



The Viking Odin on the Rhine by the Pfalzgrafenstein Castle in Germany

# From Paris to Prague River Cruise

‘Cities of Light’ cruise should be on your to do list

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**K**nees bent, heels dug in, we climbed the same slippery slope into the medieval castle that horses bearing armour-laden knights used to ride, shouting their arrival and the news of their latest conquest. This is Marksburg Castle which towers over the historic town of Koblenz, Germany. If you love the history and romance of ancient castles, story-book ancient towns and the idea of cruising Europe’s iconic rivers as you watch the vineyards (and the world) pass by, a Viking River Cruise should be next on your bucket list.

Wear comfortable shoes, bring a jacket, a camera, your passport and a few Euros and get set for an adventure of a lifetime. Last October my sister Randy and I took the *Viking River Cruise Cities of Lights* cruise from Paris to Prague.

You’ve likely seen the Viking Longboat on TV commercials, a gleaming white long boat gliding majestically beside famed cities and castles.

Twelve days, four countries (France, Luxembourg, Germany and the Czech Republic), the *Cities of Light* journey travels along the Rhine, Moselle and Main Rivers including a two night stay in both Paris and Prague, two of Europe’s most idyllic cities.

In Paris, the gorgeous *Le Meridien Etoile Hotel* is within walking distance of the Arc de Triomphe and the Champs Elysees. After enjoying the included Paris City tour by motor coach, we set off on foot to explore ‘The City of Lights.’ A visit to the Eiffel Tower and Louvre were top of our list. Travel tip: You can purchase admission tickets to most sites

through the hotel concierge and save money while giving direct-access and avoiding long lineups at the gate.

Difficult as it was to leave Paris, we were excited to head to Luxembourg (by luxury coach) to enjoy a leisurely walking tour of Luxembourg, followed by a visit to the American Cemetery which pays homage to the many Americans who lost their lives in World War II. Along the way we made a stop in the Champagne region of France and bought two bottles of the sparkling beverage to enjoy onboard. Viking allows guests to consume purchased wine. After all, we are in wine country in France and Germany. Then on to Trier, Germany to board the Viking Odin.

Travelling by river boat is one of the most relaxing and stress-free ways to see Europe. It's a gentle river cruise with only about 200 people onboard and unlike big cruise ships which often, due to sheer size, have to tender boats to get passengers into various ports, the crew just lowers the gang plank into place and luxury coaches and local guides are ready and waiting to escort you into that day's fabled European town or castle.

Ten daily excursions are included in the package with tours happening in the morning so you are back around lunch to enjoy the afternoon at leisure onboard or perhaps attend a cooking class or a lecture by a local historian. When you return to the ship from that day's adventure, the friendly staff is there to greet you. If it's hot, they offer a cool, icy drink. If it's cool, hot chocolate is the sip of the day. If it's raining, they provide umbrellas as you head out. Before long you greet the crew by name as they always ask you about your day.

The river cruise runs like clockwork thanks to the efficient and ever-friendly staff including Captain Alfred Rubben,

Program Director Claudia Diederix, Hotel Manager Thomas Leitner, Executive Chef Andreas Glaschke, Maitre d' Christian Hosu and Executive Housekeeper Elina Todorova. Captain Rubben warmly invites guests for a tour of the control station perched on top of the ship, while Chef Glaschke invites passengers into his spotlessly clean kitchen for a tour.

Lounging on deck chairs on the upper deck or sitting on our balcony, we marvelled at the abundance of castles and historic towns along the journey. The Upper Middle Rhine region boasts more than 40 castles! Luscious vineyards ripe with grapes run vertically up steep slopes which hug both sides of the river creating a tapestry of visual delight.

Exploring castles is a big part of the Viking River Cruise experience. In Cochem, one of the prettiest towns along the Moselle River in Germany, we visited the 12th century Reichsburg Castle which sits majestically on a bluff overlooking the historic city. The stone castle was destroyed in 1689 by Louis XIV's troops, but almost 180 years later, the castle was rebuilt in a neo-Gothic style by businessman Louis Ravené who lived there with his family. Visitors today can tour the castle and see the collections of Renaissance and Baroque furniture owned by the family. Visitors pause to look up, way up, to the open windows of the four-story octagonal "Witches Tower," where, as legend has it, witches were tried and tossed out of the window!

Heidelberg Castle, which towers over the city of Heidelberg, one of Germany's oldest and most romantic cities, is one of Germany's most visited attractions. Originally built in the 12th century, this storybook Gothic-Renaissance castle is considered one of the grandest Renaissance palaces of its time. The red sandstone castle has seen its fair share of destruction. It was destroyed in the 17th century Nine





The Odin passing under some of the bridges in Prague

Years' War and later rebuilt, but never completely finished due to being damaged by lightning in 1764. The castle was abandoned over 300 years ago, yet today visitors on mass tour the ruins and marvel over the world's largest wine barrel which once held 50,000 gallons of wine. A walking tour through Heidelberg was a highlight due to its cobblestone streets and abundance of half-timbered houses and baroque buildings in the historic Old Town.

From castles to palaces, we toured the majestic Bishops' Residenz in Würzburg, one of Germany's finest baroque palaces and a UNESCO heritage site. Commissioned by Prince-Bishop Philipp Franz von Schönborn, the palace was built between 1720 and 1744 and is very Versailles-like in its abundance of paintings, tapestries, art treasures including the awe-inspiring grand staircase which leads the eye up to the world's largest ceiling fresco.

Like Würzburg, Bamberg is also located in the Franconia region of Germany. Founded in 902, this beautifully preserved Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, boasting one of Europe's largest, fully intact old town centres with original historic buildings dating back from the Middle Ages to the Baroque era. Bamberg is also legendary for its beer, in particular, a smoked beer called Rauchbier which is made with malt that has been dried over open flames.

Bamberg is also where we disembarked from the Viking River Cruise to be transferred by luxury coach to Prague for our two-night stay at the grand Hilton Prague. Stops along the way included a visit to the Bavarian city of Nuremberg where we visited the haunting ruins of Zeppelin Field which served as the Nazi parade grounds in the 1930s along with the Palace of Justice where the Nuremberg Trials were held.

Prague should be on everyone's bucket list. Known as *The City of a Hundred Spires*, it is home to the famed Charles Bridge and historic Old Town. Throngs of tourists gather in front of Town Hall to witness the 15th century astronomical clock work its magic at the top of each hour. You have to be quick with your camera to catch the tiny figures popping out of the clock, cuckoo-clock style, to announce the hour.

The optional tour to Lobkowitz Palace in Prague is a must. After dining on a Prague-themed lunch in a grand ballroom-like room which was once the living quarters of the Lobkowitz family, it was off to the baroque music hall to enjoy a Midday Classic Concert. Donning headsets with mini-recorders, we toured the castle listening to personal stories pre-recorded by a member of the Lobkowitz family who tells about the loss of their precious palace to both the Nazis and the Communists and the recent restitution to the family. Along with stunning panoramic views of Prague, visitors will see priceless

collections including crown jewels, weaponry, the famed Lobkowitz Collections of artwork and musical collections including Mozart's red-inked annotations to Handel's Messiah and Beethoven's original corrections to the manuscripts of his 4th and 5th symphonies.

After a day of fun and adventure exploring castles and walking tours of ancient cities, passengers meet for dinner in the luxurious dining room, eager to share highlights of their day. It's open seating at various sized tables which is ideal for meeting new people, or sharing tales with the same group of new-found friends. The food is 5-star quality, produced by Executive Chef Andreas Glaschke and his team. The menu is often locally themed and offers a choice of three appetizers, main course entrees and desserts, along with paired wines which are included with dinner.

Our welcome dinner main course consisted of a choice of chateaubriand, caramelized sea scallops or zucchini with goat cheese and sundried tomatoes. And after dinner, there's entertainment in the lounge, if you can keep your eyes open after a day of adventure. Along with first-class musicians, there are special courses offered such as glass blowing by local artist Rolf Schrade.

The rooms are large and comfortable and provide many of the creature-comforts of home like expansive closets, a large walk-in shower, a small fridge and two comfy beds. Many great afternoons are spent enjoying our 5 o'clock happy hour on our balcony, sipping our champagne, mesmerized by the swirling currents in the river and glimpses of the post card perfect castles, towns and vineyards.

Prior to your journey, a thick package arrives by mail from the *Viking River Cruises* company containing a Paris-themed makeup-style bag full of goodies including a thick itinerary which describes each city, town and castle along the way and another book called *The Rhine & its Tributaries*. Once onboard, you can watch videos in your room about the cities you are about to visit, attend the daily information sessions, or read the detailed information provided in the daily itinerary that is waiting on your pillow each night, describing tomorrow's adventure.

For more information visit Viking River Cruises at [www.vikingrivercruises.com](http://www.vikingrivercruises.com) 📍



The Eiffel Tower (above) and Bourse street scene (2nd Arrondissement, right bank, Paris Opéra area).  
Photos by Jan Bilek