

APRIL 2026



CRUISE

WEEKLY

River CRUISE

SPECIAL REPORT



RISING TIDES: RIVER CRUISING ENTERS A NEW CHAPTER
LUXURY BY DESIGN: INSIDE THE WAVE OF NEXT GEN SHIPS
EXPERIENCE GUIDE: NEW ESCAPES TO EXPLORE



Is Your Client A Viking?

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- They prefer a child-free, adults-only experience.** No kids' clubs. No splash zones. Only quiet sophistication and space to unwind.
- They do not enjoy the chaos of casinos, clubs or crowded bars.** Evenings are best spent with a glass of wine, good company and engaging conversation.
- They value cultural enrichment over karaoke.** Lectures, local performances and curated excursions reveal the heart of every destination.
- They enjoy smaller, quieter ships with no crowds.** No queues. No noise. Just spacious surroundings and a sense of serenity at sea.
- They have a genuine interest in art, history, architecture and world affairs.** Curiosity guides their travels. They explore to understand, not simply to arrive.
- They appreciate refined design and modern comfort.** Clean lines, natural light and a Scandinavian sense of serenity feel like home.
- They may be seasoned travellers or first-timers seeking something different.** Viking appeals to those who value substance and style in equal measure.
- They enjoy connecting with like-minded, well-travelled guests.** Conversations begin over dinner and often grow into friendships beyond the journey.
- They expect excellent value without upselling or surprises.** Viking includes what matters most: wine with meals, Wi-Fi, excursions and peace of mind.
- They travel to understand the world, not to escape it.** Vikings believe that travel can inspire change and be more than just an escape from the ordinary.

NO KIDS | NO CASINOS | NO NCFS



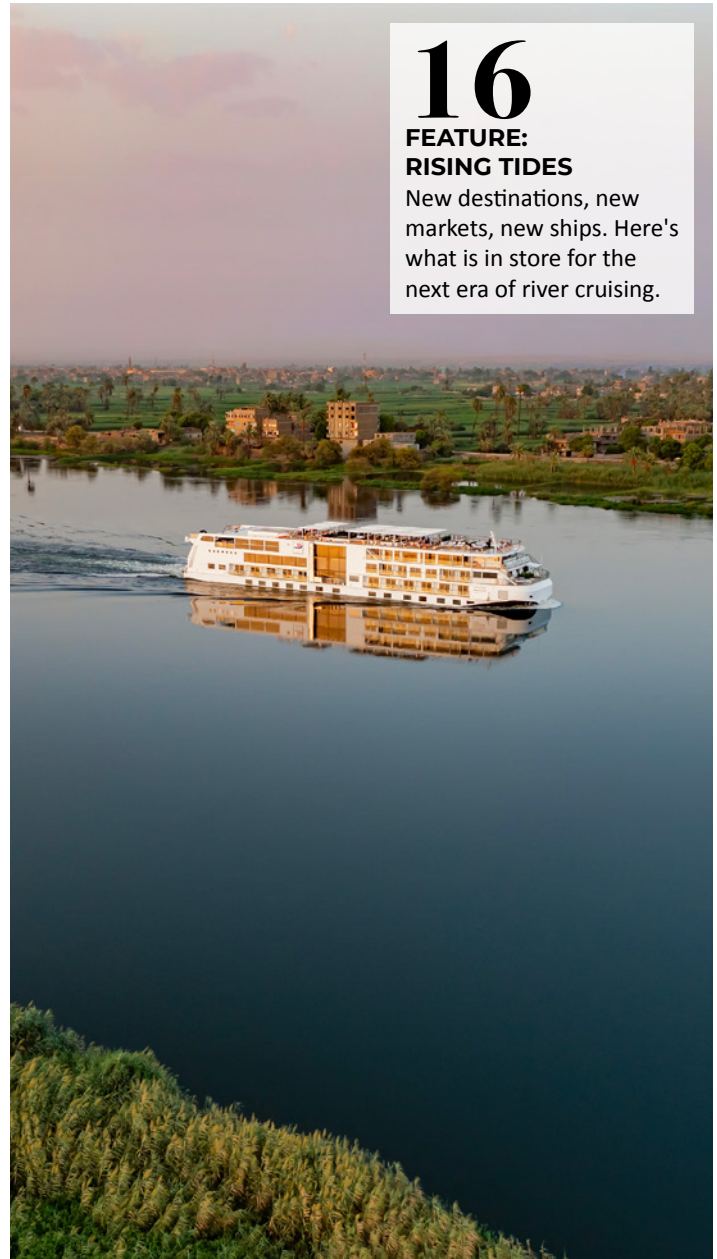
Contents



12

IN THE NEWS

AmaWaterways' fleet expansion; Viking does Egypt; Scenic announces new ships; Windstar creates new category; and more.



16

FEATURE: RISING TIDES

New destinations, new markets, new ships. Here's what is in store for the next era of river cruising.



14

OPINION

AmaWaterways' Steve Richards on the enduring appeal of river cruising.

Contents

21

FEATURE: THE ART OF THE RIVER CRUISE SHIP

From utilitarian vessels to floating boutique hotels, we explore the evolution of river cruise ship design.



26

Q&A: IT'S A DONE DEAL

Four agents share tips on how to sell river cruising.



30

RIVER CRUISE GUIDE

Immersive river cruise itineraries to inspire your clients.



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Partners



02

VIKING
No kids, no casinos, no NCFs.



05

AMAWATERWAYS
Here are 10 reasons to choose AmaWaterways.



08

UNIWORLD
Maximise your savings on luxury river cruises.



11

VIKING
Experience Viking's first ever cruise in India.



Partners



15

**AVALON
WATERWAYS**

Experience elevated
cruising today.



20

APT

The luxury travel
experts offering
world-class ships.



25

MARTIN RANDALL

Cultural tours for the
culturally curious.



29

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Editor's Letter



From expanded fleets and fresh destinations to new competitors heating up the market, the river cruise sector is booming right now - and plenty of untapped opportunities still remain.

"River cruising has been growing in popularity but it's still a niche area of cruising and holds a huge amount of potential," Cruise Lines International Association MD for Australasia, Joel Katz told *Cruise Weekly*.

One of the major growth areas of the industry lies in encouraging non-cruisers to consider river cruising, with its ability to allow guests to immerse themselves in multiple destinations and spectacular scenery at a relaxed pace.

"We often hear of guests who might have insisted they weren't suited to cruising, but came back from a river cruise as a convert," Katz said.

"Younger generations are increasingly cruise-curious, and river cruise lines cater to them well with more active excursions and experience-led itineraries. At the same time, repeat factors are very high in river cruising, which presents great opportunities

to suggest new rivers, new destinations and new regions to past cruisers."

Of course, it is often an easy sell when persuading ocean cruisers to switch to sailing on some of the world's greatest rivers, especially for those looking for new travel experiences.

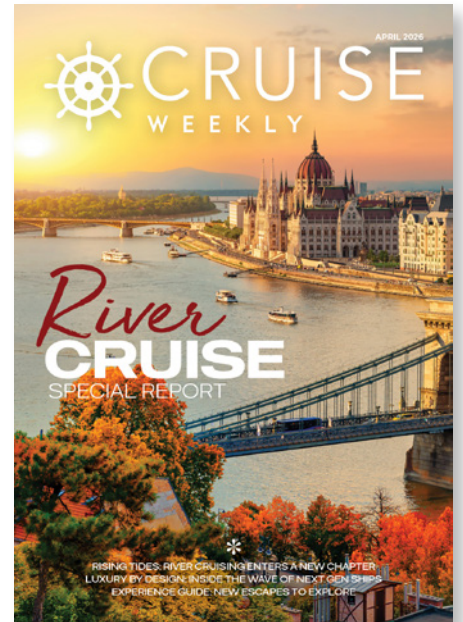
Meanwhile, whether you're a foodie, history buff or classical music enthusiast, river cruise lines like Avalon Waterways and Uniworld are leaning into specialist itineraries, adding cultural depth to their sailings.

Another white space in the river cruising market is families and kids, a demographic that new entrant Trafalgar has its eye on. Unlike its ocean counterparts with plenty of kids' clubs, onboard programs and rollercoasters galore, there are not many itineraries and experiences suitable for kids of any age in river cruising - until now.

While there are currently no dedicated childminding facilities on Trafalgar, the line offers kid-friendly entertainment, interconnected staterooms and flexible onboard spaces to appeal to its youngest passengers. It will be interesting to see the flow-on effect this accessible approach may have on other river cruise lines in the future.

Beyond new guests and itineraries, the sector's continued growth increasingly depends on venturing into new waterways. AmaWaterways' pioneering efforts on the Magdalena River come to mind. In 2025, the cruise line finally launched the river's first ever luxury cruise ship, after three years of collaborating with Colombia's communities and private and public sectors on the project.

My colleague Myles Stedman recently returned from a famil with Avalon Waterways, where he chatted with



There are still plenty of opportunities for river cruising to grow.

"YOUNGER GENERATIONS ARE INCREASINGLY CRUISE-CURIOUS, AND RIVER CRUISE LINES CATER TO THEM WELL."

president Pam Hoffee, who urged the wider industry to begin conversations around finding new ports.

"I think there are a lot of opportunities in Europe to go beyond the itineraries that exist and with so much more capacity coming, I think that's a reality of what we need to do as an industry," Hoffee told *Cruise Weekly*.

"There are communities that already have enough business from the river cruise industry and they're happy with what they have. We have to develop with communities that want to have river cruise ships coming, and there are tons of charming places that nobody's going to."

It is this kind of energy and sense of opportunity and innovation that is currently driving the thriving river cruise sector - and one that will see it reap plenty of benefits for the industry in the future. ••

Jo-Anne Hui-Miller
Special Report Editor/
Associate Publisher
Travel Daily & Cruise Weekly

Sponsor's Letter



Despite some uncertainty in today's travel environment, river cruising offers a lot to look forward to, and it remains a category with genuine momentum. What we're seeing is steady interest from guests who want travel that is well-planned, immersive and easy to navigate. River cruising does that very well.

At Viking, our newest river itineraries are opening up destinations like Egypt and India. These are places many travellers are curious about but may feel hesitant to explore on their own.

By river, the experience becomes seamless. Guests unpack once and travel deep into the destination, moving calmly from port to port. This sense of ease is what continues to make Europe's rivers so appealing. Many of our ships use long-held, grandfather ports right in the centre of towns and cities. That access changes the experience and it's something newer operators simply can't offer.

From an advisory perspective, trust comes down to how a cruise line operates day to day. We treat travel advisors as long-term partners and place strong emphasis on

clarity from how our product works to how we plan for challenges and support guests.

Since launching in this market, Viking has been the only river cruise line to offer no NCFs, with no hidden conditions or exceptions, and that commitment remains in place today. This transparency helps advisors set expectations early and have confident conversations with clients, particularly as travel conditions continue to evolve.

It is Viking's operational experience that advisors really value. High and low water levels are a natural part of river cruising, and when river conditions impact a sailing, advisors are who clients turn to first. Our experience, scale and full operational control allow us to respond quickly and keep journeys running smoothly, including managing ship swaps when needed. In many cases, changes are handled without losing a day. That means advisors are not managing a crisis. They are simply confirming that everything is under control.

Scale also brings flexibility. We currently operate 82 river ships, with a committed orderbook that will see our fleet grow to 112 river ships by 2028. That consistency across our sister ships means advisors know exactly what they are selling, and guests know what to expect onboard, regardless of destination. This scale supports greater availability and a wider range of itineraries, making it easier for advisors to match the right journey to the right traveller.

For travel advisors, what this ultimately comes down to is confidence. Trusted partnerships, proven experience and a clearly defined product make a Viking river voyage an easy recommendation. With those foundations in place, it remains one of the most dependable and rewarding ways clients can explore the world. ••



River cruising makes exploring new destinations easy and seamless.

"BY RIVER, THE EXPERIENCE BECOMES SEAMLESS. GUESTS UNPACK ONCE AND TRAVEL DEEP INTO THE DESTINATION, MOVING CALMLY FROM PORT TO PORT."

Michelle Black
Managing director
Viking Australia and
New Zealand



VIKING

INDIA

Viking's first river voyage in India



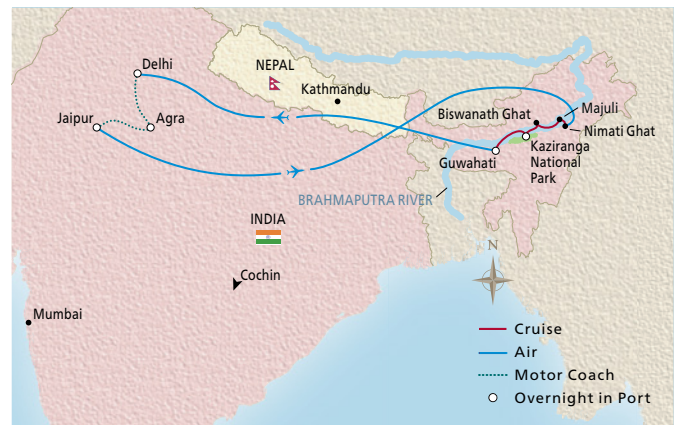
TAJ MAHAL, INDIA

NEW DEPARTURES RELEASED

Following the sell-out success of our new *Wonders of India* itinerary, we have released new departures across 2028 and 2029.

We will also welcome a second all veranda ship, *Viking Ganges*, sailing on India's Brahmaputra River from 2028. An identical sister ship to *Viking Brahmaputra*, *Viking Ganges* offers the same intimate onboard experience, hosting just 80 guests.

Built specifically for the Brahmaputra River and featuring the signature Scandinavian design for which we are known, our newest vessel the *Viking Ganges* along with the *Viking Brahmaputra* blend the elegance of our river fleet with regional influences.



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VIKING BRAHMAPUTRA / VIKING GANGES

NO KIDS | NO CASINOS | NO NCFS

In the news

AMAWATERWAYS' FLEET EXPANSION



AmaWaterways announced this month that it will operate more than 50 ships by 2032, making it the cruise line's largest growth investment to date.

The expansion plans aim to reinforce AmaWaterways' leadership in river cruising amid strong global demand for the sector, with the cruise line set to add more than 60% capacity to its Europe program.

AmaWaterways will introduce seven more ships on the continent, including one in Portugal, on top of the eight new vessels the line ordered in September.

There will also be new ships in Africa and Asia, with two new vessels on the Nile, and one additional ship on the Chobe River in northern Botswana.

The latest additions build on AmaWaterways' current fleet of 31 ships, with three more set to join next year across the Rhine, Danube, and Mekong.

"Our expansion reflects strong demand across both our established and emerging markets," CEO Catherine Powell said.

"River cruising is on a clear growth trajectory, and we are investing with purpose, expanding our global footprint while continuing to elevate the experience for our guests and our travel partners." •• MS



MRT CELEBRATES BEETHOVEN

Classical music lovers will enjoy Martin Randall Travel's 'Beethoven Along the Rhine' cruise from Amsterdam to Basel, marking 200 years since the legendary composer's death.

Sailing 5-12 May next year, the itinerary is part of the travel brand's festival series, offering guests daily talks from Beethoven scholar Professor Laura Tunbridge and private concerts on land, performed by internationally renowned string ensembles, chamber orchestras and soloists.

A special highlight for guests will be the rare chance to listen to all 16 works from Beethoven's complete String Quartet Cycle at the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn, the composer's birthplace.

Other concerts will take place at the iconic Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and a series of magnificent palaces and villas in Lembeck, Mannheim, Strasbourg and Basel. •• JHM



TAUCK SEES DOUBLE

Tauck recently christened its new ships *ms Lumière* and *ms Serene* during two ceremonies in Lyon in March.

The celebration for *ms Lumière* on the Rhône River was attended by 50 guests including her co-godmothers who christened the ship - Kristen Mack, vice president of Tauck director operations, and Brenna Shay, Tauck director manager.

Guests previewed several of the ship's new spaces such as wellness area, The Retreat, with a fitness centre, massage treatment room and lounge space surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows.

"Celebrating the christening of *ms Lumière* is a wonderful milestone, and these new ships allow us to welcome more travellers to these beautiful rivers while incorporating ideas and insights we've gathered from our guests and teams over the years," said Jennifer Tombaugh, CEO of Tauck.

ms Serene was christened two days later by godmother and Tauck vice chair of the board, Jennie Norman. ••

Emerald Kaia launched in April after passing through the Red Sea and Suez Canal.



SCENIC ANNOUNCES MAJOR FLEET GROWTH

NEWS

Scenic Group has announced the major growth of its river fleet, with three new luxury ships set to join its Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours and Emerald Cruises brands.

The new ships will join the fleet in 2027 and 2028, and include two ultra-luxury Scenic Space-Ships and one new Emerald Star-Ship, extending the company's presence across Europe and Asia.

Emerald Nova will be the first, launching on the Douro in Jun 2027, joining *Emerald Radiance*.

She will be followed by *Scenic Aria*, which will launch on the same river in Sep 2027.

Aria will join *Scenic Azure* in Portugal, operating both of the cruise line's signature itineraries on the river: the eight-day 'Delightful Douro' and the 11-day 'Unforgettable Douro'.

The final ship to launch will be *Scenic Spirit II*, which will arrive in early 2028 on the Mekong.

Already operating for the cruise line on the East Asian river is *Scenic Spirit*, which sails seven- and nine-night itineraries between Vietnam and Cambodia.

The announcement builds on Scenic Group's previously confirmed new ships, including *Emerald Astra* launching in May on the Rhine, Main and Danube; and *Emerald Lumi* debuting on the Seine next year.

Combined with the latest launch of new luxury yachts *Emerald Kaia*, *Emerald Raiya* in 2027, and *Emerald Xara* and *Scenic Ikon* in 2028, the commitment to build more new ships represents the Group's most significant fleet growth phase in nearly a decade. •• MS



+ VIKING SAILS LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Viking floated out two of its newest ships on the Nile River in April, *Viking Ptah* and *Viking Sekhmet*, set to debut in Sep and Nov this year respectively.

Both ships will sail the cruise line's 12-day 'Pharaohs and Pyramids' itinerary, featuring a three-night stay at a first-class hotel in Cairo, visits to the Great Pyramids of Giza, the necropolis of Sakkara and the Grand Egyptian Museum.

Guests will then fly to Luxor with a Viking Egyptologist, where they will visit the temples of Luxor and Karnak and begin an eight-day roundtrip sailing on the Nile.

"With the float out-of our two newest ships, we look forward to further expanding our elegant fleet on the Nile and welcoming more curious travelers to experience this extraordinary region in the years to come," said Torstein Hagen, Chairman and CEO of Viking. ••



Amadeus is set to debut its first ship on Portugal's Douro River in 2028, sailing between March and November.

"We are delighted to bring the Amadeus experience to Douro, one of Europe's most beautiful and culturally rich regions," said head of sales, Corina Lueftner.

"The Douro Valley has become an increasingly popular destination, and with Amadeus Douro we are excited to offer our partners and guests a truly immersive way to explore its extraordinary scenery, wine heritage and historic towns."

Amadeus Douro will have capacity for 111 guests and feature 54 staterooms and two suites, most with either dropdown panoramic windows or private balconies.

She will also offer spacious public areas, an open sun deck with a pool, and a lounge area and bar. *Douro* is being constructed with sustainability in mind, featuring hybrid propulsion technology. •• JHM

River cruising comes of age

Steve Richards,
AmaWaterways
Managing Director



River cruising has come a long way in a relatively short time. What was once seen as a niche option is now firmly part of the mainstream conversation. It delivers on many of the things travellers are looking for: depth of experience, a more relaxed pace and confidence in how they travel.

For advisors, it's no longer a 'nice to have'. It's where some of the most valuable conversations are happening.

Experience as the true differentiator

One of the biggest shifts we're seeing is in what clients expect from their travel. It's less about ticking off landmarks and more about how they connect with a destination.

That's where river cruising really stands out. Through AmaWaterways' experiences, guests might sit down with a local distiller for a private gin tasting, cook alongside a Parisian 'mamie', or spend time in villages such as Kampong Tralach along the Mekong. In Africa, visiting a Namibian village near Impalila Island or connecting with local communities along the Chobe River adds a cultural layer that stays with guests long after they return home.

These are the moments people talk about, and a big part of why river cruising continues to resonate.

Confidence in a changing landscape

The appetite to travel is still very much there, but how people make decisions has shifted.

River cruising offers a level of simplicity that clients appreciate. Smaller numbers, well-planned itineraries and the ability to see multiple destinations without constant unpacking create a more relaxed experience.

For advisors, the key is to stay on the front foot. Even if clients take longer to commit, starting the conversation early makes a real difference. When confidence lifts, demand returns quickly, and that's when availability becomes the challenge.

Getting the right fit for your client

Where advisors really add value is in matching the right experience to the right client.

For those looking for something different, destinations like Colombia offer a real sense of discovery. For families or multi-generational groups, festive season sailings work incredibly well. For clients drawn to culture, food and history, Europe and the Mekong remain consistently strong.

River cruising isn't one thing anymore. It's a collection of different experiences, and the more you tailor it, the better the outcome.

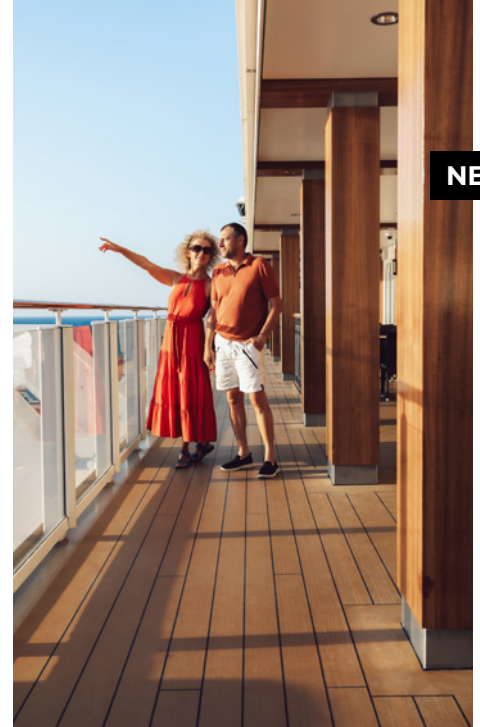
Well-placed for what comes next

Looking ahead, river cruising is well-aligned with where travel is heading. There is a growing preference for slower, more considered journeys, and the category continues to evolve with new destinations and richer experiences.

We're seeing strong interest across both new and repeat guests at AmaWaterways, reflecting what's happening more broadly. Awareness is growing, satisfaction levels are high and more travellers are recognising what river cruising offers.

For advisors, it comes back to knowing your client, having the conversation early and being ready when the time is right. River cruising will remain one of the most in-demand ways to explore the world. ••

**RIVER CRUISING
OFFERS A LEVEL
OF SIMPLICITY
THAT CLIENTS
APPRECIATE.**



NEWS

WINDSTAR CREATES NEW CATEGORY

Windstar is set to launch a new category called river-to-ocean cruising, offering agents new opportunities to retain and grow their client base.

Launching in December, the line's 224-passenger yacht *Star Explorer* is purpose-built for river-to-ocean travel, with the ability to navigate both narrow waterways that ocean ships usually avoid and coastal destinations that traditional river vessels are unable to access.

"River cruisers are among the most loyal and engaged travellers, but many have already explored the world's most iconic waterways," says Janet Bava, chief commercial officer, Windstar Cruises.

"With Windstar, advisors now have a seamless way to retain those clients by offering something new: yachts that move from rivers to the open sea, unlocking destinations that traditional river ships and large ocean vessels simply can't reach. It's a natural next step for clients and a growth opportunity for advisors." ••

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CHANGING COURSE

There is something in the river waters. Fleets are evolving, new players are entering the market, and innovation is reshaping river cruising as the sector gathers pace.

BY MYLES STEDMAN



As recently as two years ago, river cruising was still a mostly niche, retiree-heavy, Europe-only product. However, since 2024, the sector has entered a new phase of expansion and diversification that has seen it enter the travel industry's mainstream, attract a wider range of guests, and grow exponentially across the world.

According to Future Market Insights, the industry globally is expected to grow 11.2% by 2036, reaching a value of US\$9 billion (\$A12.6 billion).

"We are seeing an enormous amount of development and innovation in river cruising right now, which is a sign of a thriving market and a huge amount of enthusiasm among travellers," Joel Katz, Cruise Lines International Association Australasia MD said.

"It's a dynamic time for river cruising, and I think that presents a lot of opportunities."

Why river cruising?

Despite the large amount of change in the sector at present, the same qualities which have made river cruising popular for decades remain relevant. The travel style offers ease and convenience, with passengers unpacking once, just like their ocean counterparts.

Where traditional cruising cannot compare to river sailing, however, is in the access that it provides. River ships typically dock far closer to the heart of the destination than ocean vessels, and passengers are never required to navigate the rigmarole of tendering to shore, while accessing far smaller destinations than ocean ships.

These factors feed into the post-pandemic appetite for more meaningful travel. River cruising's relatively short intra-port transit times allow passengers to stay far longer in the destination, which addresses what travellers have been looking for - slow travel.

"They're travelling less frequently, but they're travelling further distances for longer periods, and they're not doing 11 countries in 20 days - they are doing one country and deep diving, that sort of destination immersion," Luxury Travel Collection general manager Nikki Glading said.

Entering new waters

River cruising can thank some of its most popular destinations for the surge of interest the sector is witnessing. The rebirth of Egypt is being led by the Nile, with even the recent outbreak of war in neighbouring countries failing to dampen enthusiasm. »

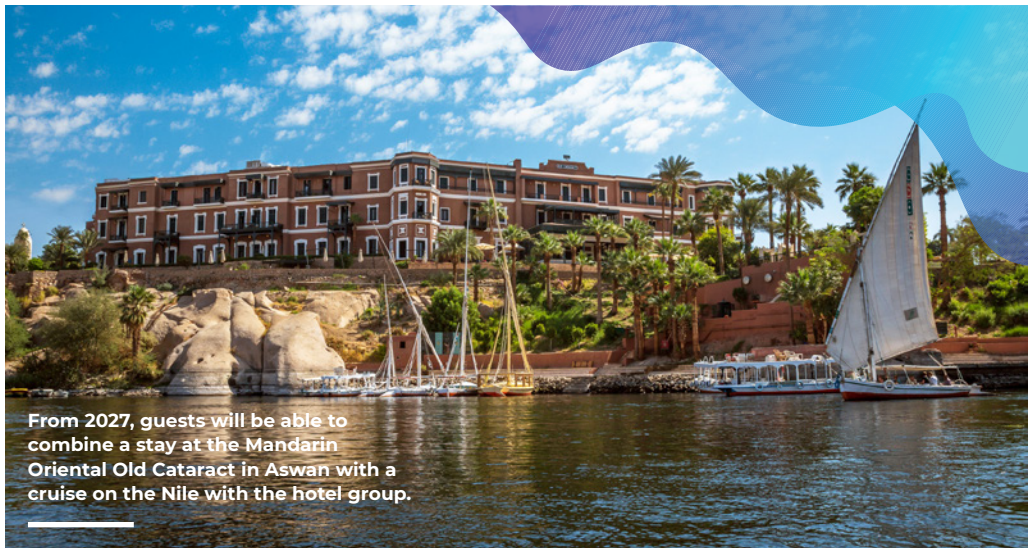
"SINCE ANNOUNCING OUR NEW RIVER VOYAGES IN INDIA, WE HAVE SEEN STRONG INTEREST FROM GUESTS EAGER TO EXPLORE THIS REMARKABLE REGION."

Cruise lines like Viking and Uniworld are expanding their fleet into India.

Hotel group Mandarin Oriental is entering river cruising in July 2027 with a luxury Nile experience, offering three-, four-, and seven-night itineraries between Luxor and Aswan, paired with stays at its properties. Meanwhile, current popular choices for the Nile such as Uniworld and AmaWaterways report Egypt as one of their most well-loved destinations.

However, future destinations are proving just as popular as current ones. The increased diversity of passengers is forcing lines to step outside of their traditional comfort zones and pioneer new destinations, and occasionally, new rivers altogether. AmaWaterways early last year made a breakthrough in river cruising with its first departures on the Magdalena River in Colombia, with *AmaMagdalena* and *AmaMelodia* set to sail the waterway between Cartagena and Barranquilla. Much of the cruising infrastructure along the river was constructed by AmaWaterways, in a project that took years to come to life.

Next year will see Viking, the world's largest river cruise line, debut on the Brahmaputra in India. While a long list of tiny, locally-owned operators over the past 20 years have operated on the waterway, Viking will be the first major player, when it introduces its purpose-built *Viking Brahmaputra* in 2027. She will sail a 15-day 'Wonders of India' itinerary combining an eight-day river voyage with a land tour of the Golden Triangle of Agra, Delhi, and Jaipur.



From 2027, guests will be able to combine a stay at the Mandarin Oriental Old Cataract in Aswan with a cruise on the Nile with the hotel group.

Brahmaputra will be followed by her sister ship *Viking Ganges*, which will make her debut in 2028.

"Since announcing our new river voyages in India, we have seen strong interest from guests eager to explore this remarkable region," said Torstein Hagen, chairman and CEO of Viking.

"By adding a second ship on the Brahmaputra River in 2028 and opening 2029 departure dates now, we look forward to inviting even more curious travellers to explore India in Viking comfort in the years to come."

The cruise line is also planning to expand its itineraries to reflect how and where guests love to travel, Viking ANZ managing director Michelle Black told *Cruise Weekly*.

"In Europe, that includes longer river journeys and river and ocean combinations like the Iberian Odyssey," she said. "In the United States, we're growing our offering on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, showcasing destinations known for their history, culture and strong sense of place."

Meanwhile, other rivers receiving attention from cruise lines for the first time include Australia's Murray River, with Murray River Paddlesteamers and APT now partnering on a new five-star vessel, *Australian Star*. Abercrombie & Kent is also increasing its presence on the Amazon, and may soon be joined by new kids on the block, Trafalgar, with vice president Damien O'Connor recently hinting at a possible debut on the world's second-longest river. »



River cruisers are diversifying

Growing as diverse as the destinations are the passengers themselves. Some river cruise lines are now targeting families - traditionally only welcomed aboard ocean vessels - while others focus on younger travellers.

This has transformed the sector from one which primarily targets older cruisers to an experience which appeals to children, parents, and grandparents. The sector is answering the demand for multigenerational travel with more active shoreside experiences and new onboard spaces, among other product enhancements.

Trafalgar's recently-launched river cruises aim to bridge the gap between traditional markets and younger guests through onboard programming and land activities.

"I think a lot of people overlook touring and river cruising when it comes to families. We're going to try to make it very accessible to families with kids from six years old right the way through to teenagers," said The Travel Corporation's Toni Ambler when Trafalgar announced its entry into river cruising last year.

Other changes Trafalgar has made to cater to a broader age group include offering "live show"-style entertainment over old-school performances, and even moments led by the ship's captain.

In addition, the line boasts interconnecting rooms, something that is otherwise almost exclusively available on ocean vessels, and caters to larger groups, such as families.

Meanwhile, Avalon Waterways is focused on steering its cruises toward a more typical land touring customer base of 35-55 year-olds. The GFOB-owned cruise line is tempting these passengers by rolling out more 'Active & Discovery' departures, which specifically target travellers who like to be on-the-go all day. These itineraries swap the traditional, slower-paced wandering tours for more hiking and cycling options. Some of its European cruises even allow passengers to bike to the ship's next port of call, when visiting two ports in one day.



FEATURE

**"THEY'RE TRAVELLING
LESS FREQUENTLY,
BUT THEY'RE TRAVELLING
FURTHER DISTANCES
FOR LONGER PERIODS."**

Scenic Eclipse sailing the Komodo Islands.

New kids on the block

Different varieties of travellers flocking to river cruising have seen a new range of brands enter the sector. Trafalgar has begun by targeting its product to the families its land tours attract. The brand is only starting with three ships, but this will expand quickly, as will its destination map, said Trafalgar's O'Connor.

Meanwhile, Celebrity River Cruises will make its debut next year, following the encouragement of its oceangoing guests. The cruise line will debut with *Celebrity Compass* and *Celebrity Seeker*, with plans for a fleet of 20 ships by 2031. The vessels will aim to emulate Celebrity's popular Edge-class ocean ships, which maintain a strong following within the premium market.

"There will be three marquee experiences throughout our entire fleet that will show up on our river ships," Celebrity president and chief executive officer Laura Hodges Bethge explained.

"First will be our Sunset Bar at the back of the ship behind the rooftop garden; then we will have our miniaturised Martini Bar; and then also Cafe Al Bacio, which is a gathering place for everyone throughout our fleet. Our top deck, unlike others, will never close, even when we're going under the locks," she added.

Another travel brand entering river cruise includes National Geographic, which will enter Europe's waterways with a third-party charter arrangement through its tie-in with Lindblad Expeditions. The brand will focus on more educational and naturalist-led excursions, bringing another dimension to the industry.

Meanwhile, hotel brand Waldorf Astoria will also enter river cruising on the Nile,



alongside fellow luxury hotel brand Mandarin Oriental.

"Egypt is one of the fastest growing global destinations and presents a rare opportunity to create a journey that is both culturally rich and uniquely Mandarin Oriental," said Laurent Kleitman, group CEO at Mandarin Oriental.

By uniting our first river cruise, with truly iconic historic hotels in Luxor and Aswan, alongside the upcoming Mandarin Oriental Shepheard, Cairo, we are introducing a seamless, end-to-end experience that unfolds across land and water."

The future of river cruising

Unlike many other sectors of travel, river cruising's immediate future is already playing out, as new destinations are plotted, the industry becomes further segmented, and more first-time cruisers choose river over ocean.

Trafalgar's O'Connor has already started pushing new pins into his brand's map, and told *Cruise Weekly*: "We've got on our radar at the moment the Rhône, Douro in Portugal; we're looking at the Amazon, we're looking at Vietnam, we're looking at the Great Lakes in the US, the Mississippi." »

"THESE JOURNEYS FOSTER CONNECTION AMONG LIKE-MINDED TRAVELERS WHILE ADDING DEPTH TO THE ITINERARY."

Trafalgar is bringing kid-friendly river cruising into the sector.

AmaWaterways' Richards also spoke of possible new destinations to watch out for in the future, some of which, like the Magdalena, have never seen river cruise passengers before.

The future of river cruising will also see a wider range of interest appealed to, outside of what some in the sector used to refer to as "ABC cruises" - "another bloody cathedral".

While the luxury end of the market, such as Uniworld, Abercrombie & Kent, and others continue to expand their fleets, Trafalgar is targeting travellers with small budgets, making river cruising accessible to a wider variety of passengers.

Niche interests are also being explored by river cruise lines, from Lindblad's naturalist-led departures and Avalon's 'Storyteller' itineraries hosted by authors, actors, and musicians, to AmaWaterways' beer and wine cruises and golf trips.

According to Uniworld CEO Ellen Bettridge, these specialised itineraries are important for today's river cruise guest, who is looking for more than just beautiful

surroundings and desires personalised and enriching experiences both onboard and onshore.

"Our themed sailings have become a meaningful part of that experience. Whether centered around music, culinary discovery, or other shared interests, these journeys foster connection among like-minded travelers while adding depth to the itinerary," Bettridge told *Cruise Weekly*.

"For example, our recent women-only Cruise brought together women from different generations and backgrounds for a series of thoughtfully curated experiences, from an onboard comedy set by Saturday Night Live alum Rachel Dratch to a burlesque workshop and Lunya pajama party," she said.

It was an entirely new offering for the line and one that resonated so strongly with guests, it will make a return in the future, Bettridge noted.

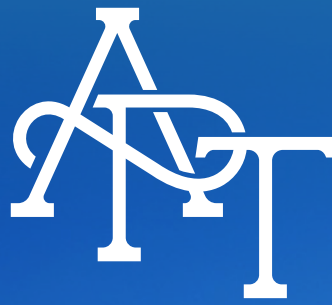
As CLIA's Katz pointed out, the increased options available now for travellers is in turn leading to increased opportunities for agents.

"As itineraries become more diverse and ships more differentiated, agents can position themselves as specialists - helping clients navigate an increasingly sophisticated choice of ships, inclusions, and destinations," he told *Cruise Weekly*.

"There is a great opportunity to match travellers to experiences that align with their interests - aspects like wellness, gastronomy, active excursions, or cultural immersion."

He added: "This opens the door to new-to-cruise customers, cross-selling opportunities, and the ability to build long-term client relationships within a very rewarding and increasingly diverse form of travel."

These rapid changes to the sector mean river cruising is no longer an emerging industry - it's establishing itself as a core pillar of the travel business. Its relocation from niche consideration to mainstream vacation means that there is a brand, style, or destination for every kind of traveller - which was almost unthinkable just a few years ago. ••



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LUXURY BY DESIGN



As river cruising quickly gains momentum around the world, a new wave of innovation and sophistication is reshaping the evolution of ship design.

BY JO-ANNE HUI-MILLER

From the sunburnt terracotta roofs of Florence and the tranquil Mekong to the lush Amazonian jungle, discovering the world on water has always been a romantic experience, and one that has evolved as river cruise ship design has grown in sophistication.

“River cruising is one of the most exciting areas in travel right now, and we’re seeing a huge amount of innovation and investment as a result. The market is forecast to grow significantly over coming years, which is driving an evolution in both ship design and the immersive experience guests can expect on shore,” Cruise Lines International Association Australasia managing director Joel Katz told *Cruise Weekly*.

With a focus on slow travel and cultural depth, and elevated offerings such as spacious suites and wellness amenities, today’s elegant vessels are a far cry from the converted cargo barges of the 1960s, when the industry was in its infancy and guests endured cramped, utilitarian cabins.

“Modern river ships are increasingly conceived as floating boutique hotels, with interiors, materials and fittings that complement the destinations they pass through,” continued Katz.

“The latest generation of ships offer more in the way of panoramic outlooks, open decks and locally-inspired decor, all of which help to establish a greater connection for the traveller.”

Here, several leaders in river cruising discuss some of the key ways that river cruise ship design has advanced over the years - and what the ship of the future will look like. »



Destination-led design

According to APT Travel Group CEO David Cox, the design philosophy for each of the business' ships starts in the same place each time - the destination itself.

"A ship should feel like it belongs exactly where it is, and that plays out very differently on the Nile versus the Rhine or Danube," he told *Cruise Weekly*.

"In Europe, the rivers are narrow and the landscapes shift constantly. The ships that reflect that are sleek and considered," he continued.

However, sailing in Egypt demands something different, given guests are often spending long days in the intense heat, exploring ancient sites, Cox explained. To cater to this experience, the ship needs to be more like a sanctuary - calm, spacious and restorative.

In September this year, APT Travel Group's brand Travelmarvel will launch its purpose-built ship for the Nile, *Travelmarvel Sirius*. Featuring a sun deck at the heart of the vessel, she will also offer an expansive pool with open-air lounging and the Tutankhamun Terrace Cafe.

As Cox explained, "When you're sailing past temples that are 3,000 years old, you want space to simply stop and take it in."

Whether it is by showcasing artwork from local artisans, featuring crafted details or using locally-sourced materials, modern-day river cruise lines often focus on creating bespoke spaces and taking design cues from the surrounding locale.

"Each design decision is intentional, a deliberate choice to create bespoke spaces rather than a cookie-cutter approach," explained Stacey Van Harn, director from design practice Hecker Guthrie, which works with APT.

"We always want our projects to be relevant for the location they sit within. A lot of research goes into the locale and what makes the region special, and how we can inject that personality into each of the spaces without it being thematic."

For Uniworld CEO Ellen Bettridge, river cruising will become even more personalised and design-forward in the future, as guests are increasingly drawn to meaningful and distinctive experiences.

No two Uniworld vessels are alike, with each inspired by the destinations and rivers on which they sail, "creating a deeper connection between the ship and the journey itself".

"You'll find our *S.S. Venezia* wrapped in custom Fortuny fabrics in Venice, or original Picasso works onboard the *S.S. Beatrice* as it



FEATURE

APT Solara offers expansive social spaces for guests to connect.

“MODERN RIVER SHIPS ARE INCREASINGLY CONCEIVED AS FLOATING BOUTIQUE HOTELS.”



Celebrity River Cruises' upcoming vessels will offer a wide range of culinary experiences.

journeys along the Danube through cultural capitals like Vienna and Budapest," she told *Cruise Weekly*.

"These aren't simply decorative elements - they're part of a larger storytelling approach that brings the destination on board."

She added: "Our upcoming Super Ships, including the *S.S. Audrey* and *S.S. Marlene*, are a perfect example, inspired by iconic Hollywood figures Audrey Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich. These vessels will bring a new, narrative-driven layer to the onboard experience."

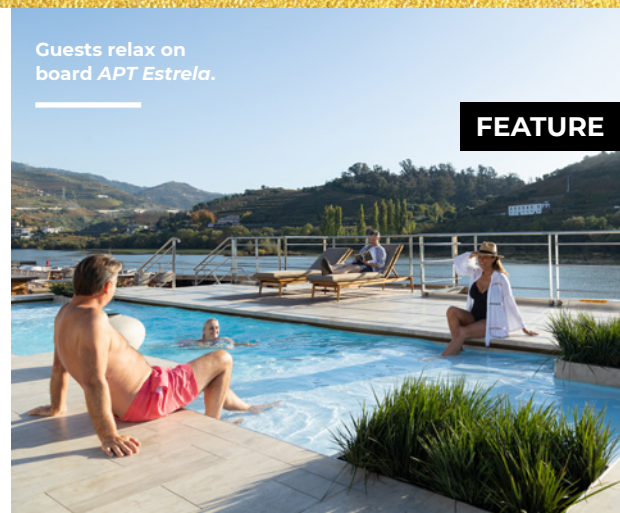
Onboard spaces, reimagined

As passengers' needs and interests have evolved over time, so have cruise lines' creative use of space on board river cruise ships.

"The newest features are less about gimmicks and more about multi-use lifestyle spaces. The strongest trends are wellness, culinary diversity, smaller-ship intimacy, and more immersive destination design," explained Katherine Nielsen, Scenic's director of global marketing and branded content. »

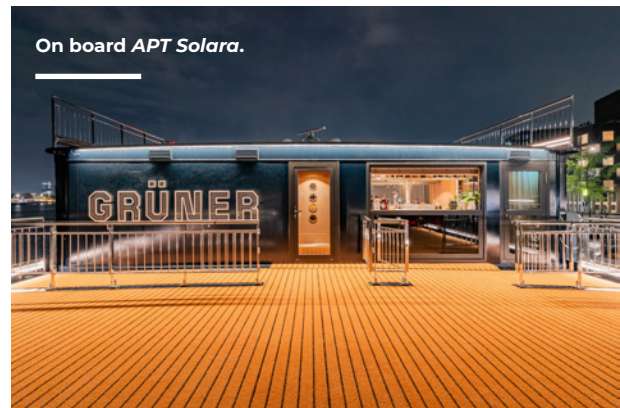


The Elements spa on board *Emerald Kaia*.



Guests relax on board *APT Estrela*.

FEATURE



On board *APT Solara*.

Health-conscious and active travellers are often able to enjoy well-equipped sophisticated gyms with on-deck yoga sessions, swimming pools, and equipment on offer for active shore exploration such as bicycles, electric bikes and walking poles.

Wellness studios complemented by dedicated onboard programs, as well as massage rooms and luxurious spa offerings are becoming more common on ships across the board, too.

Scenic Group recently announced its upcoming fleet expansion, with six new ships launching between 2026 and 2028 - all of which will feature "more sophisticated marinas, new enhanced interiors, open-air gyms and expanded spa facilities that cater to a trend towards wellness cruising", explained Nielsen.

Meanwhile, social spaces have also expanded across plenty of fleets, with multifunctional areas focusing on in- and outdoor living, including sky terraces, intimate lounges and generous swimming pools that convert into cinemas or entertainment spaces.

In addition, river cruise ships now cater to a diverse range of palettes and often feature several distinct dining venues, each with their own menu and culinary experience, whether it is al fresco dining on the sun deck or an elevated chef's table offering.

It is quite a departure from years gone by when ships offered just one main dining room on board, noted APT's Cox.

On board *APT Ostara* and *APT Solara*, which each offer six different venues, the Grünert Bar

**“THE
NEWEST
FEATURES
ARE LESS
ABOUT
GIMMICKS
AND MORE
ABOUT
MULTI-USE
LIFESTYLE
SPACES.”**

is a particularly innovative highlight, which Cox describes as “an incredible feat of engineering”.

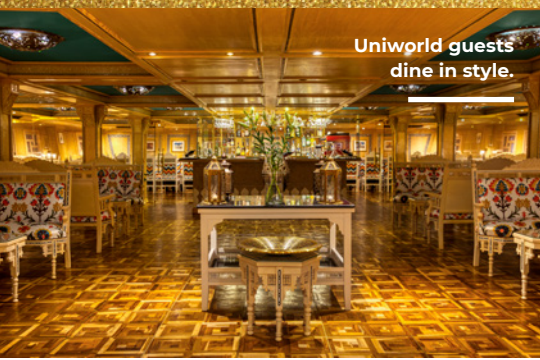
"When the ship is sailing, it operates from the back of deck three as an intimate 28-seat restaurant," he said. "When the ship is in port, the crew press a button and the entire venue - seating, galley, bar and all - lifts hydraulically up to the sun deck, where it becomes a walk-up bar for guests catching some sun or taking in the views."

Meanwhile, at Scenic and Emerald, the vessels are small enough to pull into remote ports, allowing for local cuisine to come on board, often pulling up to fishing boats to buy a fresh catch. Guests are able to enjoy a truly local food experience, as the onboard chefs have the chance to develop regionally-inspired menus throughout the sailing.

Ocean cruise line Celebrity recently launched into river cruising with the promise of offering industry-leading ship design, one of its highlights being its "revolutionary" open decks, which the line claims will offer the most usable outdoor space of any river ship, immersing travellers in uninterrupted, 360-degree views.

On board the upcoming *Celebrity Seeker* and *Celebrity Compass*, guests can also enjoy dining directly over the water on 'Magic Edge', innovative cantilevered dining pods, launching in 2027.

"Celebrity River Cruises ships will be the most innovative on the river, with a patent-pending industry-leading design that offers more space to vacation while bringing guests even closer to destinations," said Laura Hodges Bethge, president of Celebrity Cruises. »



Uniworld guests dine in style.



One of Riverside's suites.



FEATURE

Designing the modern stateroom

Taking inspiration from ocean cruising and designer hotels, many river cruise lines have transformed what were once cramped cabins into luxurious experiences, such as creating expansive suites, adding stylish touches to the interiors and offering amenities from designer brands.

Lines have also developed creative uses of space, offering guests more room to relax in their cabins.

"The introduction of wider vessels, like Riverside Luxury Cruises' *Mozart*, which is nearly twice the width of traditional ships, has enabled more public space and larger cabins, essentially bringing ocean cruise dimensions to the European rivers," Riverside Luxury Cruises (RLC) country manager for Australia and New Zealand, Stewart Williams said.

In fact, RLC offers some of the largest cabins in the market, with sizes ranging from 18sqm for standard suites to an expansive 70-82sqm for Owner's Suites.

"Every stateroom is a suite, with the majority featuring walk-in closets, king-size beds and bathrooms with double-vanity sinks," said Williams.

Whether it's the vineyards of the Douro or the Ganges in Varanasi, the beauty of river cruising is waking up in a different destination every day, and cruise lines have discovered innovative ways to give passengers more opportunities to immerse themselves in the changing landscapes outside. The cruising days of small picture windows are over.

On board APT's *Solara* and *Ostara*,

Electric slide-down windows on APT.

"I ENVISAGE A LEVEL OF PERSONALISATION OF THE GUEST EXPERIENCE BECOMING MORE ACCESSIBLE."

Owner's Suites include floor-to-ceiling windows, while French suites feature electric slide-down windows, giving guests the feeling of opening up the entire room to the landscape outdoors.

RLC guests can enjoy French or walk-out balconies, while the Panorama Suites on Avalon's Suite Ships feature floor-to-ceiling windows that open to create an 18.5sqm open balcony.

In addition, every Comfort Collection bed on board the Suite Ships faces the outside, so guests can admire the view from the moment they wake up.

Meanwhile, Scenic's ships feature sunroom balconies with sliding doors, which can convert from a closed window to an open air balcony at the push of a button, complete with two chairs.

Welcome to the ship of the future

As innovation continues to support the increasing demand for river cruising globally, cruise lines are looking into the future and considering the next generation of vessels.

For Hecker Guthrie's Van Harn, technology will play a significant role in the guest experience in the future.

"I envisage a level of personalisation of the guest experience becoming more accessible, [such as] the ability for guests to alter lighting, temperature, and other

functionality of their cabins to suit their preferences through in-cabin apps and smart control systems," she said.

"Things like this will start to get more automated as this technology improves and becomes more widely adopted."

Meanwhile, Nielsen believes that in the future, as river cruise lines explore an even greater diversity of waterways around the world, more will be designed as purpose-built vessels, like *Emerald Lumi* on the Seine, *Scenic Spirit II* on the Mekong and *Scenic Aria* and *Emerald Nova* on the Douro.

"There will also be more emphasis on open views and convertible spaces with stronger spa, fitness and recovery offerings, rather than classically cruise-like," Nielsen said.

Luxury river vessels of the future will also feature more seamless terraces and modular social spaces, quieter machinery, lighter materials, and better sensory design, she predicted.

"If there were no limitations, the dream river ship would feature the wellness offering of a destination spa, the culinary diversity of a city precinct and the exploration capability of an expedition vessel," said Nielsen.

"It is about better curating guest spaces rather than scale, and making every square metre feel like it was designed specifically for you." ••

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A DONE DEAL: HOW TO SELL RIVER CRUISE

Four travel agent leaders share their hottest tips for selling river cruising to clients.

INTERVIEWS BY JO-ANNE HUI-MILLER



THE EXPERTS



BRAD KENNEDY,
GENERAL MANAGER,
CRUISEABOUT



JANE FOWLER,
PERSONAL TRAVEL MANAGER,
TRAVELMANAGERS



KARRYN BARTLETT,
PERSONAL TRAVEL MANAGER,
TRAVELMANAGERS



KAREN RIDGE,
CRUISE SPECIALIST,
TRAVEL & CRUISE

“CUSTOMERS LOVE A RECOMMENDATION AND YOUR ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PRODUCT WILL SHINE THROUGH.”



Cruise Weekly: What are some ways that agents can improve their river cruise selling abilities?

Brad Kennedy: Having a commitment to continuous learning is important in any role but even more so when you're selling a product. There is so much out there to absorb. We always tell new-starters that the CLIA learning platform is a really great place to begin, and then for specific products, working with the trade partners and BDMs is even more helpful to get that tailored level of knowledge.

We also have an internal platform within Cruiseabout designed for knowledge sharing between our consultants, which I think is absolutely key. I'd encourage other organisations to set this up for their consultants as a proactive community-building measure.

Also don't forget to ask your customers about their holidays. They're the ones spending their own hard-earned dollars and will very candidly tell you what they did and didn't like about their cruise experience. This intel is gold for future bookings.

All that said, nothing beats experiencing the product and destination yourself, so as often as the opportunity presents itself, we're getting our consultants out of the office and on board.

Jane Fowler: Experiencing a river cruise firsthand is the ideal way to truly understand how it works and who it suits. If that is not possible, do as much product training as you can and stay curious about the different cruise lines and destinations.

Read, listen, and learn from suppliers, but also from your own clients.

CW: What are your tips for encouraging clients to consider river cruising as an option?

BK: I like to think of river cruising as the perfect entry into cruising for sceptics. I've seen a lot of people come back from their first completely converted after saying they would never go on a cruise.

Even in entry-level cabins, the ships are more luxurious, the routes are generally more scenic, and most importantly, you aren't going to be faced with rough seas like you may on an ocean cruise. The ships also dock right in the heart of your destination, so it's incredibly convenient to explore the town and be back at the ship within a 20-minute walk.

I think the best thing consultants can do is just ask the question: "What are your thoughts on taking a river cruise?" Customers love a recommendation and your enthusiasm for the product will shine through.

JF: I always present river cruising as an option alongside a land-based itinerary so clients can see the difference in style of travel and how the river cruise works out more value for money.

I talk about the convenience of unpacking once while still seeing multiple destinations. That is something many travellers really value.

I also explain that it offers flexibility. You can socialise and meet new people if you enjoy company, or simply enjoy your own space if you prefer a quieter experience.

The expertise of the staff onboard as well as the local guides is another big advantage. They often bring a destination to life in ways that independent travel sometimes cannot. »

Plenty of river cruise sceptics return from their trips as cruise converts, says Cruiseabout's Brad Kennedy.

Karen Ridge: [I tell them] you can intensively explore a country from the river, whereas an ocean cruise will only take you to coastal cities. It's more immersive in that way.

Also river cruising is not just for the older generation - it's a common misconception. There are river cruises for families, for the active and for the adventurous.

Consider a shorter river cruise, something like a Christmas markets river cruise or the Douro in Portugal as a first-time river cruise, where you can enjoy the sights rather than sitting on a coach for a lot of the time.

CW: Who are the kinds of clients attracted to river cruising?

BK: We tend to find seasoned travellers are the highest bookers of the product; they enjoy the ease and convenience as opposed to that really fast-paced style of travel that they've done.

That said, we still recommend river cruising to those who aren't experienced travellers – there is a product out there for everyone.

JF: River cruising appeals to a diverse range of travellers, including:

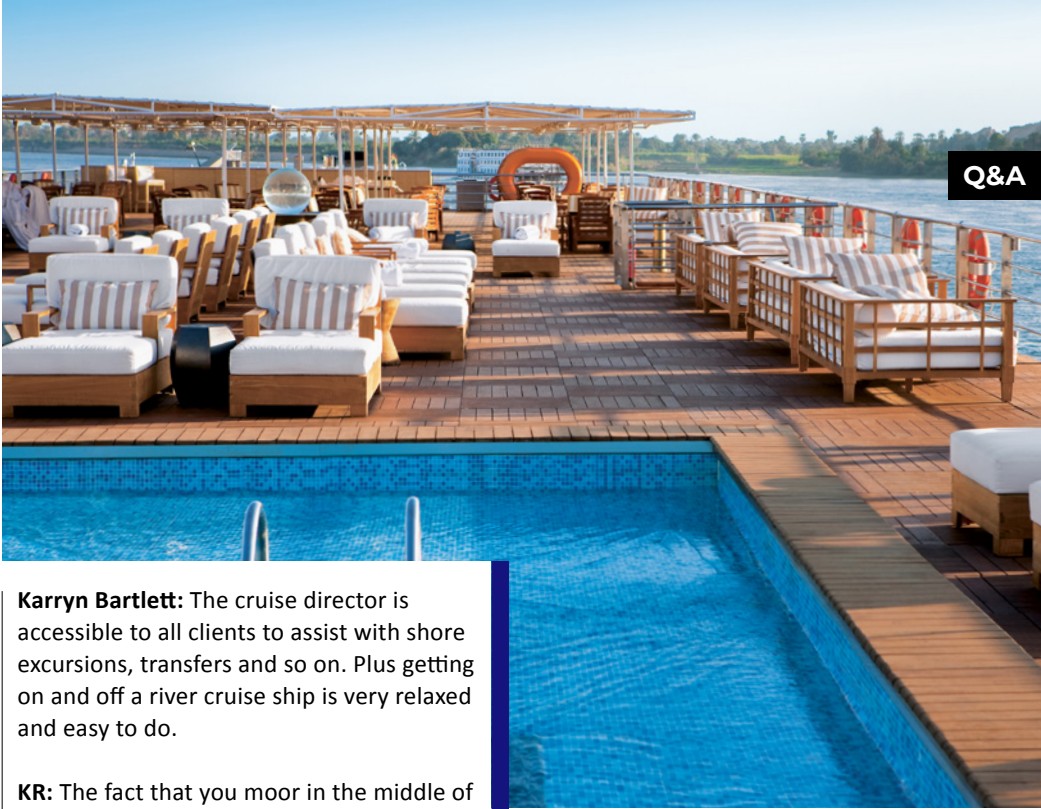
- Ocean cruisers who already enjoy cruising and are looking for something a little more immersive.
- Travellers who like a well-planned itinerary but still want a slower, more comfortable pace.
- Clients who enjoy learning about destinations and value ease, comfort, and organisation.

CW: What are some of the hidden benefits of river cruising that most clients do not consider?

JF: Having expert guides with you throughout the journey who can suggest experiences you may not have thought of on your own.

There is also the chance to meet like-minded travellers and form genuine connections along the way.

Then you are introduced to new experiences and the simplicity of travel. Everything flows smoothly, which allows travellers to focus on enjoying the experience rather than worrying about logistics.



Karryn Bartlett: The cruise director is accessible to all clients to assist with shore excursions, transfers and so on. Plus getting on and off a river cruise ship is very relaxed and easy to do.

KR: The fact that you moor in the middle of each city or town is a huge plus and saves a lot of time and money. As with any cruise, you unpack once, and the destination comes to you each day.

There are no early arrivals to airports or security checks wasting your valuable holiday time.

I also think many river cruise companies are trying hard to introduce unique experiences that you wouldn't have access to if you did your own thing.

CW: How do you encourage an ocean cruiser to consider river cruising and why might they be interested?

BK: Ask them what they liked about their ocean cruise. Nine times out of 10, they can have the same experience on a river ship (though there isn't a wave pool or go-kart track).

JF: I usually explain that many of the reasons they enjoy ocean cruising are the same reasons they will enjoy river cruising.

You still have that lovely rhythm of waking up in a new destination each day, but you are often right in the heart of the city or town. It feels more personal and immersive, which appeals to many experienced cruisers looking for something a little different.

KR: It's an easy sell from ocean to river cruising. They already understand the benefits of unpacking once and also the value proposition that cruising presents. Looking at per diem rates versus an FIT booking is another way to present river cruising as a viable alternative to clients.

“LOOKING AT PER DIEM RATES VERSUS A FIT BOOKING IS ANOTHER WAY TO PRESENT RIVER CRUISING.”

CW: How do you pair the right cruise experience with the right client?

BK: Ask plenty of questions and get to know your customer really well. I truly believe there's a cruise product out there for most people. It's also really important to be honest too. If you don't think a product is right for them, tell them. You want your client to have an amazing experience off the back of your recommendation so they keep booking with you.

JF: It always starts with getting to know the client and understanding how they like to travel.

I ask questions about their pace, their interests, and the kind of experience they are hoping to have.

For example, some clients prefer travelling with mostly Australians and New Zealanders, while others enjoy a more international mix onboard.

The more you understand their travel style, the easier it becomes to match them with the right river cruise line and overall experience. ••

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River CRUISE EXPERIENCE GUIDE

» WORDS BY
JANIE MEDBURY
AND JAMES BALE





EUROPE

1. La Ville Lumière



Travellers can immerse themselves in the City of Love on Viking's 'Paris and the Heart of Normandy' cruise, which sails along the Seine River. Guests can admire iconic landmarks like the Eiffel Tower and Arc de Triomphe, mingle with locals at a Parisian café, and visit D-Day beaches along the Normandy coast. There is something to satisfy every traveller - literary enthusiasts will love visiting Shakespeare & Co., while foodies can sample premium French cheese and wine.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

2. A Viking homecoming



Viking takes travellers back to where its legacy began on the 'Viking Homelands' voyage across the Baltic and North Seas. The 15-day journey starts in Stockholm with a historian-led tour through the Swedish capital's Vasa Museum. Next, guests will explore Tallinn, Estonia's UNESCO-listed old town, and visit the historic sites of Gdansk, Poland, before experiencing the charm of Denmark. The last leg of the itinerary is spent in Norway, from the cultural riches of Oslo to the natural beauty of Eidfjord.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

3. A Danube deep-dive



Uniwold's cruise-and tour in Switzerland and the Danube will appeal to travellers seeking a balance of adventure and luxury. The 17-day journey encompasses six countries, allowing guests to experience the best of Austria, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Slovakia, and Switzerland. Highlights include an after-hours visit to Lucerne's Rosengart Museum, a hike to Bratislava Castle, and a visit to Dürnstein Wine Estate with a special tasting of organic tipples.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

4. Best of land and sea



From the romance of Venice to the picturesque Swiss Alps, Uniwold's 'Cruise & Rail: Grand Alpine & the Jewels of Veneto' itinerary offers the best of land and sea. Travellers will board the Golden Eagle Danube Express for a rail journey through Vienna, followed by a seven-night sailing on board *S.S. La Venezia* across the Venetian Lagoon. Guests will be treated to exclusive experiences along the way, including a private visit to the Postojna Caves and a guided tour of Castello del Catajo.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

5. European treasures



Travelmarvel's 'European Gems' sailing offers a well-rounded itinerary featuring some of Europe's most storied regions. Guests will enjoy premium inclusions on this trip, which floats through some of Germany's most beautiful towns along the Rhine River, before taking in the sights of Vienna. Travellers will get a glimpse into local life as they embark on a culinary walking tour in Miltenberg and sip on a glass of sparkling wine as they watch a private opera recital in Hungary.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

6. Bonjour Bordeaux



Avalon Waterways is inviting travellers to experience the romance of Bordeaux on its eight-day river cruise on the Garonne and Dordogne Rivers. From cellars to castles, the journey offers guests the opportunity to become intimately acquainted with the region's regal history, world-famous wine-growing culture and lush landscapes. Panoramic drives, seaside bike rides, and wine tastings led by esteemed sommeliers are just a few examples what's in store for those who join this cruise.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



EUROPE

7. Secrets of the Douro

Emerald's eight-day round trip from Porto takes guests along the Douro River all the way to Salamanca in Central Spain. The river provides guests with a glimpse of Portugal's history through trade and winemaking, complemented with a trip to a terraced vineyard in the Douro Valley. Guests will also have the chance to enjoy cultural experiences such as on-board cooking demonstrations, mosaic tile painting classes, live music performances and cocktail-making using traditional port wine.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



8. Snapshot of the Rhône

Riverside's five-day luxury cruise is an introduction to the South of France with stops in Lyon, Vienne, Tain L'Hermitage, Viviers, Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Avignon. This trip on board *Riverside Ravel* provides guests with walking tours of towns and cities that combine Roman, medieval and Renaissance architecture, as well as the chance to experience the fine wine and chocolate that defines the region. The cruise is priced from \$5,855 per person.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



9. UK explorer

APT's 13-day voyage aboard *Seabourn Venture* allows guests to experience the World Heritage-listed sites of Edinburgh, Fair Isle, Orkney, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, Belfast, North Wales and Dublin. The curated tours provide guests with a journey of local history, culture and traditions with trips to the heart of Neolithic Orkney and Fingal's Cave. APT also offers trip extensions, including a city stay in Dublin for an extra two days or an 11-day land trip across Ireland.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



10. Explore Balkan gems

This 14-night river cruise from APT begins in the Czech capital of Prague, where guests can enjoy the city's landmarks and a trip to Chateau Jemniště. This is followed by a seven-night cruise along the Danube River aboard *APT Ostara* travelling through destinations like Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, and Bulgaria. Once the voyage winds up in Romania, guests will experience highlights including Bran Castle and the beautiful capital city, Bucharest.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



11. A magical journey

AmaWaterways' eight-day journey through the Netherlands and Belgium allows guests to witness windmills, storybook towns, and centuries-old traditions, along with experiences that showcase the artistry, flavour and charm that the region has to offer. Starting and finishing in Amsterdam, the journey calls in Dordrecht, Bruinisse, Antwerp and Ghent. The trip is priced from \$6,700 per person with the option for an extended stay in Amsterdam before or afterwards.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



12. A Douro immersion

The 11-day trip from Scenic allows guests to be fully immersed in Portugal's strong history and culture. Highlights include Vega de Terrón, a town on the border with a strong Spanish influence, as well as the ancient town of Lamego, the home of Port wine. Guests will also experience Aveiro, known as the Venice of Portugal, where they can ride a traditional moliceiro boat through its canals. The all-inclusive, 96-passenger journey starts from \$8,396 per person.

Click [HERE](#) for more.





ASIA

1. Master the Mekong

Spend seven nights aboard the *Mekong Serenity* on APT's 'Vietnam and Cambodia Highlights' sailing. Beginning with a two-night stay in Ho Chi Minh City, the cruise takes guests from riverside villages to Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh and finishes in Siem Reap, home to Angkor Wat. The voyage also includes locally inspired dining options including a multi-course Khmer dinner. It is currently priced at \$5,495 per person but only for a limited time.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



2. Wonders of India

Viking's 'Wonders of India' trip takes passengers on a 15-day journey across the Golden Triangle of Northern India, visiting Delhi, the cultural centre of the country, as well as the Taj Mahal in Agra, Jaipur's ornate Palace of Winds and Guwahati's temple. Guests will also enjoy encountering villages along the Brahmaputra River, searching for rhinos and buffalos at Kaziranga National Park and visiting Majuli, one of the world's largest river islands.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



3. The great Ganges

Uniworld's 16-day 'Sacred Ganges & the Maharajas' Express' voyage combines land, cruise and rail, taking travellers along the legendary Indian waterway on board the *Ganges Voyage II*, with visits to the Hindu temple complexes of Kalna and Kolkata's colourful flower markets. This is followed by a once-in-a-lifetime train trip on the Maharajas' Express, visiting showstopping destinations such as Mumbai, Jaipur, Agra and New Delhi.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



4. A week in Kerala

Pandaw's 'Kerala Backwaters' trip journeys through the narrow inland waterways off the coast of the Arabian Sea. On a weekly seven-day circular itinerary operated by the line's purpose-built fleet, guests will encounter Hindu temples, artisan communities and traditional villages as they sail down the interconnected rivers and lakes. The nearby Cochin International Airport provides easy access to major Indian cities and Middle Eastern links to Europe. Prices start from \$8,100 per person.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



5. Grand Indochina

Scenic's luxury river cruises on the Mekong River provide passengers with a wide array of options, from sightseeing in Southeast Asia's vibrant cities to exploring grand temples and small villages. Highlights include Halong Bay in Vietnam, a journey to Angkor Wat in Cambodia and a trip to Laos, one of Asia's best-kept secrets. Guests can choose between seven or nine-night sailings aboard the five-star *Scenic Spirit*.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



6. Cruising in China

Abercrombie & Kent's 'Iconic China and Yangtze Cruise' showcases China's luxury offerings. The fascinating 13-day tour begins in Beijing, where passengers will fly to Xi'an to board the *Yangtze Explorer II*, with stops in Chengdu, Chongqing and Fuling, followed by Yinchang. From there, guests will fly to vibrant Shanghai to complete the journey. The trip begins from \$17,595 per person and includes all entry fees and airport transfers.

Click [HERE](#) for more.



Off the beaten TRACK

1. Magic Magdalena



AmaWaterways offers travellers the chance to experience Colombia's Magdalena River with an eight-day journey from Barranquilla to Cartagena on either the *AmaMagdalena* or *AmaMelodia*. Guests have the opportunity to experience all the region has to offer including village life, nature, music, and history. The journey starts from \$4,706 per person with options to extend the trip by either three nights in Medellín before or three nights in Panama afterwards.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

2. Southern Hospitality



Viking's eight-day 'New Orleans and Southern Charms' tour takes guests on a round-trip up and down the southern tip of the Mississippi River. Highlights include the French-flavoured cities and experiences of New Orleans and Baton Rouge with gourmet Cajun and Creole cuisine, as well as the jazz and blues music of Dixieland. Viking also offers pre- and post-cruise excursions in New Orleans, as well as Lafayette and Cajun Country. Prices start from \$5,496 per person.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

3. Nights on the Nile



This 12-day 'Splendors of Egypt and the Nile' river cruise from Uniworld combines adventure with luxury, with highlights including the Temple of Karnak, Temple of Luxor and the Valley of the Kings. Starting and ending in Cairo, home of the Pyramids of Giza, the beautiful voyage also stops in cities such as Luxor, Esna, and Aswan. Pricing for this once-in-a-lifetime adventure starts from \$9,869 per person with options to sail on board either *SS. Sphinx* or *River Tosca*.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

4. Heart of the Amazon



Aqua Expeditions' three-night 'Amazon Discovery Cruise' takes travellers deep into the Amazon rainforest in Peru. Starting and ending in Nauta, flying in and out from Iquitos, the trip explores sub-segments of the legendary waterway, including the Yacapana, Nauta Cano and Marañón rivers. Guests will have the chance to admire the region's diverse range of flora and fauna, kayak along the river, spot wildlife during skiff rides, enjoy jungle walks and visit indigenous communities.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

5. Visit North America



APT's 'Eastern Canada and New England' is a land and ocean cruise itinerary, running between Toronto and Boston. The combined trip calls at iconic Canadian destinations including Ottawa, Quebec City and locations in Canada's Maritimes and Thousand Islands, with a stop at the spectacular Niagara Falls along the way. Once reaching the States, the adventure will take guests to Portland, Maine before finishing up in Boston. The 17-day tour starts from \$12,495 per person.

Click [HERE](#) for more.

6. Navigating the Northwest



Columbia and Snake Rivers: Food, Wine and History' from National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions is curated by *Food & Wine* wine editor Ray Isle, allowing guests to experience the natural wonders and culinary offerings of the Pacific Northwest in North America. The six- or eight-day journey has offerings for everyone including premium wine tasting at Columbia Gorge Museum, kayaking at Beacon Rock, Multnomah and Palouse Falls and strolling the streets of charming Walla Walla in Washington.

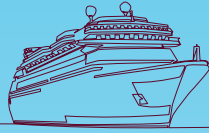
Click [HERE](#) for more.

River Cruise

IN NUMBERS

386

RIVER CRUISE VESSELS THAT
OPERATED IN EUROPE IN 2025
— THE EUROPEAN RIVER CRUISE
ASSOCIATION AND CENTOURIS



112 SHIPS

VIKING'S FLEET SIZE BY 2028
— VIKING

**10.72
million**

PASSENGER NIGHTS SOLD
ON EUROPEAN RIVERS IN 2025.
— IG RIVER CRUISE AND CENTOURIS



50+

AMAWATERWAYS'
EXPANDED FLEET BY 2032.
— AMAWATERWAYS



“

“RIVER CRUISING HAS EVOLVED
SIGNIFICANTLY, PARTICULARLY AS
MORE SHIPS HAVE ENTERED THE
MARKET. WHAT WE'RE SEEING NOW
IS A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN
GROWTH IN QUANTITY AND A
COMMITMENT TO QUALITY.”
— UNIWORLD CEO, ELLEN BETTRIDGE



99%

THE CRUISE PASSENGERS WHO
SAY HAVING A VARIETY OF SHORE
EXCURSIONS IS IMPORTANT WHEN
SELECTING A RIVER CRUISE.
— AVALON WATERWAYS



\$12 billion

THE PREDICTED GROWTH OF GLOBAL
RIVER CRUISING BY 2036.
— FUTURE MARKET INSIGHTS

