

## Frequently Asked European River Cruise Questions and Tips

### Q. Why Should I take a river cruise?

A. A river cruise is, in our opinion, the best way to experience Europe--there is just so much to see! The ships are small and comfortable, and the crew and staff are friendly. Most river cruise lines have good food and wine. Unlike ocean cruises, there is a clear upfront price that includes most of the expenses of the trip--food, wine & beer, excursions, accommodations, snacks, destination talks, free Wi-Fi, and usually local entertainment. There are no inside cabins--all have a view. With all that is included, it is a good value for the money!

### Q. What is the size of a rivership?

A. There are basically 2 sizes of river cruise ships. River cruise ships have some limitations in width & height. To fit under bridges, they generally have only 3 decks. All are usually 38 feet wide. The big difference is their length. There are two types. First are: **Longships** which are 443 feet (135 m). The second are 360 feet long, and they are known as **110 m Class Ships**. River boats are limited in size to insure they will fit into the various locks on European rivers. **How the limited space is used on the vessel is an important factor in your choice of which company to use.**

### Q. Why is river boat ship length important?

A. One of the real subtle differences in river cruising is what the cruise line has on board their ships. For accommodations, this includes # of passenger cabins, what is in the cabin & views from the cabin. Unlike Ocean Cruising, there are no inside cabins, but there is a significant difference in window size & balconies. On board facilities & equipment is another factor that should be considered.

### Q. What is the dress code?

A. River cruising is casual. No formal wear is required. For the dinner meal, most men wear slacks and a nice shirt. Some men will wear a sports coat--maybe a tie for the Captain's dinner, but it is not required or even expected. Maybe the best way to define the dress code is casual elegant for dinner and comfortable day time wear during the day.

### Q. What are meals like?

A. Breakfast and lunch often include a self-service buffet and an option to order from a set menu. There is a full-service dinner with complete waiter service on most cruise lines. The dinner meal is at a set time and often lasts an hour and a half or more. The dinner menu varies between different river cruise lines, as some offer several choices while others have limited selections and may even serve all guests the same meal without any choice. There are no reserved tables, so it is most common you will be sharing your meal with others. The better river cruise lines include beer & wine for lunch and dinner. Some cruise lines have better food than others--according to the Berlitz River Cruising in Europe guide book, AMAWaterways has the best food. It is also our choice for the best food. Some lines have more than one dining facility and offer specialty dining options, which may be available to all guests or restricted to a certain cabin category. There usually is not an extra charge for these dining options.

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### Q. Which European River should I cruise on?

A. I would sail on all of them. Since most folks want to know what are the best starting rivers if they have never taken an European River cruise, by far the two most popular rivers are the Rhine and the Upper Danube. The 820 mile Rhine actually passes through 6 countries, but most folks consider it a German River since so much of its banks are on German soil. The middle Rhine and especially the Rhine River Gorge, have the greatest concentration of scenic banks and castles in all Europe. It never gets old! The Upper Danube is the other great route--typically from Nuremberg or Passau to Budapest. You will get to visit 4 countries, 2 or 3 capital cities (Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest), castles, Abbeys, wine-sloped terraces and even quaint villages--it is a great voyage. Wine lovers should consider the Rhone or Garonne in France or the Douro (Portugal). The lower Danube is the gateway to Eastern Europe. Lesser known routes include the Elbe (Germany) and the Po (Italy). The routes may be very short or may cover larger distances. While there are some variations, many lines cruise the essentially cruise the same route on the most popular European rivers.

### Q. I really do not like guided tours--will I dislike a river cruise?

A. You do not have to go on any tours--stay on the boat if you like. Also, as long as you make it back to the boat before it leaves, explore on your own. Anne & I often break off to visit other places in a port, especially if we have seen the place before. Also several companies have different groups--fast walkers, slow walkers, bike riders or optional tours (sometimes extra fee). We use the cruise ship and the bus rides as an easy way to get to the sights and then participate or break off on our own. If we can walk to the port, which happens a lot on a river cruise, we usually go off on our own--most lines provide maps of the ports.

### Q. What is the best European river cruise company?

A. They all are good, but there are some big differences between companies. Most folks have heard of Viking since they advertise heavily and have 50% of all the river cruise vessels on Europe's rivers. The other lines may not be as well-known but offer great vacations. The best way to determine which cruise line is best for your taste is to compare them on 7 factors. Here are 7 factors to consider when comparing river cruise companies: They are: 1) Quality of the vessels, 2) Accommodations, 3) Cuisine, 4) Service, 5) Shore Excursions; 6) Extras (what is included or not included in the price), and 7) Cost—are you getting the value for your money? Then match the features that are most important to you to get the right match.

### Q. What are the limitations of a River Cruise?

A. Since the river boats often dock in the heart of older European Cities and villages, the older towns are often cobblestoned and require managing a lot of stairs and walking. For a person in a wheel chair, this is a huge problem. The walking distances sometimes are very long, often a couple of miles or so, so folks with limited mobility may have problems. Some companies have a slow walker type tours that can help this problem.

Another limitation is water levels, which can be unpredictable. Sometimes, the levels are too high or low for safe passage. This can result in missed stops or bus rides to the location that is unreachable due to water levels. By far the Elbe River has the most low water situations in Europe.

Another limitation is called rafting by the river boat companies. Rafting means due to limited dock areas, river boats often tie up next to one another. This can cause problems getting off the boat, may cause cabin privacy issues and most importantly, limit the view from outside your cabin.

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Another limitation is the pace of the tours. This is not as big a factor as the other limitations since groups are often split into groups that want a faster paced experience or a slower paced tour and the better lines have optional tours.

**Q. What about Wi-Fi?**

A. Most companies offer Wi-Fi for free. It is not always perfect, as sometimes to get under bridges and in the locks, connections can be lost. Just like in the U.S., it often depends on the tower locations. It also could be slowed down by the number of users. The good news is that the river cruise companies are working hard to improve the speed and quality of Wi-Fi. In our experience, it is much better than it was in 2009 during our first river cruise.

**Q. How should I get ready for my river cruise?**

A. Once you have selected, the right cruise, make sure you determine the highlights and must-sees and exactly when they will happen during your voyage. This might include the most scenic portions of the river, special tours, or places you might want to see on your vacation. It might happen that a particular sight will be visible early in the morning or during a meal. Many cruise companies provide a pocket sized booklet explaining the key sights for the portion of the cruise and some even have a GPS system that can explain sights in a port, so guests can wander on their own. Just make sure you do not miss what you came to see. Fortunately, most cruise lines make a point of informing about points of interest during the trip. Also check to see if the river cruise company has limited tours capacity tours and if they are free or at an additional cost. Please realize that most often, there will be a different starting and ending point for the cruise. This will require at least transfers to transportation or hotel arrangements for a pre/post stay.

**Q. What about pre/post stays—any advice?**

A. Almost all river cruise lines offer a pre/post stay package. Some can be very good but sometimes the land portion may not be as good as the river cruise was. Why? The longer bus rides may seem too much and in smaller towns or sights, the accommodations may not be as good as the level of the cruise ship. But sometimes there are huge advantages and they can save a lot of money and time and when a desired hotel is booked up, the trip may be a great option.

**Q. Can I bring on liquor?**

A. We are unaware of any restrictions about bringing any liquor on board, but most cruise lines will ask you only drink in your room and not consume it in a public portion of the ship. Wine at a meal could require a corkage fee, but some lines just open it and serve it without a problem. It is our experience the staff is very accommodating and seldom will make a big deal about private liquor.

**Q. What about Smoking?**

A. As on all cruise ships, fire is the number one danger to the safety of all. Smoking is not allowed in the cabins or on the balconies. Most ships have a designed smoking area or two on the ship.

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Q. [What about the cabins—are there any differences about them I should consider when deciding about which cabin I should select?](#)

There are no inside cabins on riverboats—they are just too small width-wise to have more than 2 cabins per deck. There are really 4 types of cabins on riverboats. The first type is at the water line and often is a small fixed window, although one company has designed an elevated sitting area for the window. There are usually a small number of these cabins, as a portion of the lowest deck is used for the crew. They are the least expensive but often clients find these cabins not as inviting as the upper deck cabins. Some cruise lines have fixed windows on the upper deck cabins. The second type is a French Balcony type cabin which opens in some fashion. It could be a sliding glass window type or a window type that open all the way up or opens partially. This is an area of major competition between lines. The third type is a balcony area. It could be a complete balcony or a split outside balcony/French balcony. One factor about an outside balcony—the cabins do not get bigger with the balcony, since the riverboat width size is restricted in order to get into the locks, the cabin will lose some square footage taken up by the balcony. This reduction is minimal in most cases. The fourth type of cabin is a suite. Often these have more square footage than other cabins and may even have 2 separate rooms. A word of caution—these are not like the huge cabins on an ocean cruise going ships and some cruise companies call a cabin a suite but it may not really be a true suite. Cabin location is also a consideration, engine noise could be a problem for some. For those with limited mobility, if the ship has an elevator and if it goes to all decks is an important consideration.

Q. [What about bikes for passenger use?](#)

A. Again this is an area of competition between lines. Some do not have bikes or have arrangements to rent bikes at port stops. Other carry bikes, have organized bike tours and even partner with cycling companies to offer special bike-themed cruises. Some even have electric bikes. Even with the cruise lines that carry bikes, they do not have enough for all passengers—20-30 is a standard amount carried on-board.

Q. [What about themed cruises?](#)

A. There are many themed type cruises. The most popular are wine themed cruises. There are art cruises, beer cruises, Christmas cruises, culinary cruises, jazz cruises, knitting cruises, Jewish Heritage cruises, and family-oriented cruises. One has even partnered with Disney to offer and even more special family experience. These will only continue to increase.

Q. [What about Gyms and swimming pools?](#)

A. Some lines have gyms and pools, some do not. Almost all have a walking track on the top deck. The gyms are generally very small, have an exercise bike or two, maybe a treadmill and maybe some weight - equipment. The pools are really different between lines—they range from a hot-tub type pool, to a swim-up bar, to a pool that becomes a movie theater viewing room at night.

Q. [Is there in-room service?](#)

A. There is usually not in-room service, but some lines offer service for their suite guests.

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**Q. What are the most scenic river in Europe?**

A. There is a lot of competition here and personal opinion also is a big factor but many travel writers and critics have selected 4 areas as their favorites. These are (in no particular order): 1) the Rhine River Gorge for its abundance of castles, 2) the Wachau Valley stretch from Durnstein to the Schonbuhl castle on the Danube, 3) Passau, where the 3 rivers converge and 4) the night cruise of Budapest. We have done them all and they are special.

**Q. Who should go on a river cruise?**

A. If you like these features, then river cruising is for you:

- A very spacious river cruise ship that has no more than 190 guests.
- Pack and unpack only once during your 7 or more day cruise.
- Sumptuous accommodations with every conceivable cabin amenity.
- Incredible gourmet cuisine, much of which is prepared when you order it.
- Complimentary wines, beers, sodas and bottled water.
- Many have complimentary small-group sightseeing excursions in every port.
- Some ships have gym, sauna, massage, hairdresser, pool, free internet and free use of bicycles.
- Daily free onboard evening entertainment (usually a piano player, sometimes local groups that come on board).
- Complimentary in-cabin Internet, entertainment systems and free movies.
- Dock right in the center of most towns and it takes only one minute to get on/off the ship.
- Ability to see more of a region and experience the local culture in-depth.
- A resort-casual onboard atmosphere – leave the formal wear at home.
- All staterooms have a river view.
- You should never get seasick on a river cruise ship.
- Impeccable, warm and friendly service by an English-only speaking crew.
- A staff that knows your name and favorite beverage or dining preference by the second day.

**Q. What about tips?**

A. Some cruise lines include tips with the fare; others provide guidelines for tipping the crew and cruise managers.

**Q. Is ownership and number of ships important?**

A. We think so. Too many ships or growing too fast can cause staffing problems. Some owners are very hands on, others let the staff handle operations. We think family-owned companies are best.