

Traveling by Boats and Trains

By Judy Koutsky

In this age of busy schedules and jam-packed vacation itineraries, it's nice to slow down and really take in a destination. That's the appeal of traveling by train or river cruise—the journey really is the point. From slowly making your way up Machu Picchu while eating a three-course meal, to exploring the floating villages in Cambodia while sipping on a glass of wine, these trips offer luxury in a tranquil, relaxing setting.

Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

One of the most famous trains in the world is the historic Venice Simplon-Orient-Express (pictured above) which is a collection of 17 carriages that date back to the 1920s and have been beautifully restored to take passengers back in time to when train travel was romantic and classic. Each car tells a different story—one was a former Le Train Bleu car while another was part of the Rome Express—and together the carriages were relaunched under the name Venice Simplon-Orient-Express in 1982. There are several different routes.

The Classic Venice-to-London route, via Paris, travels through the Dolomites in Austria and Switzerland. The six-day Paris-to-Istanbul route includes hotel stops in Budapest and Bucharest—the other nights are aboard the train. The train crosses the Danube from Romania into Varna, Bulgaria, to see the Black Sea. The newest route, from Paris to Berlin, runs through a UNESCO heritage site and views are of castles, vineyards and stunning cliffs.

Some of the most impressive décor of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express can be seen in the dining carriages, from Lalique glass inlays in Côte d'Azur to black lacquer panels in L'Oriental. The Bar Car exudes

an old-world elegance, with a resident pianist filling the air with sweet melodies. The cabins are adorned with art-deco details and French-polished cherry wood.

Inca Rail to Machu Picchu



The Inca Rail private car includes a three-course meal.

For the ultimate in luxury, book the private Machu Picchu train aboard the Inca Rail which takes traveler from Cusco or Ollantaytambo to Machu Picchu. Ollantaytambo is an Inca archaeological site located in Southern Peru, just northwest of the city of Cusco. Passengers will sip Champagne and eat a three-course meal while passing the Vilcanota River, snow-capped mountaintops and quaint Peruvian villages before reaching the famous Inca Citadel.

The private train car is rented in its entirety and can comfortably seat eight. In addition to the welcome bottle of Champagne, the service includes a tasting menu paired with regional fine wines and an open bar filled with premium spirits. Take pictures or just enjoy the view from an open balcony on your private train car, and listen to live Andean music performed by local Peruvian musicians.

Angkor Wat and the Temples in Cambodia



CroisiEurope Cruises' RV Indochine II

The Kingdom of Cambodia is an empire of temples, including the world-famous Angkor Wat, a bucket list destination for many. The Mekong River is the lifeblood, the heart and soul of daily Cambodian life, and the best way to see the country (and visit the amazing floating villages for which it's known) is on a river cruise. CroisiEurope Cruises is a family-run French river boat company and their newest ship (launched 2017) to join the fleet on the Mekong River is the RV Indochine II. Intimate in size, with only 31 cabins and 60 passengers, all rooms have a private balcony, so you get to take in all the sights as you float down the river.

There are 172 floating villages in Cambodia consisting of 1.2 million people. And while there are planned daily excursions at each port—visits to castles, local farms and pagodas—for many, the best part of the cruise is simply sailing down the river: watching the fisherman throw out their nets each morning, gliding by the floating villages where kids are playing and women are washing clothes. Stops along the river include Phnom Penh, which is the capital of Cambodia and dates back to 1434.

The town retains the French colonial feel and a must is a visit to the large silver pagoda, which was created with over 5,000 silver tiles. Another highlight is the town of Kampong Chhnang, one of the largest fishing ports on the Tonle Sap. The region is known for its traditional pottery which is a major source of revenue for the entire country, and the region's very name "Kampong Chhnang" means "the port of the pottery" in Khmer.

The Romance of the Danube River



The view from the Aquavit Terrace during a Viking River Cruises excursion.

The Danube Waltz itinerary aboard Viking's River Cruises travels from Budapest in Hungary to Passau in Germany. The itinerary explores the highlights along the Danube (the second longest river in Europe) including Budapest and Vienna, while also getting a glimpse into the lesser-known Central European cities like Bratislava and Krems. The Wachau Valley is one of the most scenic parts of the Danube River and is considered a UNESCO world heritage site.

Cruising at a leisurely speed of 12 miles per hour, the ship passes by vineyards, villages, monasteries and castles during the eight-day tour. The itinerary is designed for maximum time in port, often with late evenings or overnights, so you can experience local culture at night or an evening performance. Excursions include the thermal baths in Budapest, a visit to Benedictine Abbey of Göttweig in Krems, Austria, and a Mozart and Strauss concert in Vienna.

The Viking Longship Vilhjalm—named after the first Duke of Normandy—is a long boat with 95 staterooms including seven suites. The suites feature two full-size rooms with a veranda off the living room and a French balcony in the bedroom. The ship has a sun deck with 360-degree views and a shaded sitting area; an organic herb garden; putting green and a walking track and a library. The Aquavit Terrace is ideal for al fresco dining; the main restaurant has floor-to-ceiling windows with panoramic views.