

THE VOICE OF THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

CRUISE

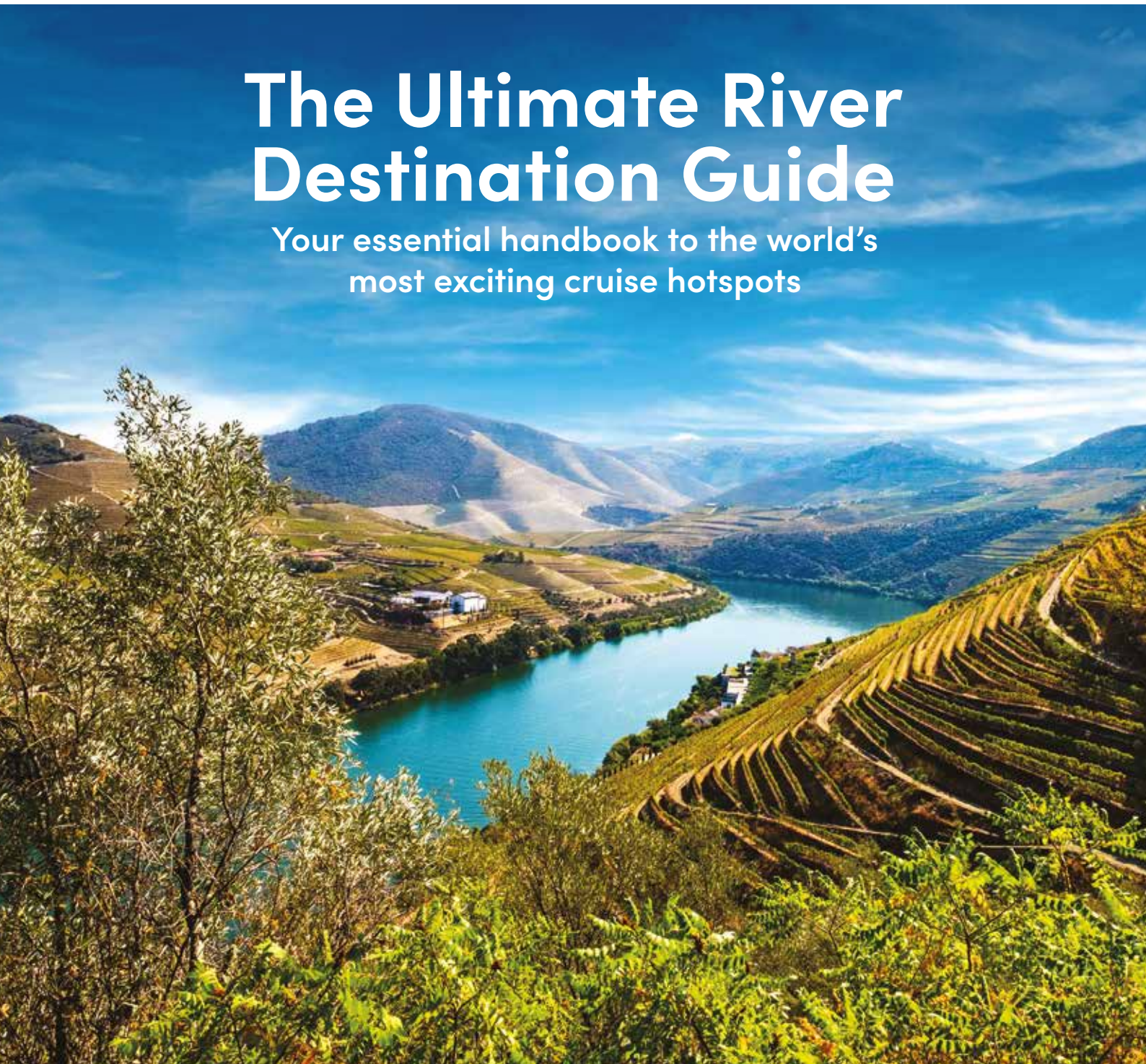
Trade News

cruisetradenews.com

2026
ANNUAL

The Ultimate River Destination Guide

Your essential handbook to the world's
most exciting cruise hotspots





CRUISE CHALLENGE

PRESENTED BY
CRUISE
Trade News

Boost your knowledge of the latest
ship launches, itineraries and travel
trends by signing up to our 2025 Cruise
Challenge roadshow



2026 DATES ARE NOW ONLINE

"HAVING ATTENDED THE LIVERPOOL CRUISE CHALLENGE LAST NIGHT, I
WOULD ABSOLUTELY RECOMMEND YOU GET TO ONE OF THEIR FABULOUS
EVENINGS, FROM START TO FINISH THE EVENT WAS WELL ORGANISED, THE
SPEAKERS WERE INFORMATIVE ON THE PRODUCTS AND ALSO FUN, THE
CRUISE CHALLENGE QUIZ WAS ONE OF THE BEST GAMES I HAVE PLAYED
HAVING TO USE THE KNOWLEDGE WE WERE GIVEN TO GET US AROUND THE
BOARD GAME, THE HOST -PETER- WAS JUST BRILLIANT.
THANK YOU FOR A FANTASTIC EVENING OF LEARNING AND FUN"

Juli Hodson
Travel Counsellor



JOIN OUR EXCLUSIVE AGENT FACEBOOK GROUP



Test your knowledge to win some amazing prizes!

Sign up today at thecruisechallenge.com
or visit cruisetradenews.com for more information

✕ @cruisetradenews f #CruiseChallenge ✉ Nathan.Emtage@realresponsemedia.com

CRUISE

Trade News

Editor

Will Payne

Staff Writer

Rashmi Narayan

Contributor

Sarah Holt

Art Director

Phil Couzens

Sub Editor

Heather Ford

Production Manager

Barnaby Moore

Senior Commercial Manager

Nathan Emtage

Nathan.Emtage@realresponsemedia.com

Commercial Director

Victoria McQuillan

Victoria.McQuillan@realresponsemedia.com

Chief Operating Officer

Lina Slater

CEO

Chris Pitchford

For subscriptions & enquiries:

020 8444 2554

info@cruisetradenews.com

Printed in the United Kingdom by Stephens & George.
Reproduction is not permitted without the express
written consent of the editor. All efforts are made to
ensure factual accuracy at time of publication.

Follow us on Facebook at
Cruise Trade News and
X at @cruisetradenews

cruisetradenews.co.uk

PUBLISHED BY

Real.
RESPONSE MEDIA

Unit 4, Cally Yard,
445 Caledonian
Road, London N7 9BG

CONTENTS

RIVER GUIDE 2026

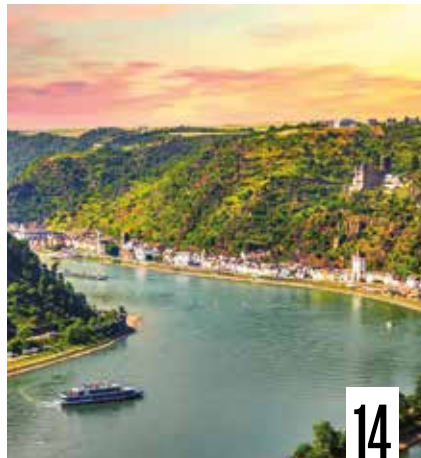


4 Making waves

Riviera Travel doubles down on its
commitment to travel agents

8 Danube

One of the continent's longest
rivers continues to turn heads



10 The Douro

Adventure awaits along the banks of
Portugal's wine country

12 The Rhine

This European river cruise staple has
plenty to offer

14 Rest of the world

Get under the skin of the
Magdalena, Zambezi and Nile

16 New river ships

The latest vessels debuting in 2026



WELCOME...

TO THE 2026 ULTIMATE RIVER DESTINATION GUIDE

River cruising continued to go from strength to strength once again in 2025, so much so that it attracted the attention of some of the world's biggest ocean operators. At the turn of the year, Celebrity Cruises confirmed plans to expand onto the world's waterways with 10 new ships in Europe in 2027. This was soon followed by National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions and Trafalgar, signalling the soaring demand for holidays along the banks of the world's most enticing rivers.

Solo river cruising, meanwhile, continues to flourish. Riviera Travel cemented this trend in September with the launch of the first-ever solos-only river cruise vessel, *MS George Eliot*.

Towards the upper end of the market, the likes of Tauck and Uniworld continue to turn the heads of land-based holidaymakers.

This guide has been constructed to support you in boosting your river cruise sales, providing all you need to get more passengers onboard in 2026 and beyond.

Will Payne
Editor

cruisetradenews.com
FOLLOW ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR MORE

@cruisetradenews @ Cruise Trade News
Cruise Trade News in Cruise Trade News



TRADE DEDICATION

If you're looking to expand your river cruise business this year, but aren't sure where to start, look no further than Riviera Travel, the line that keeps its partners as close to its heart as consumers

It's easy for a cruise line to pledge its commitment to its customers. Who wouldn't? But when it comes to caring for and supporting its trade partners, only a few companies can truly stand their ground as agent-orientated.

One of those is Riviera Travel, which consistently demonstrates its commitment to the trade through a range of exclusive sailings, training opportunities and incentives. Earlier this year the line relaunched The Vault for its trade partners, after the first instalment saw 486 agents log 708 trade bookings, unlocking rewards through the Riviera Explorer platform.

Prizes included lifestyle vouchers for Costa Coffee, Greggs and Marks & Spencer, luxury LED facial masks, Fortnum & Mason hampers, and an all-inclusive holiday for two aboard its new river ship, *Riviera Resplendence*.

Amanda Docherty, head of UK trade, says: "The response to The Vault was phenomenal. The initiative is part of our wider commitment to making Riviera Explorer the go-to hub for trade support, e-learning, marketing tools and incentives. We know how hard agents work, and this was our way of saying thank you."

Not long after, the line bolstered its trade team with the addition of

Gemma Ashworth as key account manager, and confirmed plans to host the 2026 Advantage Latitude Cruise Conference onboard *Riviera Radiance* on 14 November.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Riviera's trade engagement programme isn't the only reason to promote them this year. Itineraries are created by explorers with a deep understanding of each destination, who select every aspect of a holiday to ensure a balance of adventure and relaxation, authentic experiences and free time, making them the perfect pick for a wide range of different cruise customers.

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Riviera offers itineraries along the Douro Valley; *Riviera Radiance* features a split level lounge area; solo travel is growing in popularity for the brand; *William Shakespeare* is one of the line's fleet of European vessels



“Dedicated experts will look after guests’ bespoke arrangements

Guests have the freedom to customise their holiday by adding extras such as drinks packages, hotel upgrades, enhanced experiences with the line’s Signature tours and pre- and post-cruise stays. What’s more, holidays include everything from excursions, hand-picked accommodation and direct flights to transfers and the services of a Riviera Tour Manager who’ll look after your customers throughout their holiday.

Regional flights will be available from Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow and Edinburgh later in 2026, as well as a range of options currently available from hubs across London.

EXPERTISE ENTRENCHED

To enhance the experience even further, Riviera Travel offers a Travel Concierge service included in the cruise price. The dedicated experts will look after guests’ bespoke arrangements from start to finish, whether it’s a few nights in Cape Town before a cruise or an airport transfer from their home.

Tour manager ambassador Matt Purse says: “It’s all about making the most of the journey. Riviera guests appreciate

the value of time – and adding an extra night or two lets them connect more deeply with a destination. Its travel done thoughtfully, not hurriedly.”

In 2026, Riviera will sail its largest-ever solos programme, with 12 dedicated itineraries, up from 11 in 2025. This growing market demographic was cemented as an important growth area by the river cruise line last year when it announced the launch of the first-ever solos-only river cruise ship.

MS George Eliot is set to enter service in June 2027 alongside *Riviera Alba*, the brand’s first vessel deployed outside of Europe on the Mekong River. Riviera CEO Phil Hullah describes the move as a landmark moment not only for Riviera Travel, “but for the river cruise industry as a whole”.

“The launch of *MS George Eliot*, the first river cruise ship to operate exclusively for solo guests, allows us to offer independent travellers a choice and focus that no other operator provides,” he adds. ●



For more information, visit
riveriatravel.co.uk

Meet the team



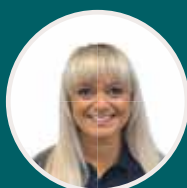
Amanda Docherty
Head of Trade (UK)
amanda.docherty@rivieratravel.co.uk



Claire Hills
Strategic Account Manager
claire.hills@rivieratravel.co.uk



Cheryl Elliott-Edwards
Key Account Manager
cheryl.elliott-edwards@rivieratravel.co.uk



Danielle Kerton
Key Account Manager
danielle.kerton@rivieratravel.co.uk



Gemma Ashworth
Key Account Manager
jessica.payne@rivieratravel.co.uk



Alexander Davies
Key Account Manager
alexander.davies@rivieratravel.co.uk



Lloyd Morris
Strategic Account Manager
lloyd.morris@rivieratravel.co.uk



Christopher McCloskey
Key Account Manager
christopher.mccloskey@rivieratravel.co.uk

Drift through timeless lands

The Blue Danube
8 days from £1,899PP
Departures April to October
2026 & 2027



Budapest to the Black Sea

15 days from £4,249pp

May to October 2026 & April to October 2027



The Danube's Imperial Cities & Yuletide Markets

6 days from £1,399pp

December 2025 & November and December 2026



Danube Discovery Cruise

5 days from £1,299pp

March and November 2026 & March to November 2027

To find out more, request a brochure or to book
01283 901 053 | rivieratravel.co.uk/agents



Riviera Travel booking terms and conditions apply.





The **DANUBE**

History-rich cities flank this charming waterway's riverbanks as it weaves through 10 countries, offering a new experience on every itinerary

The waters of the Danube kiss the banks of 10 countries on their way from Germany's Black Forest to the Black Sea on Romania's east coast. Cruise itineraries coast through Austria, eastern Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia on their way between these two spots. Cruisers to this part of the world can expect history-rich cities, UNESCO World Heritage sites, grand gorges and – in winter – spice and cinnamon-scented Christmas markets.

BUDAPEST

Sliced in two by the Danube, Budapest promises everything from hilltop palaces and underground caves to grand thermal spas, nuclear bunkers and lively food halls (don't miss the traditional goulash in Central Market Hall). The to-do list



Don't miss

New for 2026 is Budapest's new *Time Out* Food Hall. Set within the column-fronted neoclassical Corvin Palace building on Blaha Lujza Square in the Pest side of the city, the new market pools out over 27,000 square feet and features 11 kitchens and three bars, selling everything from sushi to Hungarian soul food.

is so long in the Hungarian capital that it lends itself ideally to pre- and post-cruise stay upsells. Alternatively, sell sailings in winter so passengers can catch the city's Christmas markets, which take over the plaza in front of Budapest's UNESCO-protected Basilica and the yawning Vörösmarty Square.

VIENNA

Austria's capital is known as The City of Waltzes, for its links to classical music and composers like Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. Yet it could easily be known by many other titles. It's the city of Sachertorte, a rich chocolate cake that can be gobbled up in any of Vienna's grand coffee shops. It could be the city of stallions, thanks to the white horses that can be seen performing at the Spanish Riding School. Or it could be the city of palaces, as there are more than 70 palaces spread across Vienna.

“Expect history-rich cities, World Heritage sites and spice-scented Christmas markets

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The Danube is lined with picturesque medieval towns; explore Vienna's many palaces; trips to Christmas markets are always popular

THE IRON GATES

This 134-kilometre gorge carves a course between Serbia and Romania. The scenery here is all sheer-sided mountains and forest-thicketed hillsides, and the journey through it is often included on itineraries as a day of scenic sailing. To the west of the gorge, passengers will be able to spot Golubac Fortress, a turreted clifftop fort that dates back to the 14th century. Some cruise lines offer on-foot visits to the fort, so passengers can learn about its history and take in Danube views from its ramparts.

LINZ

Exploring the pastel-painted Old Town, ducking into the Castle Museum, taking in the Mozart House where Mozart is said to have written his Linz symphony in just three days, and climbing the Landhaus Tower are just a few of the things to do in Linz. Whatever they do, visitors should chisel out some time to try the city's signature Linzertorte, a lattice topped shortcrust pie filled with rich jammy red and black fruit. It can be found on most bakery and café menus in the Old Town. ●

Get on board

The seven-night Classical Danube cruise aboard *Amadeus Nova*, from Budapest to Passau via Esztergom, Bratislava, Vienna, Durnstein, Emmersdorf and Linz departs on 30 April 2026, from £2,355pp.

Amadeus-rivercruises.co.uk

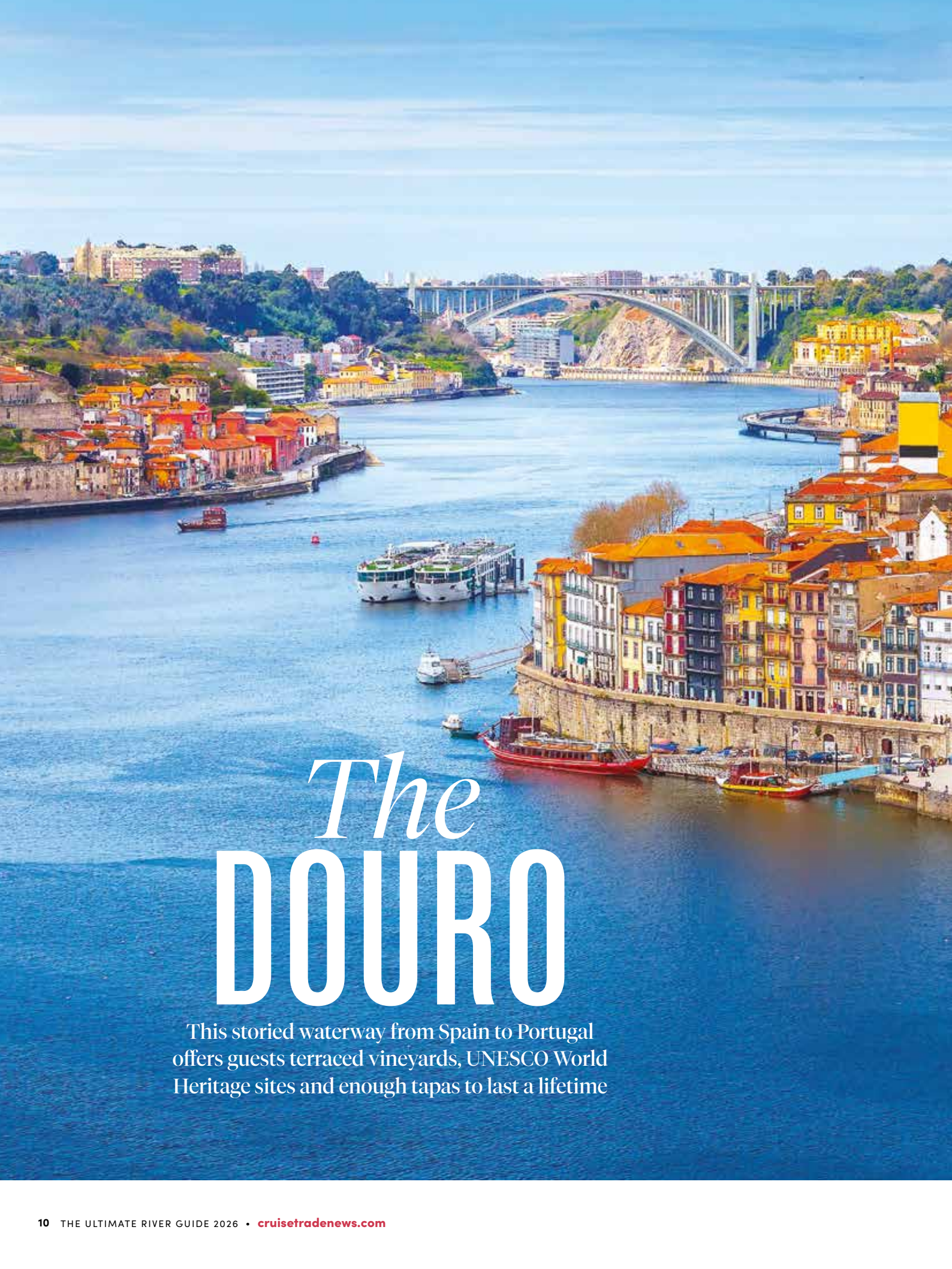


How to sell

"The seven-night Budapest to Passau (or the reverse) Upper Danube west of Budapest sailing is one of the classic 'first river cruise' itineraries along with the Rhine. With Passau struggling for berths, some operators offer start/finish in Nuremberg which includes time on the Main-Danube canal but less time in Vienna and Austria. All budgets are catered for, from 3-star to 5-star-plus operators with ships, service and excursions to match. Every month brings a new aspect."

James Hill, owner,
Go River Cruise





The DOURO

This storied waterway from Spain to Portugal offers guests terraced vineyards, UNESCO World Heritage sites and enough tapas to last a lifetime



PORTO

As the traditional start and end point for most river cruises along the Douro, this UNESCO World Heritage city offers guests a blend of medieval and baroque architecture awaiting to be uncovered along narrow winding alleyways. A trip to Porto isn't complete without a walk across the Dom Luís I bridge, as well as a tippie or two of the city's namesake beverage. Visits to the cellars of Vila Nova de Gaia are available, where cruisers can enjoy port tastings and a vineyard tour. Keen photographers, meanwhile, can climb the 76-metre-high Torre dos Clérigos for panoramic views of the city's skyline, making it a great spot for an Instagram-worthy snap.

SALAMANCA

Often described as the “jewel of Castile and León”, Salamanca eloquently blends academic prestige and imposing architecture with vibrant culture and insightful experiences. In the UNESCO World Heritage Old Town, honey-hued sandstone buildings glow at dawn and dusk, making it the perfect location for a pre- or post-cruise stay. Highlights include the grand Plaza Mayor, the twin cathedrals and the Casa de las Conchas. Salamanca's University, which is one of the oldest in Europe, houses a lively café and tapas scene.

PINHÃO

In the heart of the Douro's wine region is Pinhão, a focal point for oenophiles and clients seeking a getaway full of culture, decadent dining and fruity beverages. The town straddles the Douro and the Pinhão rivers, and is surrounded by terraced vineyards and historic quintas, or wine estates. Wine tastings are available at estates such as Quinta do Bomfim and Quinta das Carvalhas. Guests can also visit the train station, which is clad with 24 blue and white azulejo panels which date back to the early 20th century.



The **RHINE**

Cruising along this European waterway is akin to stepping into a fairytale novel, with lush forests, majestic castles and glittering night skies

Rising in Switzerland, the Rhine ebbs through Austria, Germany, France and the Netherlands before it decants into the North Sea. Cruises along this waterway introduce passengers to towns of half-timbered houses, expansive forests, castle-crowned valleys, and some of the top vineyards in Germany. Rhine cruises also sail to some of Europe's best Christmas market spots, making for year-round sales.

UPPER MIDDLE RHINE VALLEY

Twisting for 65 kilometres, from Koblenz in the north to Rüdesheim in the south, this ribbon of water is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its deeply rooted history and cinematic landscapes. It's here that the banks of the Rhine rise up into humpback hills that are clad in castles with turrets, watch towers and wizard-hat roofs. The



Don't miss

On five nights every summer, the waters of the Rhine turn technicolour when hundreds of fireworks are set off as part of the annual Rhine in Flames event. Key dates for cruisers who want to catch the illuminations from the water in 2026 are 4 July, when the event takes place in Rudesheim, and 8 August, when it happens in Koblenz.

countryside near the valley is also cornrowed with vineyards that produce some of Germany's best Rieslings, and some operators offer winery tours and tastings.

BREISACH

Eyeballing northwest France, on the southwest corner of Germany, Breisach is the springboard to the Black Forest with its walking trails, waterfalls and thousands of towering spruce, fir, beech and birch trees. This region is also famous for its cuckoo clocks and black forest gâteau cake, which is a multi-layered cream, sponge and cherry cake, laced with kirsch liqueur. Cruise passengers can encounter both of these at the Cuckoo's Nest, a shop and café with outdoor terrace which overlooks the Gutach River, an hour's excursion north of Breisach.

STRASBOURG

In December, Strasbourg becomes the Capital of Christmas. The city has been hosting Christmas markets since the 16th century and, every December, festivities continue to take over its streets.

Excursion portfolios are plump with winery tours, tastings and dinners



How to sell

"The Rhine is one of those rivers that really captures the magic of river cruising. It's incredibly scenic, with fairytale castles, rolling vineyards and picturesque towns at every turn and along every bank. But it's also full of life and culture, and shouldn't be missed. You can wake up in a completely different country each day and still feel as though the journey has flowed effortlessly. It's a great choice for anyone who loves history, good food and beautiful scenery, and it's often where people fall in love with river cruising for the first time."

Sarah Wikevand, chief commercial officer, ROL Cruise

More than 300 wooden chalets spring up around the Gothic cathedral, selling mulled wine, decorations, handmade gifts and bredle, which are traditional festive biscuits. A 30-metre Christmas tree is set up on Place Kléber. River cruisers will get the best view of the city's Christmas lights, reflected in the Rhine waters.

RÜDESHEIM

This town of half-timbered buildings is located in the centre of the celebrated Rheingau wine region, where the gently shelving vineyards produce some of Germany's best riesling and pinot noirs (known as Spätburgunder). Cruise line excursion portfolios are plump with winery tours, tastings and dinners. Experiences can take place in settings from the candlelit cellars of Gothic monasteries to estate terraces overlooking the vines. If your clients aren't into their wines, don't worry. Rudesheim's other speciality is coffee, served with a warming shot of brandy and a large quiff of cream on top. ☘

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Stroll around historic towns with half-timbered houses; the Rhine's vineyards produce incredible riesling and pinot noir wines; Strasbourg's festive markets are a feast for the senses

Get on board

CroisiEurope's four-night The Rhine & Moselle cruise aboard *MS Monet*, from Cochem to Strasbourg via Alken, Koblenz, Boppard, Rudesheim and Mainz departs on 19 July, from £936pp. croisieurope.co.uk





Rest of the **WORLD**

From Egypt's ancient artefacts to Colombia's vibrant culture or Southern Africa's magnificent wildlife, a river cruise offers the ultimate experience without the effort



NILE

Once the exclusive domain of historic steamships, the Nile is experiencing a modern revival. New vessels from Viking, Uniworld and Abercrombie & Kent have launched in recent seasons, signalling renewed global interest in Egypt's most famous river. Itineraries trace the route from Cairo to Luxor and then to Aswan, with excursions to the Valley of the Kings, Karnak Temple and small farming villages that still depend on the river's annual flood cycle. Steady recent demand for cultural travel has cemented the Nile firmly back on the map.

MAGDALENA

Colombia's Magdalena River has entered the international cruise circuit for the first time, with AmaWaterways launching two purpose-built vessels in 2024. The 1,528km river, which meanders through the country's western heartland, links tropical wetlands and cities like Barranquilla and Mompox. Often seen as Colombia's cultural backbone, the Magdalena supports thousands of fishermen and farmers while connecting regions known for cumbia music and vibrant festivals including their annual carnival which rivals Rio.

ZAMBEZI

Southern Africa's Zambezi River has become the latest addition for boutique cruising in the African continent. Stretching more than 2,500km from Zambia to Mozambique, the river remains largely untamed, its banks teeming with elephants, hippos and crocodiles. CroisiEurope and new expedition operators have started sailing its calmer stretches. Growing interest in smaller, eco-friendly river tourism has propelled the Zambezi as a rising alternative to safari-only travel, appealing to those seeking comfort and front-row seats in the region's dramatic landscapes.



ON THE HORIZON

Grow your river cruise sales even further in 2026 with these new vessels from some of the sector's biggest players

SS EMILIE

Launching: March

Sailing the Danube, the next member of Uniworld Boutique River Cruises' Super Ship fleet will be inspired by master Viennese painter Gustav Klimt. *SS Emilie* will bring elements of Klimt's style to guests, with elegant hues, Art Nouveau finishes, and pops of gold adorning the walls throughout the vessel. Guests will also find Gustav's Restaurant on the Athene Deck and the Brocade Bar and Belvedere Lounge on the Adele Deck. There will also be a spa and fitness centre, as well as a sun deck. The vessel will debut with the Tulips and Windmills itinerary on 21 March.



TUI ARIA

Launching: March

When *TUI Aria* joins the TUI River Cruises fleet in the spring, it will become the line's biggest river-going vessel, with capacity for up to 190 guests. The ship will feature a retractable roof to allow guests to enjoy the pool year-round, as well as a main restaurant and a lounge bar. At night the floor closes over the pool on the top deck and becomes an Italian restaurant. *TUI Aria* will sail an inaugural season along the Rhine, with itineraries including a North Rhine and Moselle sailing and a festive five-night Mistletoe and Rhine cruise.

AMADEUS AUREA

Launching: May

With 12 spacious suites with balconies and 67 outside cabins featuring panoramic windows, 158 guests can enjoy the sights of the Rhine and the Danube wherever they are on Amadeus' upcoming vessel, *Amadeus Aurea*. Elsewhere, they can savour culinary highlights in the Panorama Restaurant or unwind on the sun deck with the outdoor pool and Lido Bar. A fitness room is also available, as well as a top-deck putting green, chessboard and shuffleboard. Environmental technologies, such as

a hybrid propulsion system and a heat recovery system, gives customers peace of mind that their holiday is sustainable.

AMASOFIA AND AMAKAIA

Launching: May and August

Launching first on 24 May 2026, *AmaSofia* will be AmaWaterways' 24th European river cruise ship, with its inaugural 14-night Magnificent Europe itinerary starting in Amsterdam and ending in Budapest. Onboard, guests will find a sun-deck pool with swim-up bar, a fitness room, bicycles for exploring ashore and all-day tapas, afternoon tea and a 24-hour coffee station. Meanwhile, *AmaKaia* will become the line's second Mekong ship when it launches on 3 August 2026. Two seven-night itineraries – Charms of the Mekong and Riches of the Mekong – will invite guests to explore the ancient cultures of Vietnam and Cambodia.

VIVA BEYOND

Launching: May

VIVA Beyond will usher in the launch of VIVA Cruises' new boutique river cruise proposition when it launches on the Seine in May. The vessel will undergo a renovation in early 2026 to align with the new premium brand and will offer a spacious sun deck, a treatment area and accommodation for up to 116 passengers. The ship will feature more suites than any other VIVA vessel, and guests will be able to choose from 12 suites, four junior suites and, for the first time, ten master suites. The ship will debut with an eight-day cruise from Paris via Normandy to the Atlantic coast. 🍷

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *Viva Beyond* launches on the Seine in May; Guests will be able to relax and enjoy the sights on AmaWaterways' two new vessels; *SS Emilie* is decorated exquisitely throughout



Experience COLOMBIA

LIKE NEVER BEFORE



Step aboard AmaWaterways and uncover the magic of Colombia's Magdalena River. Sail in luxury on AmaMagdalena or AmaMelodia, where local charm meets contemporary elegance. Wander cobbled streets, sway to cumbia rhythms, and savour authentic Colombian flavours. Every moment is designed to connect you with the people, culture, and natural beauty of this extraordinary region. Experience a pioneering journey that's as enriching as it is unforgettable.



To find out more or to book, visit
AmaWaterways.co.uk or call 0800 520 2250

