

[Home](#) > [Cruise News](#) > [Latest River Cruise Trends: Millennials and More Activities](#)

Latest River Cruise Trends: Millennials and More Activities

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(5 p.m. GMT) -- Cycling, kayaking, hiking, jogging tours, golf and ships to attract younger travellers are all part of new-look river cruises, according to the world's largest cruise industry association.

Often seen as a market geared toward older passengers with excursions confined to sedate walking tours, active cruises were flagged up as one of the hottest trends in river cruising at the CLIA (Cruise Lines International Association) UK & Ireland River Cruise Convention held in Amsterdam over the weekend.

Giles Hawke, deputy chair of CLIA and CEO of tour operator Cosmos, said: "River cruising is the fastest growing sector of cruising, and one-third of all river ships have been built in the last 10 years. Looking ahead, one of the hottest trends is the growth in more active river cruises aimed at passengers who want to go cycling, running, hiking and take part in other activities while they cruise. The other really exciting innovation is the launch of U by Uniworld, which has been designed to attract a totally new demographic to river cruising."

The groundbreaking new line for 21- to 45-year-olds debuts in April 2018 with sailings on the Rhine Main, Danube and Seine. Voyages will take place aboard two existing Uniworld ships, renamed The A and The B, have been totally refurbished with a head-turning jet black exterior and contemporary decor.

Ellen Bettridge, president and CEO of Uniworld, admitted a lot of people are watching the line but pointed out that the millennial generation is one of the largest in history, and research had shown they were interested in taking river cruises with overnight stays in cities with a lively club and bar scene, such as Amsterdam, aboard ships featuring onboard mixologists, silent discos and healthy dining choices, such as vegan and vegetarian food.

She also revealed that Uniworld was considering launching more U by Uniworld ships in Asia, flagged up at the conference as one of the top river cruise destinations for 2018, along with Germany, France and [Russia](#).

Andy Harmer, SVP membership & director, CLIA UK & Ireland, said river cruising had been given a lead by the huge growth and changes seen in ocean cruising over the last couple of decades.

"In 2007, 180,000 passengers from the UK went on an ocean cruise, and that is the same number of people that now go on a river cruise," he said. "River cruising has become much more imaginative, with innovations to attract passengers looking for speciality dining, a choice of restaurants and more experiences and activities. River cruises now offer the type of things you would get on other holidays."

With the UK river cruise market growing 11 percent year-on-year, the convention heard about the raft of new ships that will be launched in 2018 to cope with demand.

On [European rivers](#), they include Amadeus River Cruises' Amadeus Queen, the first ship in the fleet to have an indoor swimming pool with a retractable roof, and CroisiEurope's [Elbe Princesse II](#), the line's second vessel on the Elbe with modern paddlewheel technology to deal with the river's low water levels. Ocean line Crystal is continuing its expansion in the river cruise world with two new sister ships, [Crystal Debussy](#) and [Crystal Ravel](#).

The boom in cruises on the Mekong will see Asia specialist Pandaw launch the 28-passenger colonial-style Sabel Pandaw, CroisiEurope unveil 62-passenger [Indochine II](#) and Avalon Waterways debut 36-passenger Avalon Saigon.

Europe continues to be the main river cruise destination, accounting for 80 percent of all sailings, and the convention heard that 73 percent of river cruise passengers had previously been on an ocean cruise.

--By Jeannine Williamson, *Cruise Critic* contributor