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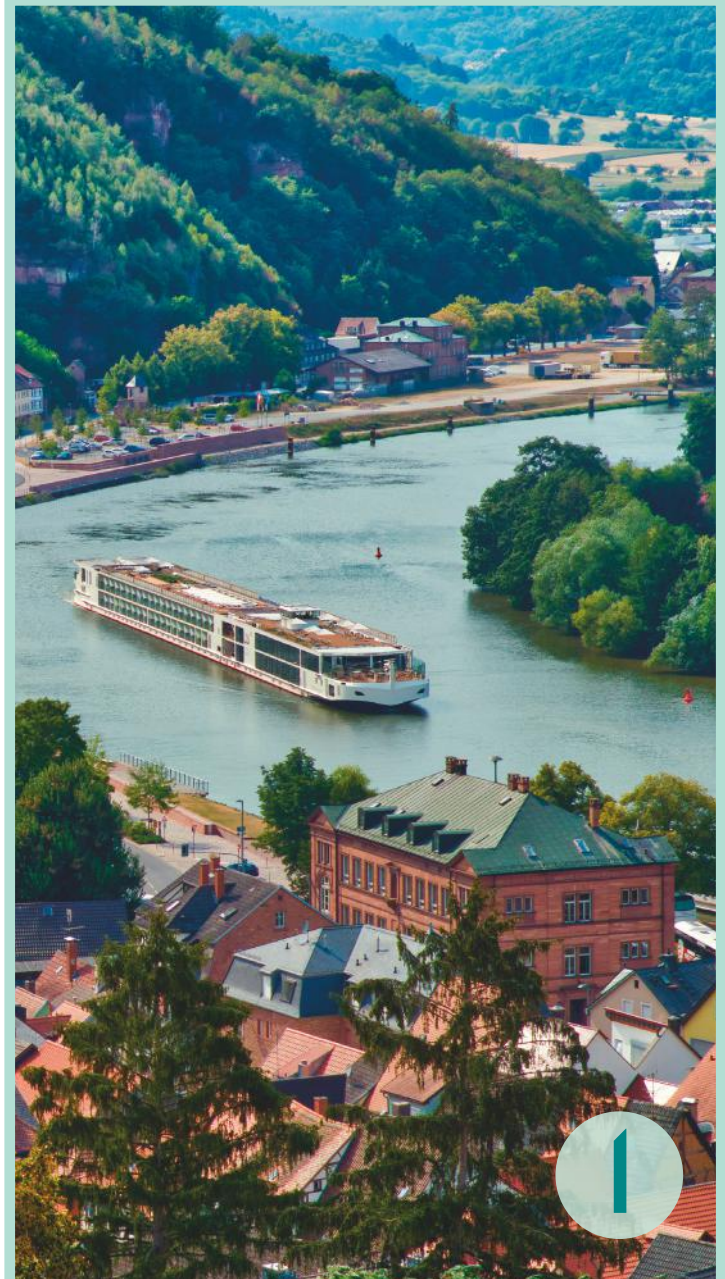


## FESTIVE RIVER CRUISES

Floating along a European waterway is a relaxing way to get into the Christmas spirit, writes **Alice Barnes-Brown**

Christmas market season is almost upon us, so it's time to sell the benefits of a festive break. Try tempting clients to take in some of the best Christmas markets and Europe's capitals in their festive finest. They can pick up unique gifts, taste treats from Christmas tables across the continent and take part in cheery gatherings around the ship's Christmas tree.

Perennially popular festive river cruises include those on the Danube and Rhine, taking in multiple markets, gorgeous medieval castles and picturesque small towns decked out in glinting fairylights. But a good cup of glühwein can also be found in more unusual riverside settings too.



### OH-SO-CHIC CHRISTMAS

Add a little ooh-la-la into your client's Christmas with this brand new Paris to Prague cruise from Viking. The all-inclusive Christmas on the Main & Moselle itinerary features two nights in a premium Paris hotel at the start of the trip – or the end, if they choose to do it in reverse. A coach whisks passengers to Trier, Germany's oldest city, where they'll sip champagne from a festive Ferris wheel before climbing aboard their Viking Cruises Longship. Riesling tasting in the Rhine Valley, handicraft-browsing in the collegiate city of Heidelberg and a private classical concert in Prague's brilliantly baroque Lobkowitz Palace are all included on the 13-night journey. Stops in the lesser-visited sleepy riverside towns of Bamberg, Bernkastel and Winingen make for some great USPs, as well.

**Book it:** Starting at £3,845 including return flights, all meals, mealtime drinks and one daily shore excursion on December 16-27. [vikingrivercruises.co.uk](http://vikingrivercruises.co.uk)

# DESTINATIONS

## CRUISE | FESTIVE SAILINGS

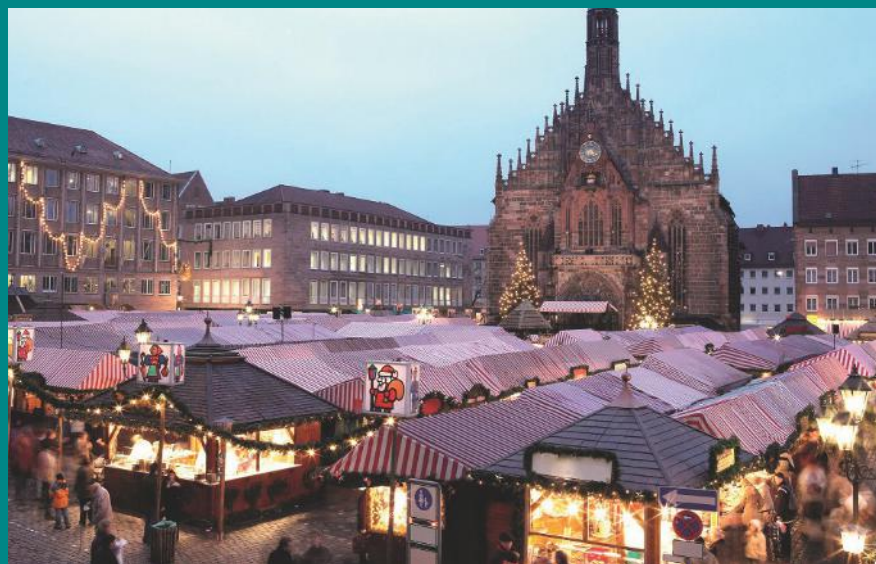


### ROLLING ON THE RHINE

Scenic's epic 15-day Christmas & New Year sojourn begins in Amsterdam and meanders slowly along the romantic Rhine, then the mighty Danube, to Budapest, stopping in German gothic towns and ornate Austrian cities before it reaches the Hungarian capital. There's a lot of free time for trinket-hunting, but also a great choice of included excursions with 25 'FreeChoice' activities that allow clients to personalise each day, from riding a mini train in Germany to taking *The Sound of Music*-themed walking tours in Austria. This cruise departs close to Christmas Day, so guests can look forward to a cosy Christmas sailing day near Würzburg with a turkey dinner and an on-board Schnapps tasting on New Year's Eve, which is spent in Vienna.

**Book it:** From £5,345, including flights, meals and unlimited drinks, departing December 21, 2024.

[scenic.co.uk](http://scenic.co.uk)



### BEAUTIFUL BLUE DANUBE

AmaWaterways' Majestic Capitals of the Danube (Christmas) sailing is perfect for clients who want to escape the UK for a short while. This easy five-night itinerary starts in Budapest, where guests can take the funicular up the cliff to Buda to try cinnamon-sprinkled chimney cake, or hop over to Pest for museums and festive markets. Bratislava brags the Neoclassical Primate's Palace, where passengers are treated to an 'Exclusive Slovakian Experience' before ending in Vienna. On board, Christmas-loving cruisers can help decorate the ship's tree, watch the crew sing carols, feast on a festive gala dinner or even meet Father Christmas.

**Book it:** Prices start at £2,037 for full board, with mealtime drinks included. Based on a December 22 departure. [amawaterways.co.uk](http://amawaterways.co.uk)



### BOUTIQUE CRUISING THROUGH BELGIUM

Uniworld's newest Christmas cruise – which begins in Brussels and loops through the country's canals to Ghent, Hasselt, Maastricht and Antwerp – offers seasoned Christmas cruisers something different. If your clients have already ticked off Germany's headline festive markets, they'll relish the opportunity to browse Belgium's quieter Christmas markets, on an itinerary packed with cultural delights as well as hundreds of souvenir-laden stalls: think talks on sustainably sourced chocolate in Brussels, pine-scented strolls in Ghent, ice skating in Hasselt and blonde Belgian beer tasting in Antwerp. Those wanting to go further afield can set out on excursions with local experts to romantic Bruges, where they may glimpse swans waddling on the frozen Lake of Love, or a cross-border coach trip to Aachen in Germany: the streets around Unesco-listed Aachen Cathedral are transformed into one of Europe's most impressive Christmas villages.

**Book it:** An all-inclusive sailing costs from £1,999, including flights. Based on a December 16 departure. [uniworld.com](http://uniworld.com)







**THE SEINE**

Another new-for-2023 itinerary from Viking, Christmas on the Seine sails from Paris into the gentle countryside of Normandy, where snow-dusted chateaux and spiced apple tarts create the perfect relaxed Christmas contrast to Paris and its busy shopping streets. From £2,445 including flights, for a 2024 sailing (if booked by December 30). [vikingrivercruises.co.uk](http://vikingrivercruises.co.uk)

**THE DANUBE**

Running in late November and mid-December this year, Amadeus' six-day Magic of Advent on the Danube sailing from Nuremburg to Vienna puts a festive twist on some fascinating places. Clients can go to a mulled wine party in Austria's wine-growing Wachau region or attend a Christmassy organ recital under the domes of Passau's painted cathedral. From £1,010, excluding flights. [amadeus-rivercruises.com](http://amadeus-rivercruises.com)

**THE RHINE**

The Black Forest is famed for its creamy cherry cake, but an Avalon four-night Christmastime in Alsace (Northbound) cruise along the Rhine through Switzerland, France and Germany showcases its other famous festive products: cuckoo clocks and locally produced Alsace wine. From £569, excluding flights. [avalonwaterways.co.uk](http://avalonwaterways.co.uk)

PICTURES: Stephane Pflieger; Shutterstock/Panomsak Aod, ecsik22



**FESTIVE FUN IN PROVENCE**

For those feeling adventurous, Jules Verne has a new-for-2023 festive sailing through the south of France in December. Although snow-covered streets don't typically feature on this five-day itinerary, the glittering display of lights in Lyon's old city offers something even more magical. Then, it's on to little Viviers – the smallest city in France – and a road trip to medieval Montélimar for nougat-making before an overnight cruise to Avignon. Walkable Avignon is ideal for whiling away time, and on this cruise, clients will have Christmas Day completely at their leisure – they can choose to start the holiday with a traditional midnight mass in town, or they could kick back aboard the locally inspired *Camargue*, which promises a few festive surprises.

**Book it:** Christmas in Provence and the Rhône Valley starts from £1,625 for full board and drinks including return flights from Gatwick, departing on December 22. [vjv.com](http://vjv.com)



**'TIS THE SEASON IN SPAIN**

Sunny southern Spain might not be at the top of clients' Christmas cruise lists, but there are plenty of reasons it should be. Croisieurope's delightful six-day sailing along the Guadalquivir, round-trip from Seville, showcases a host of Spanish delights – exploring the Moorish-influenced architecture of Córdoba with lunch in a local restaurant and losing oneself in the wine-rich backstreets of Jerez. In fact, the *La Belle de Cadix* takes the Spanish theme to the extreme, with bright red accents, flamenco nights and paella meals adding a Mediterranean touch to a programme filled with festive gala dinners, Christmassy cocktails, and a Christmas present for every passenger.

**Book it:** Prices start at £854, with all meals including the Christmas gala provided, but not flights and transfers. Departing on December 22. [croisieurope.co.uk](http://croisieurope.co.uk)