

Mississippi learning

Don't miss out on selling
America's great rivers,
writes Jane Archer

It is more than 2,300 miles long, famous for steamboating and has even had a song written about it. If you are now humming *Old Man River*, chances are you have discovered river cruising on the Mississippi.

It all started back in the 19th century, when the American West was still being won and the river was a vital transport artery for settlers. They negotiated passage for themselves, their wagons and oxen in crowded paddlewheelers, where gambling and bawdy entertainment were the order of the day.

These days, sailing on the

Mississippi is considerably more comfortable. Cruise lines still operate traditional-looking paddlewheels (on all but the *American Queen* the wheels are just for show these days) but the casinos and call girls have given way to luxurious suites, quality dining and free Wi-Fi. The Mississippi is also considerably more popular, along with other rising US waterways, so if you aren't selling them already, here's our guide to America's rivers.

► MOODY MISSISSIPPI

The American Queen Steamboat Company (AQSC) started

cruising the Mississippi in 2012, added a second vessel in 2017, and reports record sales for both this year. The line is sold in the UK through Light Blue Travel.

The two vessels are quite different. *American Queen* is a 1995-built steamboat that holds 420 passengers and boasts Victoriana decor reminiscent of the days when Mark Twain sailed the Big Muddy. *American Duchess* holds just 166 passengers in all-suite accommodation including four two-storey loft suites.

AQSC president Ted Sykes said: "The high-end suites on

American Queen always sold out so we have taken *Duchess* more upmarket."

American Cruise Lines also launched on the Mississippi in 2012 and now has two paddlewheelers on the river: *Queen of the Mississippi* and *America*, launched in 2015 and 2016 respectively. A third vessel on the way, *American Song*, will break with tradition as it won't have a paddlewheel. The 200-berth ship launches this autumn and will relocate to the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest in 2019.

Another operator, French



→ America Line, started cruising the Mississippi in 2016 but its vessel is currently out of operation, due to return to service in late summer 2018.

ELVIS AND THE CIVIL WAR

The most popular voyage on the Mississippi is a one-week cruise between Memphis and New Orleans – an eclectic journey that starts with Elvis, the history of rock’n’roll and the civil rights movement, and moves on to the American Civil War, slavery and grand plantation houses.

Round-trip cruises from New Orleans are also popular. They don’t have Elvis but they do have the advantage of direct British Airways flights from London to the Big Easy.

These Lower Mississippi cruises operate mostly in spring, autumn and winter. In summer, vessels move north and offer itineraries on the upper stretches of the river and its tributaries.

American Cruise Lines, for instance, sails between St Louis and Pittsburgh in June and July, a cruise that pairs the Mississippi with the Ohio River, and between St Louis and Nashville, combining the Mississippi and Cumberland rivers. From \$3,695 cruise-only for seven nights departing



PICTURE: TYLER KAUFMAN



The eclectic sailing starts with Elvis and civil rights and moves on to the Civil War, slavery and grand plantation houses

September 8 including a pre-cruise hotel night.

American Queen has nine-day cruises on the Mississippi between St Louis and Red Wing, Minneapolis, that visit Mark Twain’s hometown of Hannibal; and voyages on the Ohio River between Louisville and Pittsburgh that spend a day in Cincinnati. From £3,395 departing July 8 including flights and a pre-cruise hotel night.

American Duchess has nine-day voyages between Chattanooga and Nashville on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, and voyages between St Louis and Ottawa, a town on the Illinois River about 80 miles south of Chicago. From £3,895 for nine days departing August 12 including flights and a pre-cruise hotel night.

And for those who just can’t decide, an epic 23-day cruise from New Orleans to Red Wing offers the ultimate Mississippi adventure. From £5,995, departing August 19, including flights and one pre-cruise hotel night.

American Cruise Lines has a similar long cruise from \$11,270 cruise-only for 22 days, departing August 4.

Both companies offer free tours at each port that visit local landmarks and museums (AQSC uniquely has hop-on hop-off buses so passengers can dip in and out of the places that interest them) and various optional excursions.

American Cruise Lines, for instance, has a free tour of Nashville and a paid-for trip to Frogmore Plantation



ABOVE:
American
Cruise Lines’
*Queen of the
Mississippi*

LEFT:
American
Queen
Steamboat
Company’s
*American
Queen*

RIGHT:
Wine tasting
in Washington
State

FAR RIGHT:
Henry Ford
Museum,
Detroit

BELOW:
Toronto



PICTURES: GARY MALERBA; RICHARD DUVAL IMAGES; PEIKETRON

→ from Natchez. AQSC has optional tours of the Civil War front line from Vicksburg and excursions to Indianola, the hometown of Blues legend BB King, from Greenville.

► PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Buoyed by the success of the Mississippi, in 2014 AQSC launched one-week cruises on the Columbia and Snake rivers in America's Pacific Northwest. They are on the *American Empress*, which has a paddlewheel that's just for show.

These cruises, also offered by American Cruise Lines and UnCruise Adventures, operate between March and November, and take passengers from Portland, a city on the US west coast famous for its liquid sunshine (aka rain), into the desert at Clarkston in Washington, or vice versa.

This is a voyage in the footsteps of pioneering



The voyage is in the footsteps of explorers who led an expedition in the early 1800s in search of the Pacific

explorers Lewis and Clark, who led a three-year expedition across the US in the early 1800s in search of the Pacific Ocean. From Astoria, tours visit a reconstruction of Fort Clatsop, where the expedition overwintered in 1805; in Richland, they visit Sacajawea State Park, named after the expedition's native American guide.

This cruise is not just about history, though, with trips to wineries and waterfalls in Washington, a museum of antique cars and aeroplanes



in The Dalles and high-speed jet boat rides in Hell's Canyon among other options.

UnCruise offers hikes and white-water rafting on an eight-night Rivers of Adventure cruise on *Legacy*, an 86-passenger coastal steamer. There are eight departures between August and October, with prices from \$4,995 cruise-only. Seven wine-themed cruises between October and December 2018 have a wine expert and sommelier on board.

► BEST OF THE REST

Other river cruises in North America include American Cruise Lines' eight-day voyages on the St Johns and Tolomato rivers in Florida that visit wildlife parks and historic towns, and Fall Foliage voyages on the Hudson River from New York. The latter combine well with a stay in the Big Apple, operating in September and October when the region's autumn leaves are at

their fiery red best. Passengers visit former US president Franklin D Roosevelt's home in Hyde Park and the US Military Academy at West Point.

For something very different, CroisiEurope is launching cruises between Quebec City and Toronto in August that take passengers along Canada's St Lawrence River and through Lake Ontario and the Thousand Islands archipelago that separates Canada and the US. The itinerary includes calls at Montreal, Toronto and Niagara, where tours visit the CN Tower and include a helicopter ride over the falls.

Victory Cruise Lines, sold in the UK by Fred Holidays, has voyages on the Great Lakes between Toronto and Chicago that include a tour of Niagara Falls, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland and Henry Ford Museum in Detroit. From £4,999 cruise-only for 10 days on dates from June to October. **TW**

