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Europe River Cruise Company Comparisons 2022-23

By Hank Schrader
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Europe River Cruise Expert
European Destination Specialist

Overview

- All river cruises are very good values & special trips.
- There is no official rankings of river cruise lines & many have won awards from various travel organizations.
- These are my personal ratings & should be considered as such.
 - My ratings are based on:
 - sailing 21 river cruises, selling river cruises to clients,
 - personal research & attending numerous webinars by these individual companies,
 - earning specialist designations from individual river cruise companies and
 - ratings from The Berlitz River Cruising in Europe & the USA Guide.

Disclaimer

- The river cruise scene is constantly changing.
- I have tried to provide accurate information but changes happen rapidly.
- Also, companies change policies.
- Every effort has been made to communicate correct information. We apologize for any errors, omissions, but assume no liability should they occur.

7 Main River Cruise Companies for the US Market with their Marketing Slogan

- **AMAWaterways**—“Leading the Way in River Cruising”
- **Avalon**-- “Comfortably upscale... more-spacious-than-average-cabins.”
- **Emerald**—sometimes refers to itself as the next generation of river cruising

7 Main River Cruise Companies for the US Market with their Marketing Slogan

- **Scenic** “5-star, all-inclusive luxury river cruises throughout Europe and Asia”
- **Tauck**—“ Never Settle for Ordinary”
- **Uniwold**-- “The world's only authentic boutique cruise line”
- **Viking**– “Exploring the world in comfort”



AMAWATERWAYS™

LEADING THE WAY IN RIVER CRUISING

AMAWATERWAYS Overview

AMAWATERWAY'S dream is to provide the most exceptional river cruise experience possible. They believe they achieve this by:

- Providing custom-designed ships
- Providing the Premium Experience
- Being the only River Cruise Line inducted into the Chaînes Des Rôtisseurs, the oldest & largest food & wine society in the world—most observers feel they have the best food & wine in Europe River Cruising
- Small group Excursions led by expert local guides
- Providing Complimentary Limited Edition Tours
- Complimentary Bicycles & guided bicycle excursions

AmaWaterways AmaCerto

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AVALON

WATERWAYS®

Legendary river cruises. Inspired design.™

Avalon Overview

Avalon has two goals in their approach to river cruising.

- First, they believe their clients deserve more choices and they follow through with a long list of options that can be added for an extra fee.
- Second, they want to be known as the “floating room with a view” —most cabins have floor to ceiling windows that open up.

Avalon Impression

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EMERALD

WATERWAYS

Emerald Waterways

- Emerald Waterways features include:
- complimentary wine, beer & soft drinks at lunch and dinner; all on board meals; balcony cabins on the upper 2 decks; bikes (without electronic assisted feature); & complimentary Wi-Fi.
- As with most river cruise lines, there are included tours in every sailing.
- They also have an EmeraldPLUS no addition cost tours to enhance the standard offerings. There are also Discover More tour options that cost extra and require a minimum number of passengers.
- Gratuities are included in the basic cruise fare.
- The long ships (135 meters or 443 feet) carry 182 passengers.

Emerald Sun

Photo Anne Schrader www.dreamdestinations.com



SCENIC  **CRUISES**
The Ultimate River Cruising Experience

Scenic Overview

- Scenic cruise line features:
- your own butler (services vary by stateroom category)
- complimentary beverages all day, every day; six dining options
- the Tailormade GPS device
- balcony suites on the 2 upper decks
- electronically assisted bikes
- complimentary Wi-Fi; laundry and airport transfers.
- There are no extra charges for tours or gratuities but massages and the hairdresser are extra charges.
- The long ships (135 meters or 443 feet) carry 167 passengers.

Scenic Opal

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TAUCK



RIVER CRUISING

Tauk River Cruise Overview

4 Cornerstones of Tauk River Cruising

- Uncommon Access to included shore excursions
- All-inclusive Value
- Personalized Cruising from 4 on-board Tauk tour staff
- Intimate Club-like atmosphere

Tauck Treasures

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UNI**W**ORLD®

BOUTIQUE RIVER CRUISE COLLECTION®

Uniworld Overview

Uniworld is the world's only authentic boutique river cruise line

- All-inclusive
- one-of-a-kind ships—operates 13 in Europe-- each is different
- stylish décor
- thoughtful personal touches
- welcoming ambiance
- superb cuisine
- gracious service

Uniworld River Royale

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U by Uniworld

- Uniworld has added a new brand aimed at younger cruisers—it is called U by Uniworld.
- There are 2 riverships—the A and the B—and they are painted all black.
- Originally there were age limits—21-45 but these have been lifted.
- Idea is a more party central themed cruise in the cities with longer overnight stays.

The A by Uniworld



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VIKING
CRUISES

Exploring the World in Comfort®

Viking Overview #1

Viking provides good itineraries—a great value.

A Viking journey includes:

- Exceptional Accommodations
- Attentive Service
- Enriching Daily Shore Excursions
- Engaging Cultural Enrichment
- All Onboard Meals
- Complimentary wine, beer & soft drinks with lunch & dinner
- Free onboard internet service

Viking Overview # 2

- Has 64 ships deployed in Europe by my count. 53 are longships (135 m or 443 ft) & carry 190 passengers.
- Has over 25 % of all river cruises ships in Europe.
- Heavy advertising campaign—brand is most well-known river cruise company.

Viking Jarl

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What to Consider When Comparing River Cruise Companies

- Number of on-board passengers
- Quality of the vessels
- Accommodations
- Cuisine
- Service
- Shore excursions
- Extras
- Cost—are you getting the value for your money?

How Many River Ships in Europe?

COMPANY	TOTAL SHIPS
AMAWATERWAYS	22
AVALON	14
EMERALD	7
SCENIC	13
TAUCK	9
UNIWORLD	12 + (2 U by Uniworld)
VIKING	80 Total (53 Longships)

How Many Passengers?

COMPANY	Longships 135 m	110 m Class
AMAWATERWAYS	158-164	146-148
AVALON	166	138-128
EMERALD	182	138
SCENIC	167-169	128
TAUCK	130	118
UNIWORLD	159-154	130
VIKING	198-188	150 (FOR 375 FT SHIP)

A Unique Ship:

AmaWaterways AmaMagna Danube Cruises

- In May 2019, the AmaMagna, a double wide vessel, first sailed on the Danube.
- It carries 196 passengers.
- It has expanded on board facilities.
- It can only sail on portions of the Danube, as their extra width does not allow them to use some of the locks on the Danube River and the Main-Danube Canal.

Quality of Vessels

- Designing & putting new river cruise ships on Europe's rivers is a constant source of competition between companies.
- There are many different approaches.
- The Berlitz guide evaluates riverships by 5 criteria.
- They are Hardware; Accommodations; Cuisine; Service and Miscellaneous.
- It is probably as objective a rating system as currently available to potential river cruisers.

3 Typical Europe River Ships in Port



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Overall Ratings by Douglas Ward

River Cruising in Europe & the USA

COMPANY	Best Rated Ship	Score (Company Rank based on best rated ship)
AMAWATERWAYS	AmaKristina	427/500 (1)
SCENIC	Jasper	411/500 (2)
VIKING	Hera	399/500 (3)
UNIWORLD	SS Joie de Vivre	388/500 (4)
TAUCK	Joy	387/500 (5)
EMERALD	Dawn	385/500 (6)
AVALON	Imagery II	374/500 (7)

River Ship Size

- 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 (not counting the sun deck which is basically a roof).
- All are generally 38 ft wide but 2 riverships are now double wide.
- The big difference is their length. The two types are:
- **Longships** are 443 ft (135 m) and
- 360 ft ships, known as **110 m Class Ships**.
- How the limited space is used on the vessel is an important factor in your choice of which company to use.

Why is River Ship Length Important?

- 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.

Stateroom Size/Views Longships

Slide 1 of 2

Company	Large Suite >200 sq ft	Veranda <200 sq ft	French Balcony	Window	Small Window
AMA	4 (350-300 sq ft) 45 (290-210 sq ft)		16 (170 sq ft)		17 (160 sq ft)
AVALON			64 (200 sq ft) 2 (300 sq ft)		17 (172 sq ft)
EMERALD	4 (315 sq ft) 8 (210 sq ft)	60 (180 sq ft)			18 (162 sq ft) 2 single (117 sq ft)

Stateroom Size/Views Longships

Slide 2 of 2

Company	Large Suite >200 sq ft	Veranda <200 sq ft	French Balcony	Window	Small Window
SCENIC	45 (205 sq ft) 17 (225 sq ft) 2 (240 sq ft) 2 (360 sq ft) 2 (475 sq ft)				13 (160 sq ft)
TAUCK			3 (150 sq ft) 2 (190 sq ft) 28 (190-225 sq ft) 22 (300 sq ft)		4 (150 sq ft) 8 (225 sq ft)
UNIWORLD	9 (391-294 sq ft)	20 (196 sq ft)	33 (196 sq ft)		15 (163 sq ft)
VIKING	8 (445-275 sq ft)	39 (200 sq ft)	22 (135 sq ft)		25 (150 sq ft)

Stateroom Size/Views 110 m Class

Slide 1 of 2

Company	Large Suite >200 sq ft	Veranda <200 sq ft	French Balcony	Window	Small Window
AMA	4 Ships 3 (255 sq ft) 1 (225 sq ft)		56 (170 sq ft) 2 (140 sq ft- Single cabins)		12 (170 sq ft)
AVALON	2 (300 sq ft)	50 (200 sq ft)			12 (172 sq ft)
EMERALD	2 (315 sq ft) 4 (207 sq ft)		48 (170 sq ft)		14 (162 sq ft) 2 single (105 sq ft)

Stateroom Size/Views 110 m class

Slide 2 of 2

Company	Large Suite >200 sq ft	Veranda <200 sq ft	French Balcony	Window	Small Window
SCENIC	43 (205 sq ft) 9 (225 sq ft) 2 (305 sq ft) 2 (455 sq ft)				7 (160 sq ft)
TAUCK	14 (300 sq ft)		6 (183 sq ft) 30 (150 sq ft)		1 (183 sq ft) 8 (150 sq ft)
UNIWORLD	4 (215 sq ft) window			60 (151 sq ft)	
VIKING				63 (170 sq ft)	12 (120 sq ft)

Hardware Ratings by Berlitz

- The next slide needs a little explanation.
- Hardware includes the condition and maintenance of the vessel, its age, and public areas.
- It also includes floor & wall coverings, passageways and stairwells.
- 2 other features are included: pools (or lack of them), and lifts (elevators—or lack of them).

Hardware

(Ratings from Berlitz River Cruising In Europe & the USA)

COMPANY	Hardware	Rank
AMAWATERWAYS	87/100	1
VIKING	84/100	2
SCENIC	82/100	3* Tie
UNIWORLD	82/100	3* Tie
TAUCK	81/100	4
EMERALD	80/100	5
AVALON	79/100	6

Accommodations

(Ratings from Berlitz River Cruising In Europe & the USA)

COMPANY	Accommodations (Rank)	Comments
AMAWATERWAYS	87/100 (1)	Best in Industry; Twin Balconies
VIKING	84/100 (2)	Mix of Balconies & Windows
SCENIC	82/100 (3)	Full indoor/outdoor Balcony w/motorized window
UNIWORLD	81/100 (4)	Each ship has different theme
TAUCK	79/100(5)	French Balconies Only
EMERALD*	76/100 (6* Tie)	Full indoor/outdoor Balcony w/motorized window
AVALON*	76/100 (6* Tie)	Panoramic Window Opens to French Balcony

Cuisine & Beverages

(Ratings from Berlitz River Cruising In Europe & the USA)

COMPANY/ Rank	Cuisine	Beverages
AMAWATERWAYS/1	86/100; impressive food They spend more than competition on food	Good wines & beers Free wine & beer dinner & lunch
SCENIC/ 2	82/100 good but not outstanding	Free wine & beer & spirits
VIKING/ 3	78/100 tasty, unpretentious cuisine	Tend to use the same 2 wines for whole cruise; wine & beer with lunch & dinner meals
EMERALD/4* Tie	75/100 food well above average	Free wine & beer dinner & lunch
TAUCK/4* Tie	75/100 Good food; lacks wow factor	Free wine & beer & spirits
UNIWORLD/5	74/100; decent food, based on French cuisine	Young wines, beer & spirits all included
AVALON/6	71/100; Dinners underwhelming	Free wine & beer dinner & lunch

Service

(Ratings from Berlitz River Cruising In Europe Guide 2016-2017)

COMPANY	Service (Rank)	Comments
AMAWATERWAYS	85/100 (1)	Service is very good
SCENIC	81/100 (2)	Butler Service
EMERALD	76/100 (3* Tie)	
VIKING	76/100 (3* Tie)	
UNIWORLD	75/100 (4* Tie)	Butler Service in Suites
TAUCK	75/100 (4* Tie)	
AVALON	71/100 (5)	

Shore Excursions Slide 1 of 2

Company	Daily Excursions	Comments
AMAWATERWAYS	Often 2+ tours at each stop Fast/normal/slow groups local guides, maps	2-3 Optional tours per cruise may cost extra. Free limited bike & Hiking tours Have limited free culinary/wine tours
AVALON	Use local guides 3 different paced tours	Enhanced Active & Discovery Tour Optional tours usually extra
EMERALD	Tour in each port	EmeraldPLUS no addition cost tours to enhance the standard offerings. Discover More tour options extra

Shore Excursions Slide 2 of 2

Company	Daily Excursions	Comments
SCENIC	All tours included at each stop. Includes all listed in comments on each cruise	Has Freechoice tours & Scenic Enrich & Sundowner & GPS Tailormade go on your own on each cruise
TAUCK	4 Tauck staff on ship Highly Rated tours	Exclusive tours free
UNIWORLD	Tours & Options every stop	Exclusive tours free At least one culinary tour Each cruise
VIKING	One tour per day free May have to pay for 2nd	Most optional tours cost extra

Ownership

Slide 1 of 2

Company	Type	Comments
AMAWATERWAYS	Family-Owned	Owners Rudi Schreiner (former Uniworld & Viking), & Kristin Karst (AM Express) & Gary Murphy.
AVALON	Globus	Linked with Globus (tours) enhances tours
EMERALD	Family Owned	Emerald is division of Scenic. Only river cruise company that operates 2 different cruise lines.

Ownership

2 of 2

Company	Type	Comments
SCENIC	Family-Owned	Glen Moroney started company in 2008. This brand emphasizes all inclusive including gratuities & all onboard drinks.
TAUCK	Family-Owned	Tour company pays close attention to every detail of guest experience.
UNIWORLD	Travel Corporation	30 itineraries in Europe
VIKING	Scandinavian and Dutch consortium	Fastest growing river cruise company; have 50 innovative longships

Comparing Prices

- Comparing prices is difficult at best.
- In our 2016 guide, I was able to make a price comparisons, but river cruise companies have recently added so many add-ons and seasonal price points, that these comparisons are no longer accurate or meaningful.
- Also, some companies are not actually publishing fare prices and require their guests to call.
- The best we can do now is to advise of what is included in the fare.
- Here is a price range (all 7 cruise lines) for a balcony cabin in August 2019--**\$3,880 to \$5,769** per person for a 7-day Danube cruise (based on my personal research for a client).

AMAWATERWAYS

What is included in the fare?

- Fine dining—all meals are first class
- Chef's Table—an intimate dining alternative that features delicious dishes
- Complimentary, high-quality unlimited red & white wine with lunch & dinner, or beer, or soft drinks.
- City tours at all stops, limited edition tours & bicycle trips, all led by qualified, local guides. All excursions tailored to guest's walking pace.
- Impeccable service—guests are treated like family
- Great onboard entertainment
- Free Wi-Fi
- Fleet of onboard bikes/wellness instructor

Avalon

What is included in the fare?

- Choice of spacious outside staterooms with plenty of room to relax (price varies).
- Special touches, like regional wines and beer at every onboard dinner.
- Complimentary Wi-Fi access
- Good shore excursions, led by Certified Local Guides
- VIP entrance into the must-see sites.
- Unique Local lectures designed to bring your destination to life.
- Expansive panoramic views throughout the ship – included—bed faces window.

Emerald

What's Included in the Fare?

- All meals
- Carefully selected wine, beer & soft drinks at lunch & dinner
- An included shore excursion in each port using local guides
- Bikes on board for daily use
- Complimentary Wi-Fi onboard
- Airport transfers to & from ship
- All gratuities
- Port charges

Scenic

What's Included in the Fare?

- Most guests will never buy anything extra—it's all included except massage & hairdresser or gift shop
- Your own butler (services vary)
- Complimentary beverages all day, every day. Mini bar in room.
- Six dining options (some are limited to higher paying guests)
- Exclusive Tailormade GPS for self guided tours
- Electronically assisted bikes
- Free Wi-Fi
- Airport transfers
- All tours

Tauck

What is included in the fare?

- Virtually every river cruise expense is included in one upfront price
- All shore excursions
- Unlimited complimentary beverages onboard (including all liquor—even stocked mini bar in stateroom)
- All meals
- Crew Gratuities
- Pre/Post stays depending upon itinerary
- There are no little extras to pay for, no hidden expenses, no options sold.

Uniworld

What is included in the fare?

- All gratuities onboard and onshore
- All meals onboard
- Unlimited beverages onboard, including extensive selection of distinctive wines, craft beers, spirits, soft drinks, specialty teas and coffees
- Carefully crafted shore excursions—many exclusive to Uniworld—hosted by English-speaking local experts with options to personalize
- All scheduled airport transfers
- All entertainment & cultural enrichment programs onboard
- Internet and Wi-Fi access onboard

Viking

What is included in the fare? # 1

- Choice of staterooms, including Suites, Junior Suites and Staterooms with verandas and French balconies & window cabins (price varies).
- Complimentary internet service
- In-room Infotainment system
- Complimentary beer, wine & soft drinks served at lunch & dinner

Viking

What is included in the fare? #2

- Daily shore excursion - led by friendly, knowledgeable local guides utilizing a high-tech audio headset system.
- Cultural enrichment - itinerary includes informative talks, performances, hands-on cooking and craft demonstrations.
- All onboard meals - the exquisite cuisine created by Swiss-trained chefs, features fresh ingredients and regional specialty options.

My Personal River Cruise Line Ratings

Company	Comments
# 1 AmaWaterways	Best food/wine; best overall; great partners with Backroads (bikes) & Disney; sometimes pricey; all guests get same perks
# 2 Scenic	Best All-inclusive; tours very good; sometimes inconsistent—generally very good value; higher price cabins get more perks
# 3 Emerald	Best lower priced river cruise line but delivers good value for your money; 182 guests capacity is a negative
# 4 Uniworld	All-inclusive a plus; elegant cabins; generally pricey; U by Uniworld controversial
# 5 Tauck	All-inclusive a plus; use 4 on board tour directors instead of local guides; higher price than others
# 6 Viking	Most green ships; may have grown too quickly; no frills approach OK but does not always live up to advertising
# 7 Avalon	Ships have low scores by Douglas Ward for food & service; extras drive price up but improving

AMAWATERWAYS Advantages

- Best food & fine regional wines that change daily—added free cocktail hour—including Chef's Table
- Best Active line—added wellness instructor
- Good tours—usually 3 groups & at least 2 options—sometimes more
- Crew becomes your friends—service is excellent & consistently high standards
- Slow, steady growth—new ships have high staff standards
- Owners are hands on—they read every critique—always improving
- Great Cruise Managers go the extra mile for your trip
- Great Partners with Ancestry, Backroads (bike touring) & Disney

AMAWATERWAYS Disadvantages

- No gratuities included in price
- If food & wine are not of high importance, price may be considered too high by some.

Avalon Advantages

- They deliver a good product at a fair price.
- Since they are owned by Globus Corporation (tour company), they have good tours.
- They claim to have the newest fleet in Europe market—oldest ship built in 2008 but with Scenic & Emerald no longer true.
- Cabin bed faces window—has larger windows & French balconies compared to others
- Added more active options during shore visits

Avalon Disadvantages

- A lot of extra services for a fee
- Food is described as “bland” by some observers & wines “are low quality” but Avalon Fresh (vegetarian option) very good.
- Lease, do not own, riverships.

Emerald Advantages

- Very good quality cruise at a good price.
- Gratuities included.
- 2 upper decks on most ships have ½ window balcony that opens with touch of a button.
- Pool has retractable roof & converts into evening cinema—it is awesome!
- Even with higher guest capacity (182) has bikes, spa & fitness area—Viking (190) does not—does not feel crowded.

Emerald Disadvantages

- 182 passengers—only Viking carries more
- Only 7 boats at present, limits access

Scenic Advantages

- All inclusive—all is included—most guests will not pay anything more unless they get a massage or use the hairdresser.
- Onshore tours are awesome—includes Scenic enrich (exclusive experiences) & sundowner (hosted cocktails in Europe's most beautiful locations).
- Seafood buffet is excellent!
- Offers 6 reds & 6 whites wines at dinner for free.

Scenic Disadvantages

- More expensive cabins get more services, especially diamond deck guests
- Exclusive Table La Rive located in main dining room—other guests get to see the 6-course degustation menu while served a lesser meal
- Service & meals inconsistent on our cruise with them

Tauck Advantages

- All-inclusive
- Generally fewest passengers on Tauck ships as compared to other river cruise companies.
- Many feel they offer the best tours & on-shore experiences—mostly due to 4 onboard staff members who lead all tours—others disagree, like local guides
- Generally, has more large sized staterooms than others but only French Balconies. Has best window first deck staterooms
- Has a good family program called Tauck Bridges

Tauck Disadvantages

- Usually the most costly cruise line
- 9 ships provide limited availability to take a Tauck River Cruise—they often sell out very early.
- Lease, do not own, riverships but have refurbished 110 m. riverboats.

Uniworld Advantages

- All-inclusive
- Each ship is different—big emphasis on boutique aspect for the client
- Only cruise line on the Po River (Italy) & has a Burgundy region cruise
- Rate very high on most comparison lists—a lot to like about their product & service.

Uniworld Disadvantages

- Some find interiors just “too much”
- Higher price point
- 110 m ships have no French Balconies—only windows
- U by Uniworld controversial product

Viking Advantages

- Sometimes best pricing but often requires full payment at booking while other river cruise companies allow deposit + 90 day prior to departure final payment.
- Only company that cruises Elbe (special shallow water design)
- Herb garden; solar panels (most green ships)
- Since long ships are identical; in low water situations; Viking has been able to switch ships to avoid extended bus tours—generally successful but does not always work
- Has best port docking locations

Viking Disadvantages

- Carries 190 passengers on long ships—all others carry around 165-170 or less on longships except Emerald at 182.
- No extras—no bikes, no exercise room, no pool
- Dinner meals sometimes only has 2 choices & they often use same 2 wines for all 7 days of a cruise
- Some cruisers feel they are crowded--not enough room in lounges & main dining room
- Only major river cruise line that caters to US market that is not CLIA member (more protections for cruise clients)
- On most cruises only 6 tours provided for free; if more than 2 tours per day it may require an extra fee.

How Best to Use This Comparison Guide

- First, realize that all river cruises are a good value!
- The most important info is to first select the itinerary and make sure it visits the sights you desire to see, then pick the line.
- To select the line, match the items you consider most important from the river cruise line—this guide is a good place to start.
- Use price last—look for value!
- This is very complicated—why not seek our advice to get the best possible trip?



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