

THE CALL OF RIVER CRUISING: LINES DEBUT NEW SHIPS

VACATIONS

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Summer 2018

Castle Stays
in the
British Isles


The Spirit of
Southeast Asia:
On the Mekong With
AmaWaterways

Cultural
Caribbean

Cruising Q&A

Our experts share their tips,
from favorite destinations
to what to pack





River cruise companies like Viking, with two additional ships sailing the Rhine in 2019, are allotting popular itineraries to sleek new vessels.

The Call of **RIVER CRUISING**

These companies are growing their fleets to meet travelers' needs in 2018 and beyond

> BY LUCY SPICER

FOR TRAVELERS who delight in easy access to ports and prefer the intimacy of small ships, river cruising fits the bill. An influx of new vessels in 2018 and 2019 also will meet the demand for more itineraries, improved amenities

and comfier accommodations.

Some cruise lines are releasing sister ships, providing additional chances to sample vessel styles that have proved to be popular. Others are introducing brand-new riverboats touting innovative features and roomier cabins. And one company is completely refurbishing

two ships to serve a niche market: the next generation of river cruise fans.

Read on to discover the newest members of our favorite fleets, and be sure to contact travel discounters Vacations to Go, (800) 510-4002 or www.RiverCruise.com, when you're ready to book your own leisurely voyage. ►

The new American Song is the first ship in American Cruise Lines' Modern Riverboat Series.



> Two additions to the **American Cruise Lines** fleet allow passengers to enjoy a river cruise closer to home. The American Constitution and the American Song will feature modern technology and conveniences while still embracing the historic nature of the line's signature U.S. itineraries.

A point of pride for the 175-passenger American Constitution is its staterooms: The majority of accommodations have a private balcony, and every cabin measures more than 225 square

feet. The 184-passenger American Song takes comfort a step further, as every stateroom will boast a private balcony and each sprawling Grand Suite will cover a whopping 900 square feet, complete with a wraparound balcony and private dining area.

Both ships will offer entertainment and onboard experts. The live music complements cruise destinations — think jazz in New Orleans or country music in Nashville. River and maritime historians contribute lectures and

folklore about America's waterways.

The American Constitution began sailing in April with itineraries built around New England and the Chesapeake Bay. (Find more information at Vacations To Go's escorted tour site, www.TourVacationsToGo.com.) Eight-day, fall foliage-themed cruises of the Hudson River will start on Sept. 22, visiting storied spots like the United States Military Academy at West Point and the town of Sleepy Hollow, all while enjoying New York's changing colors. Prices start at \$4,220.



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The American Song sets sail on Oct. 6 and will cruise the Mississippi River through the end of the year, switching over to the Columbia and Snake rivers in March 2019 for itineraries in the Pacific Northwest. An eight-day, round-trip Mississippi River cruise departing New Orleans and visiting historic sites in Louisiana and Mississippi starts at \$3,175.

> **Viking** is expanding its river fleet in 2019 to include three more ships that explore European waters.



The American Song's sizable Grand Suites feature private dining spaces on wraparound porches.

The 106-passenger Viking Helgrim will become the line's fourth vessel to sail the 10-day "Portugal's River of Gold" itinerary. Like its three predecessors, the Helgrim was built specifically to sail the Douro River and will feature the same comfortable quarters and exclusive amenities as its sister ships.

These include the open-air Aquavit Terrace and a sundeck with an organic herb garden, alfresco dining space, putting green and solar panels. The sundeck also boasts a swimming pool, a feature that does not appear on Viking's Longships. The Helgrim's spacious accommodations include staterooms and suites, and all but those on the main deck have a full veranda or French balcony.

"Portugal's River of Gold" brings an in-depth look at Portuguese history and culture, in addition to a stopover in Spain for a glimpse of the ancient city of Salamanca. The trip dedicates at least two days each to Porto and Portugal's capital, Lisbon, so travelers won't feel rushed while delving

into UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Gothic architecture. A March 30, 2019, departure aboard the Helgrim is priced from \$6,998.

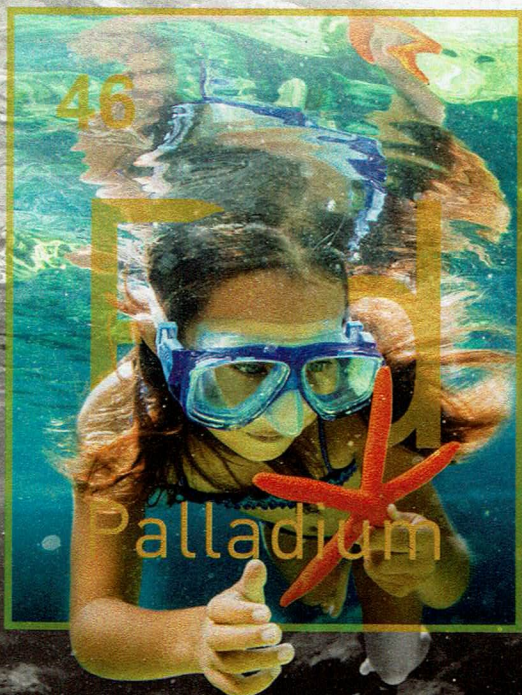
The Rhine River will welcome two of Viking's signature vessels in 2019: Viking Longship Einar and Viking

Longship Ullur. These 190-passenger sister ships will adopt the same sleek design of their forerunners, including a wide variety of suites and staterooms, several common areas with floor-to-ceiling windows and eco-friendly hybrid engines that provide smoother sailing. ▶



Atop every Viking Longship is the Aquavit Terrace, where alfresco meals are paired with unparalleled vistas.

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Select departures of Riviera's "The Douro, Oporto and Salamanca River Cruise" include an extension in Lisbon, Portugal's capital.

Both will transport guests on the eight-day "Rhine Getaway" between Amsterdam and Basel, Switzerland, visiting spots in Germany and France along the way. The Einar and Ullur debut on April 3 and 16, respectively, with prices beginning at \$3,998. Every cruise will incorporate the line's Culture Curriculum program, which offers everything from engaging port talks to menus inspired by the local cuisine.



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> The popularity of Riviera River Cruises' Portugal itineraries prompted the construction of a sister ship to the MS Douro Elegance. Enter the 126-passenger MS Douro Splendour, which will begin transporting travelers on Aug. 9.

Like the Elegance, the Splendour harbors tasteful rooms, with all but those on the lower deck including floor-to-ceiling windows. These cozier lower deck quarters hold a unique appeal for solo travelers: Stern cabins are available for sole occupancy without paying a dreaded single supplement.

All accommodations include marble-accented bathrooms, among other perks.

"The Douro, Oporto and Salamanca River Cruise" is a relaxing, eight-day itinerary that leaves plenty of free time to take advantage of the Splendour's shared facilities, such as the spa, fitness center and swimming pool. However, the scheduled onshore activities are not

to be missed: A visit to a port vineyard in Lamego educates the mind and delights the palate in equal measure, and Day 4 focuses on Salamanca, brimming with ornate architecture begging to be admired. Other notable experiences include a flamenco dance performance and a captain's dinner complete with regional delicacies and live musical accompaniment. ►



All accommodations on the MS Douro Splendour are outside cabins with luxurious beds.



A NEW CONCEPT: U by Uniworld

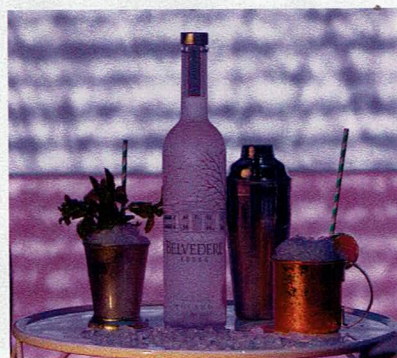
> While other river cruise lines roll out new ships, Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection has refurbished two vessels to cater to a new crowd. The company joins with sister brand Contiki to promote U by Uniworld, a cruising concept inspired by younger travelers and focused on adventurous activities.

"U by Uniworld is the first river cruise dedicated to a new generation of adult travelers, with a sexy, stylish look and feel that offers immersive experiences along the world's most popular rivers," says Uniworld president and CEO Ellen Bettridge. Although no age restrictions are imposed on travelers (other than requiring passengers to be 18 or older), onboard amenities have been designed with youthful interests in mind.

These two 120-passenger ships, now named The A and The B, sport a trendy matte black exterior. Each boasts two lounges and a rooftop bar, and activities at these venues include mixology classes and "silent discos" led by international DJs. Classes for painting, cooking, wine appreciation and yoga also are on the schedule.

The A will sail the Danube, Rhine and Main rivers, including some Christmas-themed itineraries. The B is reserved for "The Seine Experience," an eight-day

romp through the north of France, including two full days in Paris. Optional U Time excursions allow travelers to personalize their trip with kayaking jaunts, history-focused tours and more.



Two bars and lounges, including the Rooftop Lounge (above), encourage guests to socialize on U by Uniworld's stylish ships, The A and The B.

Voyages on The A start from \$1,899. The ship's first sailings this April are the eight-day "Rolling on the Rhine" itinerary, traveling from Amsterdam to Frankfurt, Germany. The B also debuts this spring, and prices for its adventure on the Seine begin at \$2,199. U hopes to expand to cruises on the Mekong River in the future.

Weekly departures are available August through October and resume in April 2019, with prices from \$1,909.

> **Avalon Waterways' Avalon Saigon**, like its sister ships in Southeast Asia, is an all-suite vessel with a passenger capacity of just 36, ensuring an intimate cruise and attentive service. The new-for-2018 Saigon also will share another distinction with the Avalon Siem Reap: These riverboats cruise between Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and the company usually flies guests between the latter and Siem Reap, Cambodia, gateway to Angkor Archaeological Park. These itineraries save several hours of road travel.

The Saigon's onboard experience is enhanced by the presence of "a cruise director and an expert local guide — providing insight and information about the region — for all guests," says Pam Hoffee, Avalon's managing director. And, although the ship's guest capacity is small, the boat itself is roomy, allowing for airy suites and plenty of common space to host performers and artisans who come aboard to entertain and educate passengers.

The Saigon makes its inaugural voyage on Sept. 20 with the northbound "Fascinating Vietnam, Cambodia & the Mekong River." Prices begin at \$3,889 for this eight-day adventure that explores candy- and boat-making in Vietnam and sacred sites and Khmer history in Cambodia.

The Avalon Envision, which will begin traversing the Danube in 2019, is the newest ship in the line's "suite fleet." The 166-passenger vessel will retain 16 standard staterooms, but the main attraction is the collection of 67 suites filling two full decks, each with a panoramic window that opens wide to create the cruise line's signature Open-Air Balcony.



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Dining and excursion choices abound on Envision sailings, lending every traveler's journey a personalized touch. Both early and late breakfast options

Avalon Waterways' Panorama Suites on the Avalon Saigon and Envision each boast a seating area next to a wall of glass that slides open.



are available, as well as late-night fare, alfresco bistro dining, health-conscious menus and more. The reinvented Avalon Choice program divides excursions on

all 2019 itineraries into three categories: classic (focused on history and heritage), discovery (exploring interests such as cooking or painting) and active

(athletic pursuits like jogging and biking). The new AvalonGo app allows guests to explore their excursion options ahead of time. ►



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The Saigon will be Avalon Waterways' second ship to explore the wonders of Vietnam and Cambodia along the Mekong River.

The Envision's maiden voyage beginning April 9, 2019, will be an eight-day cruise on the Danube from Budapest, Hungary, to Deggendorf, Germany. Highlights of "Danube Dreams" include museums and music history in Vienna and a chance to hike among castle ruins in Durnstein, Austria. Prices start at \$2,699.

> Future rollouts from **AmaWaterways** include two sister ships and one innovative vessel almost twice the width of the average riverboat.

The 158-passenger AmaLea and AmaMora were designed with luxury yachts in mind, and this inspiration is evident in the comfortable decor. Almost all staterooms feature French balconies, and the majority have both a French balcony and an outdoor seating area. In an effort to accommodate multigenerational groups and families, several cabins can be converted to fit

three guests. Connecting staterooms also are available.

In addition to amenities that are considered standard for riverboats (fitness facilities, public lounges, etc.), AmaLea and AmaMora offer more in the way of active pursuits. Bikes are available for those who wish to take in the sights from two wheels. Also, AmaWaterways' entire European fleet soon will be staffed with specially trained wellness hosts, and itineraries will include health talks and activities each day in addition to hiking and biking excursions scheduled in port.

The AmaLea will find its way to the Danube on May 6 after completing its spring "Tulip Time" sailings around Belgium and the Netherlands. The 15-day "Magnificent Europe," priced from \$6,399, will relocate the ship from Amsterdam to Budapest, and subsequent itineraries will center on themes ranging from music to romance to Christmas market shopping.


The AmaMora sets sail on June 3, 2019, with "Captivating Rhine," an eight-day journey from Amsterdam to Basel, Switzerland, with prices from \$3,599. Notable activities include a gondola ride and wine tasting in Germany's Rhine Gorge and a tour of Strasbourg's La Petite France, a quaint district of cobblestone streets and

gabled facades.

Joining the AmaLea on the Danube is the AmaMagna, making its debut on May 5, 2019. As the name suggests, its sheer size is an accomplishment: While the AmaLea and AmaMora measure 38 feet across, the 196-passenger AmaMagna spans 72 feet in width. This expanded space allows for extra roomy accommodations — in fact, most cabins on this vessel measure 355 square feet or more.

Amenities will include a jogging track and spaces for sports and leisure, with recreational boats available at the back of the ship for small-scale tours. Mealtime options range from the two-level dining room to an alfresco area, and the fact that all AmaWaterways' European ships are members of the illustrious *Chaine des Rotisseurs* culinary society means exquisite cuisine is in store.

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The eight-day "Romantic Danube" maiden voyage offers cabins from \$3,699. This cruise delights the senses with Vienna's musical history, traditional Slovakian cooking demonstrations in Bratislava and hiking or biking options available almost every day of the trip. 



The sprawling new AmaMagna by AmaWaterways is nearly twice the width of other ships in the fleet.