

A Guide to River Cruising



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Introduction

River cruises are a perfect way to experience different cities and cultures that large ships can't access. Rivers take you into the heart of the country where one can experience ever-changing landscapes and scenery in a relaxing, leisurely and intimate way. Ships tie up right in town, where you can walk to local shops, a sidewalk café, meet locals, take a bike ride, head off on the ship's organized tours or simply explore the area on your own. Perfect for solo travelers, couples, friends, families and groups with shared interests.

Cruises range from 3 days to several weeks and are often combined with land tours to enhance the overall experience. A wide range of itineraries are available all over the world, including many themed cruises that focus on culinary and cultural events.

River cruising is growing in popularity and new ships are being added every year. This guide is designed to provide an introduction to river cruising: The top benefits of river cruising, what to expect onboard as well as onshore, the rivers where the top cruise companies have itineraries and some insider tips to help make your experience even better.

Contact Lakama Travel to learn even more about river cruising.



TOP REASONS Why People Choose River Cruises

OVERALL VALUE

The all-inclusive nature of a river cruise provides exceptional value. Meals, beverages, Wi-Fi, shore excursions, entertainment and of course accommodations are all part of the package.

THE DESTINATIONS

River cruises are available all over the world. They take you in to the heart of the country, to places less traveled and off the beaten path.

DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCES

River cruises offer experiences to match all tastes. Visit castles, palaces and temples, experience the local culture, walk through history.

RELAXED, LEISURELY TRAVEL

River cruising is relaxed, and allows you to see the country in a leisurely fashion. Watch the ever changing scenery, socialize with new found friends - the amount of activity is totally up to you.

FLEXIBILITY IN SIGHTSEEING

Daily shore excursions are included. Passengers can choose to go on the escorted tours, explore an area on their own or relax and stay onboard.

INTIMATE ENVIRONMENT

Leave the crowds behind. River cruises have fewer passengers than the big ocean ships, making it amore intimate and friendly environment.

GREAT FOR FOODIES

River cruises pride themselves on their fine dining and wine options. Regional specialties and fresh, local ingredients make for great culinary experiences.

COMFORT AND STYLE

Leave the hassle of unpacking and packing behind. Cruise in comfort and style and enjoy new destinations each day.

NO SEASICKNESS

Rivers are calm and provide a smooth sailing.

The Basics

Who cruises?

River cruises draw people with varied travel experiences. River cruisers include a mix of past river cruisers, avid ocean cruisers, people who enjoy tours and independent travelers who are seeking an all-inclusive package.

Passenger Mix

River cruises are popular and attract passengers from all over the world. Depending on the line and itinerary, the passenger mix can vary, from decidedly European to primarily North American, a mix of English speaking like the UK, New Zealand, Australia and the US, or a truly international mix.

What is included

River cruises are popular in large part due to the all-inclusive value. The definition varies between companies, but accommodations, all meals on board, most non-alcoholic beverages, shore excursions and Wi-Fi are all included. Some lines also include all beverages, premium excursions and gratuities.

Excursions

One of the draws of river cruising are the excursions. An excursion per day is normally included, and some companies offer multiple or premium excursions as part of their experience. Optional tours may be offered for an additional fee. No worries though –leisure time is always included as well.

Dining

Breakfast and lunch are buffet style or a la carte. Some lines have quick food venues for lunch or an afternoon snack. Dinner is normally a sit down event in the main or specialty dining venues. Dining emphasizes local cuisine and regional dishes served with local beers, wine and soft drinks.

Onboard Entertainment

Onboard entertainment is low key, especially in comparison to the lively entertainment on board big ships. Educational lectures, local artisans and musicians and variety of demonstrations may all be part of schedule.

Cabins

Cabin categories are available to suit almost every taste and budget. Most if not all cabins have windows – some with port holes or picture windows, others with wall to wall windows, French or walk out balconies. Cabins range in size, from single cabins to large suites.

Onboard Amenities

Each line offers a different set of onboard amenities, which may include fitness areas, a swimming pool, whirlpool, sauna, spa services and bicycles. Some lines provide I-pads in the staterooms.

Beverage Policies

Wine, beer and soft drinks are included during lunch and/or dinner. Coffee, tea and bottled water are complimentary all day. Some lines include complimentary drinks all day; others offer premium beverage packages and spirits for purchase. Be sure to check policy details.

Attire

Attire is country club casual – no formal nights. Some exclusive events may require a sport coat or cocktail dress.

Gratuities

Gratuity policies vary by company. Some include gratuities as part of their all inclusive fare, while others bill at the end of the cruise. Some ask that you tip the tour guides directly.

Smoking

Smoking is generally not allowed anywhere inside the ship at any time. Most ships have designated smoking areas, often located on the uppermost deck.

What is Not Included

Unless part of a package or otherwise stated, the following items are generally not included: Port Charges, airfare to and from your home city, optional premium shore excursions, discretionary gratuities to vessel crew and tour operators, travel insurance and transfers to and from the airport.

Q & A

What are the popular rivers?

Popular itineraries include the Danube and Rhine, especially for first time cruisers. The Seine, Rhone and Saone in France are also popular, especially with wine lovers and history buffs.

When is a good time to go?

River cruises are available year round.

European cruises run Mar – Dec. The popular summer months can be busy and crowded. Shoulder season, Mar - May and Sep - Nov, offers a nice alternative for those seeking fewer crowds and cooler weather. Spring is the optimum time to see the tulips in Belgium and Holland. Late Nov – Dec offers the wonders of the holidays and magical Christmas markets.

The best time to cruise in Asia depends on the destination. **Mekong River** cruises in Vietnam and Cambodia run year round. The dry season, Nov – Feb is also high season. Low water can happen Apr – Jun. **Yangtze** cruises in China run May - Oct. Spring and fall are the most comfortable. **Irrawaddy River** cruises in Myanmar run Sep – Apr. The best time is Nov - Feb. **Ganges** cruises in India run Sep – Apr. The best time to

visit is the dry season, Oct – Mar.

In Egypt, one can cruise **the Nile River** year round. Oct - Apr are the best months as temperatures are more tolerable.

In Botswana, **Chobe River** cruises are best taken Apr - Oct. This is the dry season when wildlife viewing is at its best.

Amazon River cruises run most of the year. Apr - Nov is slightly drier, but still humid.

In the US, **Mississippi** cruises run year round, though the northern routes are not available in the winter months. Spring and fall tend to be less humid than the summer. Snake and Columbia River cruises run Mar – Nov with all months being lovely.

Hudson River, Great Lakes, St. Lawrence River and northeast inland waterways cruises run May - Oct. Fall itineraries highlight the beautiful fall foliage. Southern waterways and Florida river cruises run Nov – Apr.

When should I book?

With river cruising becoming more popular, bookings are being made earlier than in the recent past. Many summer month bookings are being made 12 months in advance to guarantee the itinerary and cabin of choice. Most bookings are made 6-9 months of the sailing. Group bookings should be made as far in advance as possible.

Mobility Challenged

In Europe, the cobblestone streets, narrow walkways and stairs can be tricky. This is true in most other destinations as well. Ships may also tie up in town side by side (called rafting), which means one must walk across a number of ships to get on shore.

Ships offer few accessible cabins, and elevators are not always available. Most ships only accommodate collapsible wheelchairs.

Most lines do offer easy walking options. It is best to speak with your Travel Consultant to discuss specific needs.

Will I be bored?

Doubtful. River cruises are port intensive, thus providing many opportunities to experience on-shore activities. From leisurely walks in town to biking or going on the organized excursions, river cruises offer plenty of options.

Travelers also have plenty of opportunity to simply enjoy the scenery, read a book, socialize with fellow passengers or listen to an on-board lecture. Evenings include on-board entertainment.

Are river cruises a good option for families?

River cruises are great for family travel, and especially multi-generational travel. River cruises offer many opportunities to see and learn about new destinations, culture and foods.

Some lines have special programs specifically for families. The key is knowing the needs of your children and what types of activities are ideal for them.

RIVER CRUISE DESTINATIONS

REGION	COUNTRY	RIVER
AFRICA	Botswana	Chobe
	Egypt	Nile
ASIA	Cambodia / Vietnam	Mekong
	China	Yangtze
	India	Ganges
	Myanmar	Irrawaddy
EUROPE	France	Dordogne, Garonne, Gironde, Loire, Rhone, Saone, Seine
	Germany	Elbe, Main
	Italy	Po
	Portugal	Douro
	Russia	Volga
	Multi	Danube, Mosel, Rhine
SOUTH AMERICA	Brazil / Peru	Amazon
NORTH AMERICA	Canada	St. Lawrence Seaway
	USA	Columbia
		Great Lakes
		Hudson
		Intercoastal
		Mississippi / Ohio
Snake		



Insider Tips

Cruise Lines

Each cruise brand has its unique offerings. The key to a great cruise experience is choosing the right line and itinerary. With over 15 different lines to choose from, finding the right match can be confusing. Rivers cruises are not equal – work with a cruise expert to find the best option for you.

Groups

Most cruise lines offer benefits for groups, including complimentary travel or reduced rates across the group. Group sizes vary, but average around 10 paying passengers. Lakama Travel can help you maximize benefits and amenities that may be available for groups.

Businesses

Lakama Travel partners with businesses who want unique offerings and want to build loyalty with their customer base. Contact Lakama Travel to find out more about these joint partnerships.

Fares

Don't choose a cruise based on the fare alone. Many different factors make up the fares for each cruise line, thus it is important to understand the differences before making a choice.

Solo Travelers

A number of lines have no or reduced single supplements on all or a portion of their itineraries. Check with your travel consultant for availability.

Don't miss the best scenery

When on board ship, find out from your cruise director where and more importantly when you will be cruising through the most picturesque or interesting stretches of the river. Plan to be on the sun deck or observation lounge so you don't miss the best scenery!

Likewise, do some research before your trip to find out if there are any special events happening in the ports on the days you will be there. You may want to explore the town on your own versus taking the guided tour.

Trip Direction

The direction of the cruise can have an impact on the amount of time is a certain port. Direction should also be a consideration if observing the scenery from your stateroom is important.

Clothing

Be prepared for rain. You are in town for only a few hours, so you need to make the best of the time. As the saying goes "There is no such thing as bad weather. Only bad clothes." Similarly, it goes without saying, bring a good, comfortable pair of walking shoes.

Wi-Fi

Internet service is free, however service can be spotty, especially when moving through certain stretches of the river. It can also be rather slow when other passengers are trying to use the internet, using up much of the available bandwidth.

Electrical Voltage

Most ships are 220V but check with the specific line. In most cases you will need an adaptor or convertor plug.

Insider Tips

Gratuities

Each cruise line has their own policy around tipping staff and tour guides. Some lines are truly all-inclusive with all gratuities included, while others have you pay staff gratuities at the end of the cruise and tour tips each time you take an excursion. Check with your travel advisor for additional details.

High Water / Low Water

Yes, high water or flooding and low water situations can cause disruptions to a river cruise, similar to hurricanes causing disruptions to ocean cruises. Depending on the situation, ships might be swapped out (passengers are transferred to another ship), ports might be dropped or a river cruise could turn into a bus tour. Flexibility is the key in these situations. The good news is that 99% of the time cruises go off without a hitch.

Themes

Many of the cruise lines offer themed sailings, including wine and beer, art, golf and cultural heritage tours. The sailings generally offer extra or unique excursions, food demos, winery and brewery tours, special tastings and more. Themed sailings are popular, so bookings should be made as early as possible.



Insider Tips: Top Luxury Cruise Lines

All of the top luxury lines offer exceptional customer service, great accommodations, dining options and daily shore excursions. A great experience is to be had on any of these lines. So how to choose between them? Each brand has its unique offers and itineraries, and slightly different definitions of being all-inclusive. See what resonates based on your needs, and get more details and advice from your travel advisor.

AmaWaterways

AmaWaterways, which started in 2002, is family owned and operated line. They have sixteen ships in Europe, three ships in Asia and one in Africa. They have strategic partnerships with Backroads for active adventure journeys and with Disney Adventures which focuses on family travel. AmaWaterways is the only line that carries more than two dozen bicycles free to use on the European cruises.

- Chef's Table that every guest has the opportunity to enjoy once during their sailing
- Themed cruises including beer, wine, art, Jewish Heritage and Christmas Markets
- Fine wines and beers from the region served during lunch and dinner only
- Gratuities are not included

Scenic Cruises

Scenic Cruises is a privately held Australian company and operates globally. They entered the European river cruise market in 2008 with the launching of their state of the art "space ship" 5- star luxury ships. Scenic has fourteen ships in Europe and one in Asia. Scenic attracts a good mix of passengers from Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., South Africa and the US.

- Butler service in all cabins
- Up to six dining venues
- Electric assisted bikes and GPS devices for self guided tours
- 1-2 special cocktail receptions hosted at majestic locations on each sailing
- In-suite butler service
- Unlimited premium beverages, all gratuities, in suite mini bar all included

Insider Tips: Top Luxury Cruise Lines

Tauck River Cruises

Tauck is known for their exclusive access to unique, behind the scene cultural experiences on shore plus intimate, elegant, and well-staffed riverboats in Europe. They have nine ships in Europe. Tauck is the only cruise line with dedicated multigenerational family cruises. They also offer solo traveler savings on every cruise.

- Top rated by Travel & Leisure for family and multi-generational travel – lots of shared involvement
- Known for their off ship experiences – culturally enriching travel
- Largest number of suites on board versus other lines
- Unique lower level cabin with a raised loft and full sized window – quite nice
- Smaller intimate ships with 116 – 130 passengers
- Absolutely everything is included

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises

Uniworld Cruises are like being in a palace on a river. Each ship has original works by famous painters, craftsmen and designers commissioned exclusively for Uniworld. They have fourteen ships in Europe, one in Africa and three in Asia. Travel and Leisure has named Uniworld as the “Top River Cruise for Families multiple times in recognition of creative and innovative onshore and onboard experiences. Egypt cruises were added in 2015 and India is new for 2016.

- Consistently rated as one of or the top river cruise company by Conde Nast
- Sister company to Red Carnation Hotels
- Old world excellence combined with modern charm
- Each ship is unique – a one of a kind piece of art
- Themed cruises including Europe’s Royal Heritage, French Food and Wine, Christmas Markets and life enriching family adventures
- Smaller intimate ships averaging 130 passengers
- In-suite butler service (starting in 2016)
- Unlimited premium beverages, gratuities all included



**I help you collect memories of a lifetime
through soul stimulating travel focused on
nature/wildlife, culinary and cultural adventures.**

**Lakama Travel specializes in small ship cruising
(river, adventure, expedition, and ocean).**

**Contact us for more information on the right cruise for you.
602.540.7338 or Laurie@lakamatravel.com**

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