

RIVER BOAT ADVANTAGES:

1. Dock in town and short distances from the ship to mid-city
 2. Always something new to see out of your cabin
 3. Bicycles generally available for passengers for either exploring a town OR traveling between ports
 4. Can visit two ports in one day
 5. Atmosphere is more social and no lines for meals etc.
 6. Entertainment is local
 7. Port Intensive itineraries
 8. Well geared for handicapped for the most part SOME VESSELS DO NOT HAVE ELEVATORS
 9. Quiet sailing – no engine noise
 10. Excursions included are mostly walking tours with varying degrees of walking, climbing etc. Active and gentle walkers –
 11. Few Optional tours to choose from – may require a bus trip but are very reasonably priced
 12. Food is good and with buffet for breakfast and lunch options you can grab a quick meal to explore the town
 13. Very few children on-board so sailings are geared for enrichment and cultural enlightenment
 14. River Cruising is more inclusive for the most part. With wine, beer and soft drinks included with meals
 15. Balconies have advantages and disadvantages (privacy at ports and/or lengthy shore stays less used)
 16. Everything is European – culture emersion – also currency and electricity etc. is European
 17. Less deals for last minute Supply and demand – but more opportunity for waiving of single supplements on various itineraries
 18. River cruises is more classic to luxury [an opinion of past passengers] relative to service on board
 19. River cruise lines own their buses that travel on land following the vessel and available should there be an issue with either water depth or canal or river blockages...the trip goes on
 20. Offer up local specialties so you get winetasting, cheese and chocolate tasting opportunities onboard depending on the itinerary.
- TO NAME A FEW.....

A Riverboat Industry Overview for the Travel Guys

There is growing concern by the traveling public when I hear questions about European riverboat cruise cancelations due to high and low waters on the European waterways. Below is an overview of the industry and the water issue and hopefully help the agent community and future riverboat clients to choose their itineraries thoughtfully and at least be aware of the consequences and remedies for those itineraries affected by water depth.

Viking is affected more probably because they have the most ships however, **any of the ships are gonna have more problems between Passau and Regensburg than any other area - a 75 mile stretch of the river.** Why? because that is the stretch where there are NO man-made controls, such as dams or alternative canals. So there are a number of resolutions should a problem exist.

- 1) ship swap, where the river line has a ship going in both directions and they swap passengers in sister ships, same cabins and all but while the passengers are doing a bused tour the staff move passengers between the two ships that are nearly identical....this is the favorable solution and most easily performed.
- 2) Extra busing...if there isn't a matching sister ship that can be utilized the riverboat experience becomes a bus tour...with prolonged bus segments. Many of the riverboats own their own buses and this is a very

easy solution HOWEVER, a far cry from a riverboat experience the passengers longed for and finally the most costly

3) canceling the sailing all together.

Most affected rivers are: **a 75 mile segment of the Danube**, also the **Elbe (German)** and **Po (Italy)**.

Approximately **3%** of departures are affected...still the riverboats are building *Purpose Built* ships with the hulls/drafts that can manage shallow depths. AMA and a couple of the other lines are doing so particularly for the Elbe River - **Prague to Berlin**. Few of the river lines have historically been successful with that river but they are working hard to counter issues. Many riverboat passengers are repeat cruises and demand interesting and various rivers and countries and the Elbe and the Po satisfy that demand BUT..... So the Po River is in Italy. This year only one popular cruise line - Uniworld, returned to the Po. My sister and brother in law just got off that experience today. I know that it was IFFY if the entire itinerary was going to travel entirely on that river. They are disembarking today and I will know by tomorrow HA.

My husband Ron and I were once scheduled on the Elbe and our riverboat line at the time (years ago), Peter Deilmann (now defunct) flew us on their dime to Amsterdam to take a Canal sailing instead - what a story that was...cost them a lot of money for sure. We were given a choice of available departure cities...so that could be an alternative, especially if you are overseas already.

If low/high waters aren't enough, This year a barge got stuck in the Danube and the riverboats couldn't get around it - And, because of the issues with the Danube - that 75 mile stretch I mentioned earlier, Environmentalists are successfully fighting the idea to build a canal that could be used when necessary when there is an issue on the Danube...probably won't ever see that sucker built.

Each company has its own remedy when water is either too high or too low. Some give future cruise credits per day of disruptions, some offer a full refund some a future cruise credit and refund \$ spent on air, especially if the passenger is already at the departure port and no cruise is going to move.....any and all are costly to the line.

Basically however, with only <> 3% of departures affected, rivercruising is GREAT in both value and experience and i HIGHLY recommend them. Most vessels carry approximately 150<> passengers, luxury, great food and excursions included wine and beer all day or with meals only - depends on the line/vessel. With weather being the primary culprit, you can't say that only in April/May following snow melt for high water levels or extremely hot temperatures (as this year and in 2012). Future riverboat passengers must be prepared for the possibilities prior to their trips. Knowing about such issues is better than a big surprise. There is no really bad season for riverboat cruising **with the exception of April/May** (following the winter). You will note that when prices seem lower during certain periods, you can bet that the statistics have proven that maybe those weeks are more likely to have an issue.

I checked with CLIA [Cruise Line International Association] and to date there are no rules in place requiring the riverboats to report the departures affected by various water levels or to report the # of departures cancelled. I think that is a shame. However, the travel agent community, including ASTA and CLIA and other entities are pushing to have more accountability so that the Travel professional can offer information to their passengers when making a choice of river or time of year etc.

About older and new ships...yes, there is a concerted effort to design vessels that can withstand very shallow waters. Rudy Schreiner Pres. and Owner of AMA Waterways gives a great explanation and I can read it - about the Danube: it is being dredged between Passau and Regensburg. Below Passau there are power plants with dams, which keep the water levels high.. The Main River, is also dammed. The waters have not been low, like this year, since 2003. AMA was not affected one single day this year - why? They sail mostly on the Rhine and the lesser-impacted stretches of the Danube. Among the various ship lines, some have deeper drafts. AMA ships are on the low side.

Interesting - riverboats can operate in as low as 5 feet!!!!!! IF THEY ARE BUILT TO DO SO. Normally with a full load and full draft it is six feet. Problems occur when you have low water and cannot go below six feet - few ships cannot -AMA positions particular ships in particular regions to reduce and or eliminate low water issues...deployment is key...establishing itineraries that are 'fail safe' so to speak and placing the right ship in the right river - gives the traveling public a great sense of reliability in a departure.

High water is preferable to low water, why? water can go away - low water can remain for a long spell

Viking is not the only riverboat company for sure, though they are heavily invested in advertising. I personally think most of the ship companies services, food etc. are fairly comparable, I just don't like the marketing done by some...and communication between the agent community and the vendor is paramount - and this is severely lacking in some...but here is a list of companies worth comparing. Pricing is all over the place and DEALS are to be found with them...and some offer \$0 single supplements on particular sailings...a big deal.

Keep in mind: Not all of the riverboat/vessels have elevators, not all have balconies and many balconies are FRENCH balconies rather than Full traditional Balconies. Don't purchase an itinerary without learning as much about the traveled rivers, the ship configuration and what is actually included....compare brands because the most advertised is not always the best DEAL for sure.

AMA Waterways

Avalon (a member of Globus Family of Brands)

A-Rosa (only a couple of boats geared to the US market)

CroisiEurope

Emerald (only a couple of years old but an award winning company, vessels etc.)

Enchanted Cruises

European Waterways

Luftner Cruises

Scenic - all suites all butlers

Tauck - charters boats they do not own - but considered upscale

Uniworld -

Viking **to name a few.....**

Vendors that charter and provide excellent riverboat experiences with pre-post experiences:

Gate 1

Mayflower Tours

Central Holidays

Apple Vacations..... to name a few

This is an ever growing industry.....