



# A River of New Cruise Options



*River lines add new vessels, itineraries, onboard programming options and excursions.*

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PHOTO: Various Viking River Cruises riverboat classes moored together. (photo by Jason Leppert)

River cruise operators are upping the ante on options designed to appeal to a broad range of tastes and budgets. You'll find options for families, luxury and adventure travelers, and clients operating on tighter budgets.

Here's a look at what's new and noteworthy on the river cruise front:

## **Adventures by Disney**

These family-friendly trips are offered in partnership with AmaWaterways. In 2018, Adventures by Disney will operate 15 departures on three itineraries. The seven-night Rhine River cruise, which will include “Beauty and the Beast” themed activities in 2018, sails through France, Germany, Switzerland and The Netherlands. The seven-night Danube River cruise visits Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. There also are two 2017 Christmas Market cruises.

## **AmaWaterways**

AmaWaterways this year launched a wellness program on the AmaLyra’s “Paris & Normandy” sailings. The program—led by an onboard “Sports Scientist”—features four to six classes daily, including morning stretches, jogging, yoga, cardio and core strengthening and circuit training. Activities will be complemented by discussion groups with a focus on healthy eating and relaxation techniques.

AmaWaterways expects to expand the wellness program to more ships during 2018. There will be even more fitness opportunities on the company’s newest ship, now under construction, the AmaMagna, which will be twice as wide as traditional European vessels. Therefore, it will have space for a retractable watersports platform and larger fitness and spa facilities upon its debut in 2019.

AmaWaterways expanded its relationship in 2017 with Backroads – a company specializing in active vacations – and now offers more than 50 active departures in various river cruise destinations.

## **American Cruise Lines**

This small-ship specialist plans to build five modern riverboats. At 345 feet long and 60 feet wide, the new riverboats will feature large staterooms, private balconies, hotel-size bathrooms and four-story atriums.

Carrying 200 passengers, the first riverboat is scheduled to begin passenger service on the Lower Mississippi River in fall 2018. Cruises on the Columbia and Snake rivers aboard the new riverboats are slated to begin during 2019.

American Cruise Lines is offering more inclusions. All guests traveling on the Mississippi and Columbia rivers get a complimentary pre-cruise package, which includes a hotel stay and transportation to the ship.

### **American Queen Steamboat Company**

The Memphis-based owner and operator of the American Queen and American Empress was scheduled at press time to christen the new American Duchess in mid-August.

The company recently purchased an American-made hull that was converted into the new riverboat. The 166-guest American Duchess will sail on the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

The American Duchess will have three 550-square-foot Owner's Suites, four 550-square-foot Loft Suites, Veranda Suites and Interior Suites. The new vessel will have two dining venues.

### **Aqua Expeditions**

This company is collaborating with Jean-Michel Cousteau, a champion of ocean conservation and environmental protection. He will host five voyages in 2017 and 2018 on the 32-passenger Aria Amazon and 40-guest Aqua Mekong.

Each voyage will include evening talks with Cousteau and screenings of several of his films.

Guests will learn about Cousteau's experiences exploring the Amazon and other remote areas around the world. Cousteau will sail on the Aqua Mekong's Mekong River voyages Sept. 15-22, Feb. 23-March 2 and Sept. 14-21. He will be on the Aria Amazon sailings Feb. 9-16 and Oct. 5-12.

### **Avalon Waterways**

In 2018, Avalon Waterways will add a new ship and new itineraries in Asia, and expand its Active Discovery cruises from the Danube to Rhine.

### **CroisiEurope**

The company introduced four river vessels in Europe and Asia this year, with a fifth set to debut on Africa itineraries in December.

The 132-passenger MS Miguel Torga joined four CroisiEurope sister ships on itineraries that sail Portugal's Douro River. The 110-passenger MS Symphonie II and France Douce II are sailing on Danube and Rhine River cruises.

The 60-passenger RV Indochine II will join four sister ships on Mekong River cruises in August, on 11- and 14-day cruises between Siem Reap, Cambodia, and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

In December, CroisiEurope will introduce the 16-passenger African Dream, the company's first vessel to ply Africa's Chobe and Zambezi Rivers.

### **Crystal River Cruises**

The luxury line is introducing four shorter 2018 itineraries to complement Crystal Mahler's core 16-day "Grand Europe" cruises, which will sail between Amsterdam and Budapest. The vessel is scheduled to make its debut on Sept. 30, 2017, out of Budapest.

The new itineraries include three seven-day "Danube Serenade" voyages that sail between Budapest and Vienna, and an 11-day "Reflections on the Danube" cruise operating between Vienna and Budapest. Departures are available in April and May, with calls at Krems, Spitz, Linz and Melk, Austria, and Bratislava, Slovakia.

### **Emerald Waterways**

Emerald Waterways grew its fleet from four vessels to seven with the debut of Emerald Destiny, Emerald Liberté and Emerald Radiance. Emerald Destiny has been deployed on Rhine, Main and Danube river itineraries.

Emerald Liberté is cruising France's Rhône and Saône rivers on new seven-night "Sensations of Southern France" itineraries from Lyon to Avignon. Sailing roundtrip from Porto, Portugal, Emerald Radiance is plying the waters of the Douro River on seven-night "Secrets of the Douro" cruises.

### **European Waterways**

This luxury hotel barge company is enhancing its culinary theme charter cruises for 2018 on the 12-passenger L'Impressionniste. The company is incorporating more on-location cooking classes and behind-the-scenes tours, as well as exclusive wine, cheese, and gourmet mustard tastings. L'Impressionniste cruises France's Burgundy Canal.

European Waterways also is waiving its single supplement on many barge cruises for the remainder of the 2017 season. The promotion is applicable on the hotel barges Finesse, Anjodi, L'Art de Vivre, Panache, L'Impressionniste and Renaissance in France; La Bella Vita in Italy; and Spirit of Scotland in the Scottish Highlands.

## G Adventures

The company introduced a nine-day “Amazon Adventure” river tour in Peru this year aboard the 30-passenger Amatista roundtrip from Lima. It is one of 20 trips endorsed by anthropologist and primatologist Jane Goodall and is part of G Adventures’ “Jane Goodall Collection.”

The itinerary includes daily excursions by motorized skiffs led by Amazon Reserve naturalists that focus on rainforest wildlife; six days on board the Amatista; and two days exploring the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve. The trip also includes an orientation tour of Iquitos, launches and land excursions, internal flights, all transportation between destinations, and activities and meals.

## French Country Waterways

American-owned and -operated French Country Waterways has been cruising the canals and rivers of France for over 30 years. Its five hotel barges accommodate eight to 18 passengers on six-night cruises. The all-inclusive cruises include gourmet cuisine and wines, many from Grand Cru and Premier Cru vineyards. Passengers visit historic châteaux, medieval villages and vineyards.

## Scenic

The luxury company renovated three of its vessels sailing on southern France and Bordeaux culinary itineraries—Scenic Diamond, Scenic Emerald and Scenic Sapphire—to facilitate the Scenic Culinaire experience, which features cooking emporiums with cooking stations for classes, along with cheese and wine cellars.

The facelifts also included the addition of salt therapy rooms, workout rooms, spa rooms and whirlpools on sundecks.

The vessel’s voyages feature excursions designed for foodies, including meals at Michelin-starred restaurants and visits to local markets. Itineraries include “Tastes of Southern France” and “Tastes of Bordeaux” itineraries. In 2018, Scenic will increase the number of its southern France and Bordeaux itineraries.

Scenic also unveiled a Deposit Protection Plan, which enables guests who need to cancel or change their plans to reallocate nonrefundable deposits toward future sailings.

## Tauck

The company is set to debut two new Danube and Rhine itineraries in 2018: the 14-day “Royal Danube, Berlin & Krakow” and the 11-day “Rhine Enchantment, Milan to Amsterdam.” Tauck will also combine its “Rhône,” “French Waterways” and “A Taste of France” voyages to create the 10-day “Savoring France: Paris, Lyon & Provence,” which includes two nights in Paris.

Next year, Tauck will complete a two-year renovation project, which reconfigures half of its fleet, when the MS Treasures and MS Esprit re-enter service. The refit will decrease the vessel's capacity from 118 to 98 guests.

## Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection

The luxury line plans to target a new river cruise demographic—travelers ages 21 to 45—with U by Uniworld, which will debut in Europe during spring 2018. Two Uniworld vessels will be renamed The A and The B and accommodate 120 passengers. They will feature open communal public areas, rooftop lounges, nightclubs and yoga studios. U by Uniworld will operate on the Rhine, Main, Danube and Seine rivers.

In 2018 the company will debut the nine-day “Remarkable Rhine” itinerary, which will showcase Jewish history and culture. The cruise will visit ports in The Netherlands, Germany, France and Switzerland.

## Viking River Cruises

Viking marked its 20th anniversary with the introduction of two new Longships—the Viking Hild and Viking Herja. The Viking fleet now has more than 60 river vessels.

Viking Hild sailed the Rhine River on the new “Paris to the Swiss Alps” itinerary in the spring and then joined the Herja on the “Rhine Getaway” itinerary.

Viking also recently announced it was renovating a Nile River vessel in Egypt. The Viking Ra was stripped down to the steel to undergo a complete renovation that will reflect Viking's Scandinavian design. The 48-guest ship will operate a new 12-day Egypt cruise in March 2018.

*Theresa Norton also contributed to this piece.*