

Q&A

LUKAS NOVAK, FIRST CAPTAIN, RIVIERA TRAVEL

INTERVIEW BY Alice Barnes-Brown

Q. Tell us how you got to the helm of *William Wordsworth*.

A. I've gone through all the positions in my career, from the lowest to the highest. I started 14 years ago as a deckhand at Scylla, and I've been a captain at Riviera Travel for three years.

Q. How big is the crew on a typical river cruise?

A. Sailings have either two or three captains – a first and second captain and sometimes a training captain – and we change every four to six hours. It's very important to have a good nautical team but as a captain, you also need to have an overview of all the 44-strong crew on board, including the hotel, food and beverage, engineering and hospitality teams.

Q. Can you describe a typical day on board?

A. I start at 6am, so usually wake up at 5am and get ready. First, I come to the wheelhouse to change over from my colleague. We discuss what it was like during the night – for instance, the water levels, how many other ships there were – then I take over the navigation and start to sail the ship. The sailors join us at 6am or 7am and we drink a coffee together while I give them information about what's going on, where we will be docked and what we need to do on the ship. The main point is to make everything on the outside of the ship nice and shiny for the guests – so sailors wash the windows and paint the ships regularly.



“ We are like one family working together – that's why so many guests feel at home here ”

PICTURE: Alice Barnes-Brown



Q. How do you spend your time away from the wheelhouse?

A. My duty finishes at 12pm, so I go and get lunch on board, before taking one or two hours on the computer to finish any documents and contact the harbour office. I have a few hours to spend how I like: we can go out in the city and do some shopping or spend social time together. Then, I'm on duty again from 6pm until midnight.

Q. How is captaining a river ship different from an ocean ship?

A. There are complications such as high and low water, which we can never predict because only God knows how the weather will be. It depends on the year: sometimes we have a year with lots of rain, or sometimes it's drier than we expect. But with this kind of ship, the draft is smaller than on other vessels, which means it's easy to manoeuvre.

Q. What's the most important piece of kit in the wheelhouse?

A. The Tresco navigation system means you can see all the vessels on the river. With this system, you can see approximately six miles away, including the name of the ship, the average speed, length and breadth of the ship. It's vital, because we have some parts of the river where you are not allowed to meet or pass other ships.

Q. Why do ships going downstream have priority?

A. If you go downstream during high water, there's a lot of current and you need to be very careful because the ship is sliding on the water and going fast. It's difficult, but this is our job.

LUKAS'S TOP TIP

Riviera Travel operates an open-bridge policy so guests can meet their captains and see all the navigation and control equipment. It's best to go when a ship is moored, but tell clients to check with the cruise director.

Q. Which is your favourite European river to sail on?

A. For me, it's the Danube, because I'm from Slovakia and this is our river. My favourite cruise is from Budapest to Linz, or from Budapest to the Black Sea. I like all the cities on this river, but

the number one has to be Budapest. If we have the opportunity, we like to show guests the Hungarian Parliament in the evening, when all the lights are on. Guests go to the sun deck and take pictures so everybody gets to enjoy the view.

Q. What makes Riviera Travel stand out for guests?

A. I really like working with Riviera because I see a lot of happy guests here, and a lot of familiar faces who come back and ask me what new cruises or ships are coming for the next year. We are like one family working together – I think that's why so many guests feel at home here. **TW**