



Cruises

## The Ultimate Guide to River Cruises – Where to Go and Who to Book With

by [Pat Richardson](#) | Oct 14, 2017 9:00am



*The Rhine // Photo by Harald007/iStock/Getty Images Plus/Getty Images*

**by Pat Richardson, *The Telegraph*, October 13, 2017**

### Why choose a river cruise?

For an unforgettable immediate, immersive and intimate travel experience river cruising is hard to beat. River cruises don't just take you into a country, they let you get under its skin and feel its pulse and see its scenery and sights close up. As you sail at a pleasingly easy pace you're cocooned in comfort, with attentive staff at your service and the convivial company of like-minded fellow passengers.

This, too, is what a river cruise delivers: not just a convenient, hassle-free package that includes transportation to and through the country, or countries, on your chosen route; but also, travelling with you every day, a 'floating hotel' with lounge, bar and restaurant, outdoor space and leisure facilities, and all of it only a short walk from your en-suite bedroom door.

Think of it as a luxury hotel on the river.

All travel and excursion arrangements are made for you and you can soak up passing scenery from your room, balcony (if you have one), the extensive windows in your ship's lounge or the sun deck for those 260-degree panoramas. You'll only unpack once and dress codes are informal (though some like to go a little more glamorous at dinner). Life on board will also include some evening entertainment from the resident musician or, on occasion, local performers; and perhaps also itinerary-linked talks and lectures, such as wine or cheese and cooking demonstrations to enrich your river-cruise experience.

As with ocean cruising accommodation and meals are always included in the fare. Some river companies include drinks served with meals (some also include drinks ordered from the bar), shore excursions and gratuities in the up-front price you pay for your cruise. Others include some but not all of these; there may be optional excursions or special-menu meals served in an alternate dining venue, for which a charge is made.

- [Browse and book your next river cruise](#)

### **Top tips for choosing a cruise**

Look for a river or route that features what interests you most

List what you hope to see and do, then find an itinerary to match

Pick a ship with the level of comforts and services you'll enjoy

When comparing prices, check what is and isn't included

Shoulder-season dates are often cheaper and mean no crowds at key sights - but some may be closed

Pack comfortable walking shoes for exploring

Gym on board? Take workout gear and trainers. Pool too? Pack a swimsuit

When ashore, to see and learn more join an expert-guided tour

When exploring independently research beforehand and pack a map

Give advance notice of dietary requirements

[Cruise secrets: 12 things you didn't know about holidays at sea](#)

## Where can river cruises take you?

The world is your oyster. On Europe's rivers, you can cruise in France on the Seine, [Rhône](#), Dordogne and Garonne; in Germany on the Elbe and the Rhine, which also flows through The Netherlands, France and Switzerland. The Danube also flows through Germany as well as Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria. In Italy you can cruise on the Po; in Portugal, on the [Douro](#); in Russia on the Volga.

- [View Telegraph Travel's selection of river cruises in Europe](#)

Culture seekers will find the most fulfilling itineraries on the Seine, [Rhine](#), [Danube](#), Elbe, Po and Volga. History buffs will find castles in the Rhine's Gorge and palaces all along the Danube. Explore Russia's pre-revolution Imperial splendour on the Volga, where river cruises sail from Moscow to St Petersburg.

Oenophiles will find plenty to raise their glasses to on the Rhône's route from Burgundy-to-Provence, or vice-versa) route; on the Bordeaux wine region's Dordogne and Garonne rivers and on the Douro, best known for port. Finally, foodies are well catered for on Rhône, which flows through Lyon, France's capital of gastronomy, and the Seine, which winds through flavour-rich Normandy.

For show-stopping scenery, there's the gentle Moselle, the Danube's Wachau Valley, or the remarkable rock formations in so-called 'Saxon Switzerland'. For city sights, choose a round-trip from Paris Seine cruise; the Elbe, which flows through Dresden; and the Danube, most cruises include Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest, those which go all the way to the Black Sea also call at Belgrade and Bucharest.

You could go further than Europe, and cruise Ancient Egypt's highway, the Nile, see temples, pyramids and the timeless tapestry of daily life unfolding on its banks.

## Why not take a Christmastime cruise?

If your idea of Christmas bliss is not putting decorations up or a traditional lunch on the table, you could spend December 25th afloat, surrounded by Christmas-card scenery, and towns and villages all a-sparkle. If you spend Christmas Day on a river cruise in Europe, your itinerary may also include stopping at a Christmas market or two on the way. If you don't want to be away on December 25, take a Christmas markets cruise on the Rhine or the Danube instead. With a wealth of festive sights, sounds, fragrances and flavours, they'll recreate almost-forgotten treasures and pleasures of Christmases past. Cross gifts off your list and stock up on seasonal foods.

Plan ahead: festive cruises sell out fast.

- [Book your festive river cruise today](#)

## Tips for a Christmas markets cruise

If you can, browse and buy in daylight; go after dark to eat, drink and experience the magic

Take with you a sturdy shopping bag and some bubble-wrap for breakables

Not all stall holders process card payments so carry small-denomination notes

## Do exotic destinations appeal?

Cruise a river in Asia. It's a very different world, with unfamiliar landscapes, languages, music, dress, architecture, food, religious beliefs, flora and fauna, so pack your sense of adventure. A river cruise is a great introduction to a region where the local infrastructure can be challenging. The Mekong flows serenely through Buddhist Cambodia and dizzyingly busy Vietnam. The Irrawaddy uncovers Burma's tranquillity, temples and a rural way of life that is relatively untouched. The Yangtze gives a glimpse of China's bustling cities and ancient monuments and offers an insight into one of the world's most dramatic dam structures. The Ganges, India's most sacred river, mirrors the daily cycle of life and death and it all goes on before your eyes.

A word of warning | What might I not read in the brochures?

- [Best river cruises in Asia](#)

## Who to cruise with?

River operators include: AmaWaterways, Emerald Waterways, Scenic, Arena Travel, Newmarket Holidays, Uniworld, Avalon Waterways, Riviera Travel, U by Uniworld, Viking, A-Rosa, CroisiEurope and Fred Olsen.

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