



RIVER CRUISE

Sailing beyond Christmas markets on Europe's rivers

By [Michelle Baran](#) / October 24, 2017

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Several holiday cruises set sail from picturesque Strasbourg. *Photo Credit: HUANG Zheng/Shutterstock.com*

Anyone who has ever been to Europe during the holiday season knows that the Continent explodes with charming holiday markets and craft fairs, something river cruise lines have built into an important piece of winter business with their popular Christmas market cruises.

The most traditional holiday routes sail along the Danube and Rhine rivers, which are dotted with picture-book towns that host impressively festive markets during Advent, or the four weeks leading up to Christmas. The markets typically feature a jolly atmosphere, live music, seasonal delicacies and the opportunity to shop for holiday gifts.

There are some standouts, such as Strasbourg, which hosts one of the oldest Christmas markets in Europe, and Vienna's Christkindlmarkt in front of the city's town hall, which boasts stands that sell everything from pretzels to pastries, from crafts to candles.

As delightful as these classic Christmas market cruises are, there are other options for sailing between November and January that go beyond the merriment flanking the Rhine and Danube.

For instance, Viking River Cruises offers holiday-themed sailings in the Bordeaux region, on France's Seine and Rhone rivers, on Portugal's Douro River and on the Elbe River for a sailing between Berlin and Prague.

French river cruise line CroisiEurope has also added a holiday season sailing in France's Provence region, which departs Lyon on Dec. 21 and stops in Viviers, Montelimar and Avignon before returning to Lyon on Dec. 25. CroisiEurope also hosts holiday river cruises on the Elbe and the Loire; in Bordeaux and Venice; and from Paris to Normandy.



Uniworld offers a holiday sailing out of Paris on the Seine River.

Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection offers an eight-day Parisian Royal Holiday sailing from Paris to Rouen and back.

These alternate holiday cruises often include plenty of Christmas markets and holiday-themed festivities. For instance, Uniworld's Parisian Royal Holiday cruise includes a visit to the Christmas market in Rouen and an option to go Christmas shopping at some of Paris' oldest department stores. And the destinations themselves are all decked out in holiday decor, no matter where you go.

Regardless of the route, there are usually themed activities onboard during this time of year. Viking touts that guests on its holiday cruises will be given the option to bake gingerbread cookies, help decorate the ship's Christmas tree and enjoy regional holiday music onboard.

There is also the option to ring in the new year onboard a river cruise, with the river lines that do it typically hosting a New Year's party on Dec. 31. CroisiEurope offers several New Year's cruises, including on the Rhine, the Danube, the Loire, the Rhone and in and around Venice. Uniworld offers a 13-day Grand Christmas and New Year's itinerary along the Danube, which sails from Nuremburg, Germany, to Budapest, and hosts New Year's at the Palais Daun Kinsky in Vienna with a festive dinner and private concert.

Holiday season river cruises are typically priced lower than their nonholiday counterparts.