit* at **Kampong Chan**.

Guests visit small villages, temples and agricultural areas before arriving in **Phnom Penh** to explore the **Grand Palace**, and on another day head for the **Killing Fields** or participate in a **Khmer** cooking demonstration. Another option is a fun Tuk Tuk tour of Phnom Penh's colonial buildings and Central Market. Then, *Scenic Spirit* sails to **Tan Chau**, where guests can visit farmers on **Evergreen Island** and take a ride in a **Xe Loi**, a bicycle-driven pedicab.

Alternatively, they can board a speedboat and visit **Chau Doc's** market, a family-operated fish farm and the waterfront area. Another option this day is to visit **Tra Su Bird Sanctuary**. At **Sa Dec** in the **Mekong Delta**, guests will stop for tea at the home of **Huynh Thuy Le** who inspired **Marguerite Duras'** novel "L'Amant". Then the cruise concludes in **Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon)** for a two-night stay.

Yangtze Discount Deal: Let the Sinophiles among your clientele know that **Victoria Cruises** has a money-saving fall promotion on its four-day Chongqing to Yichang sailings on China's Yangtze River and also the five-day reverse itinerary. Guests who book the line's shore excursion package by November 30 qualify for a buy one / get one free deal for Superior Cabins or 40 percent off per person for Executive Suites. Offer is valid on new bookings only.

Blue Danube: New for 2018 is a robust Tauck itinerary; the 14-day "Royal Danube, Berlin & Krakow" itinerary, which begins with an included three-night hotel stay in **Berlin** at the **Hotel Adlon Kempinski**; two days of guided Tauck sightseeing are included. Guests then travel by high-speed train to **Nürnberg**, where they'll embark Tauck's *Savor* riverboat to begin a seven-night cruise along the Danube that calls at **Kelheim, Straubing, Linz, Krems** and the **Wachau Valley** before arriving in **Vienna**.

Along the way, guests have a choice of sightseeing — ranging from history-focused excursions exploring **World War II** to a walking tour of Jewish heritage sites to a visit to a **BMW** automobile factory. The itinerary concludes in **Krakow, Poland**, with an included three-night hotel stay, again with guided Tauck sightseeing. From there, guests who so choose can take an optional visit to **Auschwitz**.

For the coming year, Tauck is ramping up its shore excursions, adding a second option in many locations to give its guests a choice of experiences to better match their interests.

Many other lines also sail the Danube, including **Riviera Travel**, a well-known U.K. river cruise operator now promoting and selling cruises within the North American market. In 2018, it will operate a seven-day **Blue Danube** cruise roundtrip from **Budapest** on multiple vessels including the 169-passenger *Thomas Hardy*.



Avalon Waterways offers an 11-day “From the Inca Empire to the Peruvian Amazon” itinerary; giving guests a chance to visit Machu Picchu.

Amazon Adventure: If clients have “been there, done that” in Europe, they may want to experience a South American cruise. *Avalon Waterways* offers “From the Inca Empire to the Peruvian Amazon,” an 11-day cruise roundtrip from Lima. Guests will take a guided tour of Lima’s Larco Herrera Museum and sit down to a special welcome dinner in an ornate family-owned mansion.

They’ll then fly to Cusco and descend into the Sacred Valley of the Incas for guided tours of the ceremonial site of Kenko and the Temple of Sacsayhuaman. The highlight for most travelers is Machu Picchu, built around 1450 at the height of the Inca Empire atop a mountain.

Next, cruisers will fly to Iquitos to begin their Amazon cruise onboard the 44-guest *Delfin III*, which features four different styles of suites with floor-to-ceiling picture windows. Guests will sip fine wine, dine on Peruvian cuisine, and experience all-inclusive features and naturalist-guided panga rides through the river tributaries. Guests also can swim with pink dolphins, visit small native villages and more.

Into Africa: For those with a bucket list item of seeing African wildlife in their natural habitats, CroisiEurope will take clients into Southern Africa with 12-day itinerary that visits South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia. This adventure includes a Chobe River cruise, a stay at CroisiEurope's lodge, land-and-water safaris and a visit to Victoria Falls. Weather permitting, guests will take a helicopter ride over the falls.

A highlight is heading out on small boats for encounters with animals that dot the shores. Guests will sail on the new *African Queen*, built in 2017. It has eight cabins (six suites and two suites with a balcony); all open to the outside. It features a panoramic lounge, bar and restaurant, as well as a large observation deck.

Myanmar Dreams: Those who've been to Asia may not have been to the Irrawaddy Delta in Myanmar. *Pandaw* offers a seven-night cruise roundtrip from Rangoon with no single supplement on select dates. This travels to off-the-beaten-path territory where guests will explore the country's wetlands, creeks and channels.

For example, on day four, guests will take a morning cruise along the great Bassein River. Bassein is the delta's capital and an important seaport. Highlight? Monk's waxed cloth umbrellas are made here and guests will explore the town, shrines and vibrant market.

Ooh La La Paris: Emerald Waterways offers a "Paris & Sensations of Southern France" itinerary, a 10-day journey between Paris and Nice, on the Rhone / Saone. Guests arrive in Paris for two days, then head to Lyon where they board their cruise, and travel to Chalon-Sur-Saone and Beaune, Macon, Tournon, Avignon and disembark at Arles. In Arles, guests will take a walking tour that includes the exterior of the old Roman Amphitheatre, originally built to accommodate 20,000 spectators.



Emerald Waterways' Panorama Balcony Suites afford expansive views on its "Paris & Sensations of Southern France" cruise and other itineraries.

Christmas Markets: From holiday markets with handicrafts to hot mulled wine and gingerbread cookies, November and December are magical times in cities with annual Christmas markets. **Crystal River Cruises'** new *Crystal Mahler* is among the options for seven- or nine-day getaways exploring Europe's Christmas markets along the Danube, Rhine and Main Rivers. This vessel sails later this year from Amsterdam, Budapest or Nuremberg. Onboard, Crystal's guests will dine on farm-to-table cuisine with many regional specialties. They also receive unlimited fine wines, champagnes, premium spirits, beers and unlimited soft drinks and bottled water in-suite. In addition, guests can order room service 24 hours a day, including selections from Waterside Restaurant. All accommodations are suites with a king-sized bed; all have butler service.

Other river cruise lines also ply the world's waterways. Increasingly, demand is strong and agents can expect new experiences and operators as the market continues to grow.