

# 5 of the best... off-peak river cruises

Fewer crowds and lower fares make off-season sailings a savvy choice, says **Jeannine Williamson**



## RHINE

Traditionally, European river ships went into hibernation from January to March. However, spotting a gap in the market, Viva Cruises broke the mould and became the first line to offer year-round sailings. Others have also dipped their proverbial toe in the chilly winter waters, including AmaWaterways which has Rhine cruises starting from February. Viva's themed cruises make the most of time on board, with the added bonus of indoor activities for when the weather is grey. To kick off the new year, there are sailings with a wellness coach, complimentary massage and inspiring lectures. Guests can also borrow Nordic walking poles for bracing strolls in Speyer, Strasbourg and Mainz.

**Book it:** A four-night Ultimate Wellness Journey Between Iconic Cities & Fairytale Villages round-trip Frankfurt sailing on *Viva One*, departing January 18, 2027, costs from £675, excluding flights. [viva-cruises.com](http://viva-cruises.com)

## RHÔNE

Pleasant temperatures make spring the perfect time to get out and explore the great outdoors on the Rhône. Clients can embark on hikes, bike rides, kayaking and other included activities that are part of Avalon Waterways' shoulder-season Active & Discovery sailings. For guests wanting to take things at a slower pace, the cruise through Provence and wine-growing regions includes an art class in the style of Vincent van Gogh. He painted his famous *Sunflowers* series while living in Arles, a leisurely stop also renowned for its Roman ruins.

**Book it:** A seven-night Active & Discovery on the Rhône (Northbound) sailing from Arles to Lyon on *Avalon Poetry II*, departing May 4, 2027, is priced from £3,215, excluding flights. [avalonwaterways.co.uk](http://avalonwaterways.co.uk)





## MEKONG

The rainy season brings lush green landscapes, fewer tourists and the chance to sail on Cambodia's Tonlé Sap – southeast Asia's largest freshwater lake – at its most dramatic. Despite the name, sailing outside the dry season does not mean all-day downpours. Refreshing showers, mostly in the afternoon, can last for just 15 minutes. CroisiEurope's sailings traverse Tonlé Sap, which swells to almost four times its size during the wetter months of May to October. The tops of submerged trees break through the surface and highlights include visiting floating villages that rise and fall with the water levels.

**Book it:** From the Mekong Delta to Siem Reap is an eight-night sailing from Ho Chi Minh City to Siem Reap on *Indochine*, departing August 27, costing from £1,718, excluding flights. [croisieurope.co.uk](http://croisieurope.co.uk)



## DANUBE

With the Christmas market season yet to come, November is a peaceful time to sail this busy waterway, especially on itineraries heading to the Danube Delta, where the river meets the Black Sea. It's also a period when water levels are stable and disruptions unlikely.

Early mornings are often shrouded in mist, creating an ethereal atmosphere. Viking's late-season sailing visits five countries – Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia and Hungary – and a spectacular natural highlight is navigating the towering Iron Gate gorge, overlooked by a rock sculpture of the ancient Dacian king Decebalus.

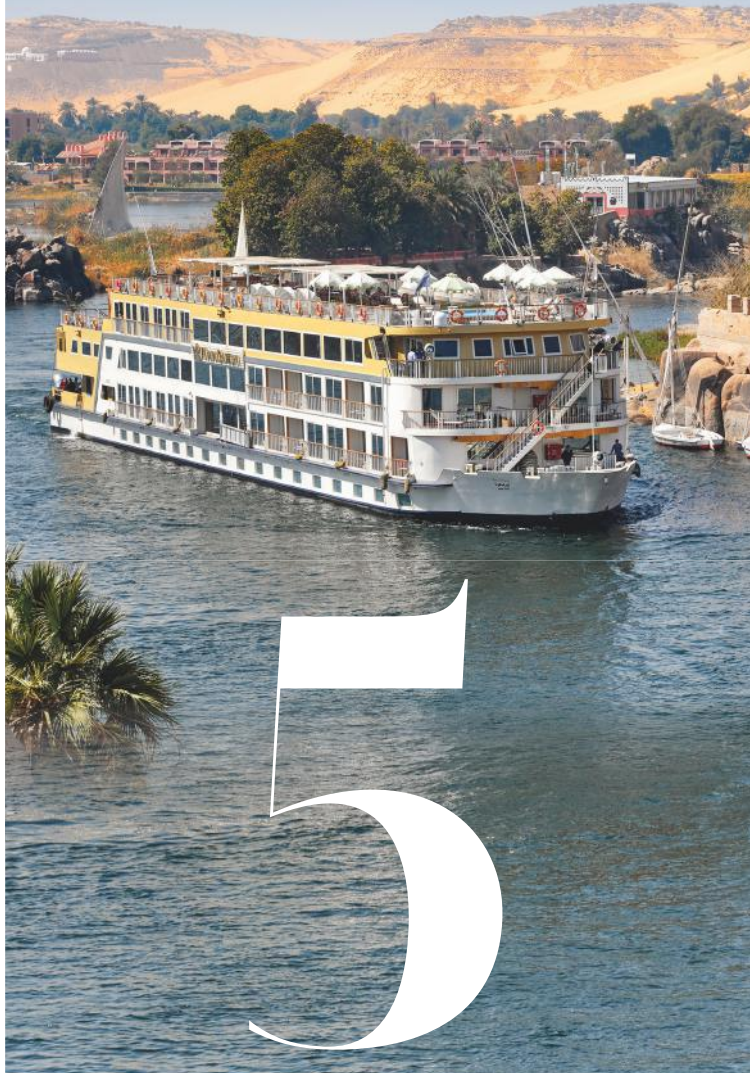
**Book it:** A 10-night Passage to Eastern Europe cruise from Bucharest to Budapest on *Viking Ullur*, departing November 17, costs from £3,395, including flights.

[viking.com](http://viking.com)



PICTURES: Matthew Shaw; Viking Cruises

## RIVER CRUISE



## NILE

For sun-loving clients who can stand the heat, a summer Nile cruise comes with plenty of benefits. Temperatures might top 40C, but that's offset by low fares and far fewer visitors at the often-crowded temples and ancient sites. Some lines stop sailing during the hottest months, but AmaWaterways only skips July. During a hotel stay in Cairo, enjoy quieter visits to the Pyramids, Sphinx and new Grand Egyptian Museum. Then enjoy the beauty and sights of the Nile, including the Valley of the Kings. Back on board the air-conditioned *AmaLilia*, passengers can cool off in the pool and relax in the shade.

**Book it:** An 11-night Secrets of Egypt & the Nile round-trip Luxor cruise on *AmaLilia*, with three nights in Cairo, departing June 15, starts from £5,373 per person, including flights.

[amawaterways.com](http://amawaterways.com)