



**The Difference Between River and Ocean Cruises**

**A Report Prepared by Eva's Best Travel**

**(203) 221-3171 or -3173**

[www.EvasBestLuxuryTravel.com](http://www.EvasBestLuxuryTravel.com)

**email us at:**

[Eva@EvasBestTravel.com](mailto:Eva@EvasBestTravel.com)

[Mark@EvasBestTravel.com](mailto:Mark@EvasBestTravel.com)

# ***What is the Difference Between River Cruises and Ocean Cruises?***

Ocean cruisers are trying their first river cruises these days -- and with good reason. River cruising is the fastest-growing sector of the cruise industry, with 18 new ships on order for 2017 alone. Even though river cruises have been operating for decades, they have come on in leaps and bounds in the past decade. Modern ships with expanded amenities offer intriguing itineraries to places oceangoing vessels can't reach, tempting fans of seagoing vessels to jump ship. At an astounding pace, dozens of new and innovative river ships are launched each year and available across Europe, Asia, North America, South America, Africa, Egypt and Russia. If there's an inland waterway, you can bet there's a river ship to navigate along its winding path.

River cruises are quickly gaining a legion of loyal followers, too. Many ocean cruise aficionados are moving inland, curious to learn what all the hype is about and anxious to experience this new trend.

## ***Are you cut out for river cruising? Here's what you can expect on a river cruise, compared to an ocean cruise:***

So what's the difference between a river cruise vs. ocean cruise? Plenty. In some ways, river cruising is more similar to a land tour than today's ocean cruising experience -- and experienced tour companies run many river lines. Mega-ship staples like pools, multiple lounges, specialty restaurants, spas and endless activities are available on some riverboats, although on a much smaller scale. And you won't find any sea days, although there are periods of scenic cruising. Best of all, most river cruises include shore tours -- and many other inclusions in their fares -- making it easier to budget.

**1. River ships are smaller:** European river ships have at most three decks plus an expansive sundeck. Any higher and the ships wouldn't squeeze underneath the hundreds of bridges along their path. Maximum passengers: about 190 vs. 5,400+ on the biggest cruise ships. River boats can be smaller, more like private yachts and as tiny as 8-passenger luxury barge boats as on Alaska's Inland waterways, French canals, Scottish lochs or Botswana's Chobe River.

**2. River cabins are smaller:** River ship staterooms are smaller than their ocean ship counterparts, but they're not short on home comforts. River ships eschew inside cabins and all accommodations face the water. Newer riverboats are getting very creative, adding balconies and cleverly designing cabins to make the most of the space allotted. Many have panoramic windows that slide down at the touch of a button to create the feeling of a balcony, even though you don't actually step outside (the French balcony). Some ships have both the step out balcony and the French balcony

**3. There are more buffets and fewer restaurants:** Most river cruise ships have one main restaurant, and breakfast and lunch are often buffet-only (or buffet mainly, with a few items to be

ordered a la carte) with a served evening meal. An increasing number of river ships have intimate secondary venues -- some vessels up to four -- offering alternative menus and private dining. A handful of lines now provide room service, previously a rarity. To make up for having only one big dining room, ships get creative, spreading casual breakfast and lunch offerings on the bar in the lounge or setting up BBQs out on deck. Plus, the small passenger count and daily port calls mean the venues are better able to bring in fresh ingredients like fish and produce or offer regional specialties at mealtime.

**4. Entertainment is low-key:** You'll find no splashy production shows on the river ... or guest comedians ... or karaoke. You will find a lone resident pianist or small ensemble on most ships, plus folk dancers, singers or other local troupes brought onboard for a quick evening show. During the day you can expect educational seminars and maybe a cooking demo, wine tasting, language class, or a fun quiz. With river cruising the passing scenery and destinations visited are the main star of the show.

**5. Itineraries are port-intensive:** Unlike ocean cruises that have leisurely sea days, river cruises are port intensive, and you'll visit a new destination each day -- sometimes two in one day -- and up to four countries in a week. The ports, not the ships, are the key attractions, and you will certainly pack a lot of sightseeing into a week or two.

**6. Shore tours are more limited and culturally focused:** The hallmark of the river cruise shore excursion is the walking tour, with lots of details of a quaint city's history and culture, followed by some free time for shopping or a quick drink in a local cafe. In addition to the traditional walking and motor coach tours to castles and other places of interest, river cruise lines have introduced options for active travelers, such as guided bicycle rides, hikes, golf, kayaking and even running tours, along with activities including cooking and art classes, music recitals and trips to the ballet or opera.

**7. There are few "sea" days; most sailing is done at night:** With the exception of particularly scenic stretches of river -- such as Germany's quaintly castled Rhine Gorge and Austria's UNESCO-listed Wachau Valley -- full sailing days are a rarity. Generally you're only on the move for a couple of hours a day. The majority of sailing is done during the late night or very early hours, and you'll miss most of it. The exception is Portugal's River Douro, where nighttime navigation is not permitted and ships only sail during daylight hours.

**8. More items are included in the fares:** River cruise fares will typically include wine, beer and soft drinks with meals, dinner in specialty restaurants, 24-hour tea and coffee, Wi-Fi and the standard tours in each port. Some lines offer all-inclusive fares covering all drinks, tips, transfers and even a hotel night before your cruise. Plus, most river ships allow you to bring wine back onboard that you've bought in local shops and vineyards).

**9. You'll wake up early:** Many tours can begin as early as 7:30 or 8 a.m. However, all is not lost as upscale lines offer a choice of excursions that include one or two in the afternoon or evening.

**10. You'll dock right in town:** Your riverboat will dock right in town, often a short walk or quick bus ride into the heart of the city.

**11. Contingency plans based on water level of the river:** High water levels during very wet spells means ships cannot sail beneath bridges, while very low water levels in dry periods means they can't sail at all. If this happens they'll put you on a bus to your next port -- and keep the itinerary going as planned. Larger lines also have contingency plans to switch passengers to a sister vessel further down the river to keep things running as smoothly as possible.

**12. Passenger demographic:** River cruise passengers tend to be well-traveled, retired (55 yrs. +) with disposable income. They usually have experienced several ocean cruises and want to try something slower and less crowded. However, river cruises, especially in Europe, are attracting younger travelers and some are appealing to families with children and honeymooners

**13. Easy Boarding & Disembarking:** Forget long lines of thousands of people passing through immigration with x-ray scans. River cruisers simply walk on and off the ship with little to no wait — and closer to the heart of the port destination, too.

**14. Spas:** These days, most river cruises have some sort of spa services onboard (with some Viking vessels as the major exception). But, again, the facilities won't be as expansive or treatment menus as lengthy as on oceangoing ships.

**15. Pools:** A few river cruises have pools: . [AmaWaterways](#), for one, has a pool on their sundeck. Uniworld has an indoor lap pool, while [Emerald Waterways](#) has a swimming pool that converts to a cinema at night

**16. Kid-free.** River cruises don't ban kids, but there's not much to keep children, especially under 7 or 8, entertained onboard. Most cabins and suites only sleep two. The big exceptions are the occasional themed cruises — plus [AmaWaterways' upcoming partnership with Adventures by Disney](#), which brought family-friendly cruises with adjoining staterooms in 2016.

**17. Everything is European:** From the electrical outlets to the onboard currency, European standards reign supreme aboard Europe-bound river cruises. This is different from deep-ocean cruise ships, many of which retain the United States Dollar as their onboard currency, even when sailing in foreign locales.

**18. Booking Last Minute will leave you in the Dark.** But booking last-minute — or holding out for that dirt-cheap-deal — is far less successful in the world of river cruising. In fact, even as we write this, many of the newest ships and hottest itineraries are completely sold out one year in advance. The reason is the limited number of staterooms on the river boat vs many more on the ocean cruise ship.

**19. River Cruising is Active.** From walking tours that are offered at differing activity levels to intimate wine tastings or unique cultural explorations, river cruising attracts an active, informed, educated passenger who is curious about the world

**20. River Cruising is More Relaxed and More Like a Luxury Cruise;** Finally, there's one last key difference that is worth sharing between ocean and river cruising: A river cruise is closer to a luxury cruise than a mainstream cruise. Meals are open-seating, dress codes are relaxed, and service – due to the manageable numbers of guests onboard – tends to be personable and genuine.

***Who might like to try a river cruise?*** Those who have been there, done that a zillion times on cruise ships are prime candidates for a leisurely river cruise. History buffs, retired educators, and those looking for a slower pace without the glitz, non-stop action and mega-crowds found on many ocean-going vessels.

You're not cruising with 3,000 new-found "friends." No queues on and off your river ship. First-time cruisers who are a bit jittery can test their mettle on a smooth-sailing river cruise. No seasickness, land is always in sight and the water may even be shallow enough to walk ashore if there was an emergency.

Watch for new designs on river ships with lofts on Avalon Waterways and Viking's new, larger Explorer Suites. AmaWaterways newest ships have unique split balconies; half French balcony and half with walkout seating. Except for the lowest waterline deck with high-up windows, most river ships offer French balconies (sliding glass doors that open to the river.) While there's enough room to stand and lean against the railing, French balconies are mainly for fresh air, listening to the river sounds and connecting with the outdoors.

Exotic itineraries in Southeast Asia take intrepid passengers along miles of the Mekong and Yangtze rivers. If you crave adventure, head to South Africa's Chobe River to view dozens of wild animals. Then there's the Nile River, too.

A few of the newest river ships offer expansive two-room suites, outdoing the longstanding one-room typical stateroom or suite.

### **US River Cruises:**

A newcomer to the North American market, CroisiEurope, a French-based river cruise line with 43 ships in their fleet (includes barges, river boats and 2 cruise ships), will build more intimate 82-passenger river ships. And it was just announced that longtime European king of the rivers, Viking River Cruises, will add six specialty river ships for Mississippi River cruises, however their launch date is uncertain.

Paddlewheelers ply the Mississippi and Columbia rivers in the United States. Small river boats, many the size of large yachts, cruise the inland waters on the eastern seaboard, Alaska and the Midwest.

Lesser known, but also rising in popularity, are U.S. River Cruises along significant, historic rivers and bays such as the Mississippi, Hudson, Columbia and Snake rivers, and the tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay.

Note: The key differences above are between river cruise ships and large ocean cruise ships of 1,500 or more passengers. Small oceangoing ships of 100- to 700-passengers offer a similar experience to a river cruise in terms of pricing, size of ship, overall onboard experience, level of service and destination-focused enrichment opportunities.

If you know what to expect, are ready for a change and enjoy socializing with a smaller group of fellow passengers, then a river cruise might be just what you should try on your next vacation.

**BUT...River Ships Do Not Have:**

- Casinos – Rock climbing walls
  - Water parks
  - Enormous fitness centers
  - Shopping arcades
  - Multiple dining options
  - Gala production entertainment.
- Disco nights. If you're looking for an all-night disco, you won't find one on a river ship. On a river cruise, your evening entertainment will include a resident piano player/singer, folkloric dance troupes, cabaret singers and regional historians.

## ***When to book a River Cruise?***

The river cruise season commences in March and carries on through December, the peak season are summer months June through September. Itineraries range from seven to thirty days in length. Travelers may consider cruising March through May or September through December when the crowds are thinner and airfares may be more reasonably priced.

Holiday cruises are some of the more affordable itineraries available, traveling to the bustling Christmas markets during November and December.

**Bottom line:** Deposit as early as you can. When pricing a river cruise, you must discuss with us the overall value vs. price as there are a variety of factors to consider including destination, ship amenities and shore excursion inclusions.

At award-winning\* Eva's Best Luxury Travel, we get to know you, your interests, desires and budget and customize your trip. We save you a lot of money, time and stress. We are fun, friendly and passionate travelers and expert travel advisors.

We are affiliated with Travel Leaders Group, the largest travel consortium of travel agencies. With our volume buying power we get you the best travel deals, and the most amenities and insider access! Our hallmark is our customer service to you, before, during and after your trip.

Travel with peace of mind: If any issues arise while you are away, we are one call away and we handle it for you!

Call us at: 203-221-3171, [Eva@EvasBestTravel.com](mailto:Eva@EvasBestTravel.com), text us at: 203-554-4462, check our website at: [www.EvasBestLuxuryTravel.com](http://www.EvasBestLuxuryTravel.com) for travel news, tips and sign up for exclusive weekly travel specials from us.

If you wish to be on our email list, just email us at: [Eva@EvasBestTravel.com](mailto:Eva@EvasBestTravel.com). We welcome your questions and comments on our blog. Look forward to hearing from you!

\*Winner, 5 years in a row, Best of Westport (CT) Award Best Travel Agency for 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015. 2016 and winner of the Westport Business Hall of Fame for 2016.