

# My oh Maya

The long-awaited launch of Tui River Cruises got off to a strong start with its first vessel making its maiden sailing on the Rhine. **Kelly Ranson** reports

**O**nce passengers try it, they will love it." Those were the confident words of Tui Cruises UK managing director Chris Hackney at the launch of the company's brand-new river cruise fleet.

Due to the pandemic, Tui River Cruises waited 18 months to officially welcome passengers on board the first of its three adult-only ships, *Tui Maya*. It has, however, given the team time to craft the style of the ships, which are geared to British travellers looking for a value-for-money river cruise option.

While there are obvious differences between the river ships and the travel giant's ocean line, Marella Cruises, the similarities in the customer offering and service are aligned as Tui looks to entice loyal beach and cruise customers – as well as those new to cruise – to the river.

Hackney adds: "We have a great concept, and we think our customers will love the river cruises and the experiences we have created for them.

"The ships were largely designed with the UK customer in mind, particularly when we were thinking of the product proposition with our standout service, excursions and great entertainment acts."

During its December 2019 refit in Lemmer in the Netherlands, the four-deck *Tui Maya* and its sister ships were given a contemporary multimillion-pound makeover, and loyal Tui clients will be happy with the relaxed and casual style that awaits. Gone are the dark-wood furnishings, replaced with golds, pastels, marble and light-wood interiors, complemented with panoramic windows throughout the ship.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As with most river vessels, dining is limited to a small number of venues. On board *Tui Maya*, there are two eateries, Verastro and the Bistro. Adjacent to one another, both are open for buffet breakfast as well as à la carte lunch and dinner. Verastro, with its green and gold decor, changes its menu daily, while the ➤

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Sergey Dryukov



## DESTINATIONS

### TUI MAYA | CRUISE



PICTURED: Tui Maya can accommodate up to 155 passengers across seven cabin categories, including a Deck 1 Standard Cabin (below, left) PICTURES: Joe Pepler/PinPep



more-casual Bistro's menu switches halfway through each sailing.

All meals are included as part of the full-board offering along with wine, beer and soft drinks at lunch and dinner. Passengers can upgrade to the premium drinks package at extra cost, while those bringing local wine back on board from a day's tasting ashore can do so with no corkage charge.

During the refit, Tui reworked a previously unused space on deck three, creating the Club Lounge bar. The 1920s-inspired venue is perfect for post-excursion coffees and pre-dinner drinks, with plenty of comfy seating well as a crackling-effect digital fireplace that will be a welcome addition in the winter months.

The Observatory is the ship's main bar and entertainment hub for interactive quizzes and silent discos (already popular on Marella ships), as well as local and guest entertainment acts. The expansive top deck serves as the spot to relax on a sunlounger or take part in fitness classes by day, or enjoy a barbecue or stargazing at night.

There's no gym on Tui Maya, but a wellness area – which featured on the ship pre-refit – comprises a whirlpool and a sauna. There's no charge for using the space, but passengers do need to reserve a slot.

#### THE ESSENTIALS

The 79 cabins are set across three decks in seven categories – from single cabins (including two with

French balconies, which is a rarity for solo cabins) through to the expansive French balcony suites with beds that face the river. At 258sq ft, these suites were created by combining two cabins into one, and they are an upscale addition to the cabin offering with a larger bathroom, sofa and dressing area.

All three ships will sail along the five main European rivers, with an average of 14 excursions offered per cruise and passengers given £120 excursion credit per week.

During our short cruise, we took a slow meander through the Rhine Valley, which is dotted with enchanting castles, sleepy hamlets and quaint towns. Nestled in the heart of the wine region, stops included a visit to Boppard, with its medieval town square, and the small town of Rüdesheim, the place for sampling the local riesling and pinot noir – or in winter, the Rüdesheim coffee, a warming concoction of coffee, brandy, sugar cubes, cream and chocolate. **TW**

#### BOOK IT

Tui River Cruises offers a five-night Christmastime on the Rhine itinerary on Tui Maya from £690. The cruise sets sail from Wiesbaden, Germany, and visits Plittersdorf, Breisach and Speyer as well as Strasbourg in France, departing on December 3, 2022, and including return flights, transfers, £85 excursion credit, tips and service charges.

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

#### GOING GREEN

Tui River Cruises has adopted a number of sustainable measures, including:

- ✿ Cutting down on single-use plastics – the river line provides passengers with reusable water bottles in cabins.
- ✿ Cabin carpets are made from recycled fishing nets.
- ✿ Local produce is used as much as possible in restaurants.
- ✿ All of the old furniture from the ship, prior to its refurbishment, was donated to charity in the Netherlands.
- ✿ All cruise news and updates on board are now available digitally on Tui's Navigate app, rather than in paper form.