

RIVERS OF THE WORLD

An Insider's Guide



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A Note From Dale

I'll be honest: I didn't expect to fall for river cruising the way I did.

Ocean cruises were always the easier sell. Bigger ships, more choices, familiar names. But somewhere between my first trip On the Rhone and a sunset over the Camargue Delta from the deck of a river ship, I started recommending river cruises to almost anyone who asked me where to go next. There's something about waking up in a new town every morning, without ever repacking a bag, that changes how people think about travel.



This guide is the version of that conversation I'd have with you over coffee, if we had a couple of hours and a map. It covers the rivers I get asked about most: the castles and Christmas markets of Europe, the temples along the Mekong, the timeless stretch of the Nile between Luxor and Aswan, and the wild, unscripted Amazon. None of it is exhaustive. It's meant to give you enough to know what excites you, so that when we do talk, we're not starting from zero.

I'm based in British Columbia and work with the cruise lines I trust most (Viking, Scenic, AmaWaterways, Regent Seven Seas, Silversea, Seabourn, and Oceania, among others) to put together trips that actually match the person taking them, not just the fanciest brochure. If something in these pages catches your eye, that's a good place for us to start.

Have any Questions or want to start planning your River Cruise! Contact me and lets start planning that Dream Vacation.



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WHY RIVER CRUISING CAPTURES
THE HEART

INTIMACY AND UNIQUENESS

Discover why river cruising is a personal journey

River cruising offers an intimacy that large ocean liners simply can't match. Where a mega-ship might carry three or four thousand passengers, river vessels carry as few as 40 and rarely more than 175 — small enough that the crew learns your name by day two, and your usual table by the second dinner. There's no waiting for tenders, no shuttle bus from a port an hour outside the city you came to see. Your ship ties up right along the riverbank, often close enough to a cathedral spire or castle wall that you could sketch it from the sundeck.

That proximity changes the way you travel. Step off the gangway in the morning and you're already standing in the old town, not waiting for transport to get there. In Vienna, that might mean a ten-minute walk to the State Opera. In Luxor, it's the temple gates within view of your balcony. Ocean cruising, with its distant ports and long transfers, rarely gets you this close.

Onboard, the pace matches the destination. Meals are built around what's grown, caught, or crafted nearby: a Rhine Valley riesling poured with dinner in Germany, fresh Nile perch in Egypt. Most excursions are already included, led by guides who actually live in the towns you're visiting. Nothing about the day feels rushed from one stop to the next; the river sets the rhythm.

And then there's the view. Since the ship is your hotel and your transportation in one, the scenery outside your window never sits still: a sunrise over vineyard terraces gives way to church spires by lunch and city lights by dinner, all without you lifting a suitcase. That's the part clients tend to remember most.



ENCHANTING JOURNEYS

Explore the Heart of Europe

You wake to sunlight slipping through gauzy curtains, and instead of a parking lot or airport tarmac, there's a castle outside your window. This isn't a postcard. It's the real thing, perched above the Rhine at Rüdesheim, its stone walls the same color as the morning light. You didn't have to fly to it. It came to you overnight, while you slept.

That's the trick of a Europe river cruise. The Rhine carries you past a string of these fortresses (some crumbling into their vineyards, some restored enough to house a wine bar) through the narrow bend at the Lorelei Gorge, where sailors once swore they heard a siren singing from the rocks. By the time you're ready for coffee, you're already somewhere new.

Switch rivers and the story changes. On the Danube, the castles give way to something grander: Vienna's opera houses and imperial palaces, Budapest's thermal baths steaming against the skyline, Passau's baroque cathedral crowding three rivers into one. Further west, the Seine trades fortresses for orchards. Normandy's apple country leads to the light that pulled Monet out of his studio and into the fields, and finally to Paris itself, waiting at the end of the river like a reward for paying attention the whole way there.

Time your trip for November or December and these towns fill up with the kind of scene you half-expect from a Christmas card. Strasbourg's market squares smell like roasted chestnuts and mulled wine. Nuremberg strings lights over centuries-old timber buildings. You wander from stall to stall buying hand-carved ornaments you'll actually use, not the kind that sit in a drawer.

Prefer warmer months? Late spring turns the Rhine's hillsides into fields of tulips, and by midsummer the evenings stretch long enough that you're still on deck at nine o'clock, watching the light change color over the water. There's no wrong season here, just a different Europe depending on when you go.



THE MYSTIC MEKONG

A Journey Through Waterways

The Mekong doesn't rush. It moves the way life along its banks moves, unhurried and practical, the same way it probably has for generations. Your cruise usually starts in Ho Chi Minh City, still loud with motorbikes, and within a day or two that noise fades into something quieter. By the time you reach the delta towns of My Tho and Chau Doc, the loudest sound most mornings is a rooster, or a vendor calling out prices from her sampan.

Somewhere past the Vietnam-Cambodia border, the river opens up. Phnom Penh appears first, its Royal Palace gilded roofs catching the light off the water, then the river spreads even wider into Tonle Sap, a lake so large it changes size by the season, ringed with entire villages built to float. Houses, schools, even pig pens, all bobbing on the water. Kids paddle themselves to class in small boats. Nobody's putting on a show. It's just how people here have always lived alongside a river that floods on its own schedule.

The reason most people book this cruise, if they're honest, is Angkor Wat. Nothing quite prepares you for it: the stone towers rising out of the jungle at first light, insects and monks chanting layered over each other, centuries of carved stone that somehow outlasted every war fought around it. You could spend a week just at the temple complexes around Siem Reap and still not see all of it.

The smaller moments stay with people too. A floating market where boats sell entire meals cooked right there on the water, still steaming when they hand it across to you. A silk village where a weaver's hands move faster than you can follow, turning raw thread into something you'll want to bring home. A sampan ride down a tributary so quiet you can hear the paddle dip in and out of the water.

If you can, go between November and March. The air is cooler, the skies stay clear, and walking around Angkor's temple complexes at midday doesn't feel like a survival exercise. Outside that window it's still doable, just hotter and more humid, which matters more at some temples than others.



THE NILE

Explore Ancient Wonders

The Nile has carried travelers between Luxor and Aswan for about as long as travel has existed. You're doing what pharaohs, priests, and a long line of curious foreigners did before you, just with better food and cabins.

Luxor is where the trip earns its reputation. Karnak Temple alone could eat a whole morning: 134 columns in its Great Hypostyle Hall, some thick enough to wrap your arms around only partway, built up over centuries by different pharaohs who each wanted their name added to the walls. Cross the river and the mood shifts. The Valley of the Kings hides its tombs behind unmarked doors cut into bare cliff, and inside, paint that's thousands of years old still holds its color. Tutankhamun's tomb is here, small compared to its neighbors, which makes Howard Carter's 1922 discovery of it intact even more remarkable. Nobody has found one like it since.

As the ship moves south toward Aswan, the landscape strips down to something quieter: sandstone cliffs, the occasional felucca sail cutting across the water, small villages that haven't changed their rhythm in a long time. Philae Temple waits on its own island near Aswan, dedicated to the goddess Isis, and its current spot isn't even the original one. Engineers moved the entire complex block by block in the 1970s to keep it from disappearing under the rising water behind the Aswan High Dam.

Abu Simbel is worth the extra day if your itinerary includes it. Ramses II didn't build small: four seated statues of himself, each over 20 meters tall, guard the entrance. Twice a year, around February 22 and October 22, the sunrise lines up to light the inner sanctuary, a piece of ancient engineering nobody has fully explained. Worth double-checking the exact dates with the cruise line, since they can shift by a day.

Go between October and April. Summer in Upper Egypt gets brutal, well past 40 degrees Celsius, and there's a real difference between admiring a 3,000 year old temple and just trying not to pass out in front of it.



THE AMAZON

A Nature Lover's Paradise

Small expedition ships are the only kind that work here. Sixteen to forty passengers, shallow enough draft to get up narrow tributaries a bigger vessel would run aground on. That's the whole point. You're not sailing past the rainforest, you're getting pulled into it.

Most days start early, before the heat sets in, with a skiff ride down some channel too narrow for the main ship. This is where you actually see things. Pink river dolphins, called botos, surface without warning and just as quickly disappear again, their skin genuinely pink, not a trick of the light. Scarlet macaws gather at clay licks along certain riverbanks, dozens at a time, eating the mineral-rich clay that seems to help them digest the toxins in some of the seeds they eat. Nobody fully agrees on why they do it, but watching thirty macaws lift off a clay wall at once is one of those things a photo doesn't quite capture.

Night changes everything. Guides take you out after dark with a flashlight, and the river that looked empty at noon turns out to be full: caiman eyes reflecting red just above the waterline, frogs calling from somewhere you can't see, the occasional splash that everyone pretends not to jump at. It's louder than the day, if you're paying attention.

Much of this happens inside the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve in Peru, close to two million hectares of protected wilderness and the largest national reserve in the country. When the water is high, the flooded forest reflects the sky so cleanly it's hard to tell which way is up in a photo. The naturalists who guide these trips, several of them from communities inside the reserve, know it well enough to spot a sloth from thirty meters or read a set of tracks in the mud most of us would walk right past.

None of this is staged. The animals aren't fed or trained to show up. Some mornings you see three species you'd never heard of. Other mornings the jungle just sits there, quiet, and that's part of it too.



PRICING & ESSENTIAL DETAILS

Understanding costs, upgrades, and travel essentials for cruising

Most premium river cruise lines already build a lot into the fare: three meals a day, wine and beer with lunch and dinner, a full slate of shore excursions, gratuities, sometimes Wi-Fi. If you've only cruised on the ocean side before, this can feel almost suspicious at first. No, that regional wine tasting really is included. No, you don't need to sign for anything at dinner.

Where people usually spend more, and where it's worth spending more, is on the things that turn a good trip into the one you actually remember. A suite with a private balcony means you can watch the Rhine go by from bed instead of walking to a public deck. A premium beverage package gets you into the better bottles instead of the house pour. Private, small-group excursions get you away from the rest of the ship for an afternoon, which matters more than people expect on a boat with 150 other guests. None of these are necessary. All of them change the trip in a way you'll notice.

Before any of that, though, there's the boring paperwork that actually matters. Visa rules depend on both your destination and your passport, and they change more often than you'd think, so check them close to your departure date rather than trusting whatever you read six months ago. Most countries also want your passport valid for at least six months past your return date, which catches more travelers off guard than it should. Travel insurance is worth having on any international cruise, and for a few destinations, parts of the Amazon in particular, you may need proof of a yellow fever vaccination before they'll let you board.

None of this is complicated, it just needs to happen before you leave, not at the airport. I'll walk you through exactly what your itinerary requires when we book, so you're not the one trying to figure out visa rules the night before a flight.



LET'S START YOUR ADVENTURE

Ready to Start Planning?

Every river in this guide is one I can help you sail, and honestly, the hardest part for most people is just picking where to start. That's normal. There are more ships, itineraries, and cabin categories than any one person should have to sort through alone, and the fine print between cruise lines (what's actually included, cancellation policies, single supplements) varies more than people expect.

That's where a conversation helps more than another brochure. Tell me roughly when you want to travel, who's coming with you, and what you're hoping to get out of the trip, whether that's slow mornings on deck or as many excursions as you can fit in, and I'll narrow the options down to two or three that actually make sense instead of the fifteen you'd find scrolling on your own.

There's also a practical reason to book through me instead of directly with a cruise line. I work with these companies regularly, which usually means access to preferred and exclusive pricing: upgraded cabins, onboard credit, reduced deposits, sometimes early access to sailings before they're released to the general public. None of that costs you anything extra. Travel advisors are paid by the cruise line, not by you, so you get a second set of eyes on your booking for free, plus someone to call if anything goes sideways before or during the trip.

Setting up a time to talk is easy. Email me at dalegraham@expediacruzises.com with a couple of times that work for you, or just tell me you're interested and I'll follow up with some options. No pressure, no obligation, just a conversation about where you might want to go.



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