# Christmas Markets along the Rhine

**RIVER CRUISE**

*Plus optional extensions in*

**Basel; Brussels**

**RXS/RXV 2014**

# Christmas Markets along the Rhine

## Table of Contents

**INTRODUCTION** ..... **1**

**1. PASSPORT, VISAS AND TRAVEL DOCUMENTS** ..... **2**
Passport Required ..... 2
Visas Not Required ..... 2
No U.S. Passport? ..... 3
Backup Photocopies ..... 3

**2. YOUR HEALTH** ..... **4**
Keep Your Abilities In Mind ..... 4
Health Check and Inoculations ..... 4
Jet Lag Relief ..... 5

**3. LUGGAGE REGULATIONS** ..... **6**
Size, Number and Weight Restrictions ..... 6
Airport Security/TSA ..... 7

**4. WHEN YOU ARRIVE** ..... **8**
GCCL Air Travelers ..... 8
International (Brussels/Basel optional extension travelers only) ..... 8

**5. MONEY MATTERS** ..... **9**
How to Carry Your Money ..... 9
Onboard Ship ..... 10
Shopping ..... 11
U.S. Customs Regulations and Shipping Charges ..... 12
Problem with a Purchase? ..... 13
To Tip or Not to Tip … ..... 13

**6. PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP** ..... **15**
In General ..... 15
Luggage Suggestions ..... 15
Packing Your Carry-On ..... 16
Clothing Options ..... 16
Travel Gear Suggestions ..... 16
Consider … ..... 17
Medicines ..... 17
Other Gear ..... 17

**7. REGIONAL CLIMATE INFORMATION** ..... **18**

**8. TRAVEL AND TECHNOLOGY** ..... **20**
In General ..... 20
Regional Electricity ..... 20

Electricity onboard ..... 21
Smartphones ..... 21
Cell Phones ..... 21
Phone Calling Cards ..... 22
Photo Gear ..... 22

**6. GRAND CIRCLE CRUISE LINE'S EUROPEAN RIVER SHIPS ..... 23**
Shore Excursions ..... 23
Onboard Activities ..... 24
Onboard Facilities ..... 25
Ship Specifications ..... 27

**7. ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS ..... 28**
Brussels in Brief—Optional Extension ..... 28
Basel in Brief—Optional Extension ..... 29

**8. COUNTRY DEMOGRAPHICS ..... 31**

**9. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ..... 33**
Books, Maps, and Movies ..... 33
Grand Circle Community & Useful Websites ..... 36
Tourist Board Addresses ..... 37

# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

We've gathered some introductory information that may prove helpful for this Grand Circle Cruise Line itinerary. For detailed and timely information, it's wise to visit appropriate websites and confirm luggage regulations, weather conditions and other variable elements of your trip. If you expect to embark on personal exploration, or wish to discover more about the countries you visit, we suggest that you consult your choice of the many in-depth travel guidebooks devoted to your destinations. Refer to our additional resources section (at the end of the handbook) for other sources of insight.

## ABOUT GRAND CIRCLE TRAVEL

Grand Circle Travel, founded in 1958 to serve the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP), is the leader in international travel, adventure and discovery for Americans aged 50 and over. Grand Circle vacations have been recommended by *The New York Times*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Travel+Leisure*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel*, among other publications. But our most impressive reviews come from the more than one million people who have traveled with us and from readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* who placed Grand Circle Cruise Lines, the cruise branch of Grand Circle, in the Top 10 of the World's Best Cruise Lines for eight years — in 2012 ranking Grand Circle Cruise Lines the #1 World's Best River Cruise Line. Grand Circle has earned a spot on the prestigious *Condé Nast Traveler* Gold List for seven consecutive years as well. For 2011 *Condé Nast Traveler* named seven Grand Circle Cruise Line river ships among the 20 best river ships in the world; for 2012 the Grand Circle Cruise Lines was named to their Platinum Circle of top cruise lines.

## YOUR GRAND CIRCLE CRUISE LINE PROGRAM DIRECTORS

During your exclusive Grand Circle Cruise Line River Cruise, you'll have reliable assistance available at all times from three on-site Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Directors. Your Program Directors are natives of Holland or Germany who are fluent in English and can give you an inside perspective on your destinations. They are supported along the way by local tour guides, who guide you expertly through particular sites and cities.

Many Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Directors are graduates of professional education programs for travel guides. In addition, they receive specialized training directly from Grand Circle Cruise Line that is based on what we've learned from thousands of past travelers about how to make the trip most enjoyable.

Your Program Directors will provide sightseeing tips, handle all travel details, reserve optional tours you choose to take, oversee our Discovery Series events, and provide any other assistance you may need. You will be in the company of a Program Director throughout your cruise (and during the optional Basel or Brussels land extensions if you take them).

## WEATHER CONDITIONS AND RIVER DEPTHS

Throughout the river cruise season, weather conditions affect river depths, and water levels may require adjustments to your itinerary. When river depths rise or fall during your River Cruise, Grand Circle Cruise Line will be required to adjust your itinerary for your safety and to adhere to the current governmental and nautical requirements. Though we strive to adhere to our planned itinerary, we may not always be able to follow it exactly as planned. Therefore the sequence of ports visited and the days on which included features and optional tours occur may vary.

# 1. PASSPORT, VISAS AND TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

## Passport Required

You need a passport for this itinerary.

***Note***

**Your passport should meet these requirements for this itinerary:**

- It should be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- It should have the recommended number of blank pages (see below for details).
- The blank pages must be labeled "Visas" at the top. Pages labeled "Amendments and Endorsements" are not acceptable.

**Recommended number of blank pages:**
Since the consequence of having too few pages can be severe—you could be denied entry into a country—we opt for *a better safe than sorry* policy. We recommend these guidelines.

- **Main trip and extensions**: Under the terms of the Schengen Treaty, the countries on this tour no longer require border guards to stamp your passport when traveling from one country to another. The entry stamp you receive at the airport when you first land serves for all the countries on this itinerary. However, because the U.S. authorities may stamp your passport when you re-enter the United States, and because they may refuse to do so on a page that already has a stamp on it, you should have at least 2 blank passport pages available.

Please take a moment to check if your passport meets all of these requirements. If it you are refused entry, you may be required by that country to return to the U.S. immediately, **which would be at your own expense**.

**If you need to renew your passport or get extra pages:**
Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778,** or visit their website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport, renewing your existing passport, or for additional pages. You can renew your passport by mail if it is not damaged, you obtained it within the last fifteen years, and it's in the name you want on your new passport. Many local post offices carry forms for renewing by mail or obtaining extra pages. Allow several weeks for processing your passport. You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

***NOTE:*** *When updating your passport, it is worthwhile to check the prices on all the different services that might apply to you. For example, it might be less expensive to renew your passport than to have pages added, depending on the number of pages you need.*

## Visas Not Required

U.S. citizens do not need a visa for entry into any of the countries on your itinerary.

## No U.S. Passport?

**Non-U.S. citizens or non-U.S. passport holders**: If you are **not** a U.S. citizen or if you possess a passport from a country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate or embassy about possible visa requirements. For your convenience, we recommend the services of PVS International. Or, contact your local consulate.

**PVS International**
Passport & Visa Services
1700 N Moore Street
Rosslyn Center, suite 310
Arlington, VA 22209
Telephone: 1-800-556-9990
Website: www.pvsinternational.org

## Backup Photocopies

The smartest and easiest security precaution you can take is to carry photocopies of the personal information pages of your passport, your air ticket, your traveler's check serial numbers, and your credit cards. Bring along extra passport-sized photos. Add the phone and fax numbers for reporting lost credit cards, and for your travel protection plan company (if you have purchased the optional travel protection plan) and medical emergency network. Store the copies in your duffel bag, separate from the originals. This can save you immeasurable time, money, and bother if your documents are lost or stolen during your trip. In addition, you can scan these photocopies and email them to your personal email address so that a replacement can be printed out if needed.

# 2. YOUR HEALTH

## Keep Your Abilities In Mind

You can encounter unaccustomed challenges on even the shortest journey — river cruises, for instance, mean adapting to life aboard ship, with the potential for rocky moments, awkward docking sites and wet, slippery terrain. At some docks you may have to step from ship to ship before reaching shore. In addition, terrain onshore can be uneven, rocky or precarious; both included and optional tours can require extended walking to guarantee a truly rewarding experience. Some of the places you'll visit have not been improved with elevators, escalators, ramps, railings or other aids. If you have difficulty walking in terms of balance or stamina, or are generally inactive in your daily life consider an exercise program to tone up for your cruise. If in doubt, consult your physician describing the length and type of rigors you'll encounter. *Please note that this trip is not wheelchair, walker, or rollator accessible; nor can Grand Circle Cruise Line accommodate motorized scooters of any kind.*

## Health Check and Inoculations

Feeling healthy and confident of your mobility is essential if you want to fully enjoy your trip abroad. Please be aware that this program features a fair amount of walking up and down inclines in towns with uneven or cobblestone streets and at river ports with old-style wooden piers lacking modern ramps. For your comfort and safety, we recommend this program only to individuals in good physical condition. If you have any doubts, please discuss them with your doctor, and follow his or her advice. A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling. You may want to have a dental exam before your trip. If you have difficulty walking or are wheelchair-bound, please consider a different Grand Circle Cruise Line vacation.

If you take medications regularly, be sure to pack an ample supply that will last your entire trip, as obtaining refills of your medication can be difficult during your cruise. Pack these medications in your carry-on bag, and keep them in their original, labeled containers. To be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications, you should also bring copies of the prescriptions, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name.

### Basic Illness Prevention

It's common for people traveling in contained spaces to be more susceptible to easily transmitted viral and bacterial illnesses such as flu, stomach and respiratory bugs, and colds. The single most effective way to prevent this is frequent hand-washing. We ask all travelers to be extra diligent in their normal hand-washing hygiene, and to drink plenty of fluids for proper hydration. Simple steps like these will help ensure that everyone enjoys the comfortable, carefree vacation they looked forward to.

### Vaccinations

**Check with the CDC:** To ensure you receive any needed vaccinations we suggest that you check the current recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the geographical region that you are going to travel. You can contact them at:

**On-line** — if you have access to the Internet, we suggest you visit the CDC's Web site at **www.cdc.gov/travel**, where you will find comprehensive information about preventing illness while traveling.

**By phone**—at the CDC's International Traveler's Hotline toll-free at **1-800-232-4636** 24 hours a day. Please note that automated information is arranged topically by disease, rather than by country or region.

**Consult your doctor:** After checking the CDC's recommendations we strongly suggest that you consult your family physician concerning any vaccinations or medications that you may need on this trip. At the time of print there were no specific vaccinations required for entry into any of the countries on your itinerary.

## Jet Lag Relief

You will feel better on the first days of your trip if, shortly before you leave home, you start to adjust to the different time zone of your destination. Since you will cross several time zones to reach your destination, you may lose many hours of regular sleep. On arrival, your body then will have to suddenly adjust to new sleeping and eating patterns. The result is jet lag. Its symptoms are fatigue—often compounded by insomnia and general restlessness—irritability, and vague disorientation. You cannot totally avoid jet lag; but you can minimize it. Here's how:

- Start your trip well rested. Try to begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave.
- Switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane. Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Try to sleep on overnight flights.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before–and during–your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying.
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane, and make an effort to get up and walk about the cabin a few times to keep your blood circulation normal.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don't push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

# 3. LUGGAGE REGULATIONS

## Size, Number and Weight Restrictions

It may seem early to discuss luggage and packing, but if you know current industry standards for international flights you can start to plan what type of luggage you'll use, how much clothing to bring, etc. The following information can help you in your trip preparations. We'll remind you to confirm your U.S./international luggage limits (and update regional limits, if applicable) in your final documents (arriving about two weeks before your departure).

| MAIN TRIP LIMITS | |
|---|---|
| **Pieces per person** | One checked bag and one carry-on bag per person |
| **Weight restrictions** | Varies by airline. The current **standard** is **50lbs for checked bags** and **15 lbs for carry-on bags**. |
| **Size restrictions** | Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches (*length+width+depth*). Generally, **62 linear inches is the checked bag limit**; **carry-on limit is 45 linear inches**. |
| **Luggage Type** | A sturdy, fabric-sided suitcase with built-in wheels and lockable zippers is recommended. |
| **TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS** | |
| Both extensions have the same luggage restrictions as the main trip. | |
| **REMARKS / SUGGESTIONS** | |
| **One suitcase and one carry-on bag per person:** Due to the space limitations on bus transfers, you'll be restricted to one suitcase and one carry-on bag per person. This is to ensure that we have room for everyone's luggage. We ask that you abide by this limit to avoid inconveniencing your fellow travelers and prevent additional airlines luggage fees (which are your responsibility). Most airlines now charge to check more than one suitcase per person for flights to Europe and other international flights.<br><br>**Note**: Enforcement of published restrictions by countries and airlines is a matter of governmental and corporate policy. Enforcement may include spot checks and may be inconsistently applied. Expect penalties and fines to be imposed immediately, however, when and if enforced. Before you choose to ignore the published restrictions you should ask: *Do I feel lucky?* And, even if you answer yes, you should make sure that you have the ability to pay the fine. | |

**Should I confirm luggage restrictions with my U.S./international airline(s) before departure?**
Absolutely, confirm current restrictions about a week or so before your departure. You should take this step no matter if your vacation has a lower limit then the average international flight or not, because there may be recent changes, such as new security regulations, or an update to the standard weight/size allowances. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our webpage in the *FAQ* section.

**You should also check with the airlines on luggage fees—many airlines charge to check luggage,** even on international flights. Others may charge a fee if you bring a second carry-on item, like a purse or a laptop. **These fees are not included in your trip price**; they are payable directly to the airlines. If you are making a connecting flight, you should also confirm if your luggage can be checked through to your final destination. For more information about air travel, see the "Air Travel" section of your *Important Information* booklet.

# Airport Security/TSA

**Restrictions on what can be included in your carry-on luggage may change**. To avoid inadvertently packing restricted items in your carry-on, we suggest that you consult the Transportation Security Administration website at www.tsa.gov/public.

**Liquids and your carry on:** Follow the **TSA's 3-1-1 rule**: Liquids must be in a 3.4 ounce or less (100ml) bottle (by volume); all bottles must be in a 1 quart-sized, clear, plastic, zip-top bag; 1 bag per passenger placed in screening bin. One-quart bag per person limits the total liquid volume each traveler can bring. The 3.4 ounce (100ml) container size is a security measure. Note that this rule is used increasingly throughout the world.

**For flights that originate in the U.S:**
To reduce the risk of damage to your luggage, do not lock your bags when checking in for flights originating in the U.S. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is responsible for screening all checked luggage at commercial airports throughout the U.S. TSA baggage-handling agents may need access to your luggage and will break locks if required. TSA "accepted and recognized" locks are widely available: screeners can open and re-lock bags using these locks if a physical inspection is required.

**For flights originating outside the U.S.:**
On all flights outside of the U.S., we strongly recommend you lock your luggage. This is not a legal requirement but merely a precaution against theft. Have the keys handy, as you may need to open your luggage for a security screening or for customs in the U.S. or Europe.

# 4. WHEN YOU ARRIVE

## GCCL Air Travelers

**U.S. Departure:** If you are among a group of ten or more GCCL travelers who depart the U.S. from your international gateway city, a GCCL Airport Representative will assist you at the U.S. airport with the check-in of your flight. The Representative will be at the check-in counter three hours before your departure time and at the gate one hour before your departure time (security permitting).

*Please note: If you are arriving at your international gateway city via a connecting domestic flight, the Grand Circle Cruise Line Representative will be stationed at the check-in counter for your departing international flight, not at the domestic arrival gate.*

**Arrival:** A GCCL Representative will meet you at the airport after you exit customs and escort you to a private motor coach for your transfer to the pier or hotel.

***Important note:*** *Airport porters are NOT allowed in the customs hall area. On arrival, you must take your luggage off the baggage carousel and load it onto a complimentary cart, which you then will move through customs. When you exit the airport building, your motor coach driver will load your luggage onto your motor coach.*

**U.S. Return:** At the end of your cruise or post-cruise extension, you'll be transferred to the airport for your return flight to the U.S. If you are among a group of ten or more GCCL travelers who return to the same U.S. gateway city, a GCCL Airport Representative will meet you as you exit Customs and help you find taxis, buses, hotel accommodations, or connecting flights.

***Important Note:*** *Please remember to wear your Grand Circle Cruise Line name tag when you exit Customs, upon arrival and when you return to the U.S., so that you are readily identifiable as a GCCL traveler.*

**Flying with a Travel Companion**

If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.

## International (Brussels/Basel optional extension travelers only)

If you have selected our optional extension, and you have booked your own international air arrangements, please be aware that you are responsible for all transfers between the airport and hotel. Grand Circle Cruise Line is not responsible for flight delays or cancellations. Transfers between the hotel and pier are included.

# 5. MONEY MATTERS

## How to Carry Your Money

**Traveler's checks—not recommended:** We urge you not to rely on traveler's checks for your personal expenses. They can be difficult to exchange and the commission fee for cashing them is quite high. It's most practical to view any traveler's checks you might bring as a last "cash" resort in the event of a special situation.

**U.S. dollars** have an advantage. Cash is more readily exchanged and accepted than traveler's checks, and sometimes commands a better exchange rate. You might also consider using a debit card, another reliable payment method.

There is no need to obtain local currency before your trip. You can change money at banks, most hotels, and money exchange offices (to exchange cash you may be asked to show your passport). Be aware, however, that torn, dirty, or taped U.S. bills will ***not*** be accepted for exchange. **New** large bills ($100) will *usually* be accepted by banks and onboard ships; **old** $100 bills will ***not*** be accepted. Money in smaller denominations is much more universally accepted, particularly if new.

### Credit Cards

Though major American credit cards (American Express, Visa, and MasterCard) are accepted abroad, always inquire if your type of credit card is accepted before deciding on your purchase. It is also wise to notify the credit card company that you will be using your cards abroad so that they may remove any security block. When using a major credit card you may receive a different exchange rate than if you pay with cash; inquire about the rate first. Please be aware that credit cards might not be accepted for small purchases or in the markets. Note that the Discover credit card is not widely accepted outside the U.S. Keep your receipts in case you have questions about the conversion or exchange rate. Also, keep your receipts as proof of purchase for items to be shipped home.

In many parts of Europe a new credit card called a chip-and-PIN (a personal identification number) card has been introduced. This new card is more secure than the standard swipe-and-sign card, but it needs a PIN to work. In *some* cases you may find that a shop has already switched to the new system and, if so, they will ask you for a PIN to complete your transaction. For this reason we suggest checking if your credit card already has a PIN on file for it. Don't be surprised if it doesn't—this new technology is not used in the U.S. yet, so many U.S. credit cards won't have a PIN.

**Debit cards**: Debit cards are very popular in Europe, and are widely accepted, but will *almost always* require a PIN. Many U.S. banks offer a combined ATM and debit card. Check your ATM card, and if it has a Visa or a MasterCard logo, ask your bank if it can be used as a debit card in Europe. (If there's no logo, then you probably can't use it as a debit card, but your bank will know for certain). If it can be used as a debit card, all you'll need is the same PIN you use at the ATM.

**PIN Numbers**

When you are *off ship* a PIN will be required for most debit card transactions and *some* credit card transactions, as well as for some transactions onboard. However, a PIN number will **not** be required for the payment of optional tours.

**If your credit card doesn't have a PIN**: Many shops in Europe will still take the swipe-and-sign cards. And if the shop absolutely requires a PIN, you can simply use another form of payment.

## ATMs

When traveling, typically PLUS, Cirrus, and other bank networks are available throughout large cities and small towns. Always notify your bank before you leave home that you are going abroad so that they may remove any blocks on your account and also ask them about the number of withdrawals you may make abroad. For cash withdrawals, don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's 4-digit PIN (Personal Identification Number), as many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their numeric keys, they only display digits.

***Note on ATM use:*** *Many banks have begun imposing a fee ranging from $1 to $5 every time you use an ATM in a foreign city. You may want to limit the number of withdrawals that you make. Your Program Director/Hospitality Desk Representative can advise you on locations, but when to exchange money is left to your discretion.*

## Currency

The Euro is the official currency of France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. Switzerland retains its traditional currency (see below). Euro banknote and coin denominations are as follows:

- Banknotes: €5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500
- Coins: 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents; €1 and 2

Currency exchange rates fluctuate daily. Your Program Director will advise you of the exchange rate upon your arrival. For current exchange rates, please refer to the our website, or the financial section of your newspaper. On our website select the region and then click on the country you'll be visiting. A link to the currency converter is included in the menu on the page of each individual country.

## Onboard Ship

**Two separate bills will be issued:**

1) **Shipboard account:** This bill is for onboard purchases (drinks at the bar, gift shop purchases, laundry, etc) and is calculated in Euros.

**Payment Options:**
**Cash:** Euros or U.S. dollars are accepted
**Credit card:** American Express, MasterCard, or Visa are accepted
**Debit card:** Cards with Visa or MasterCard logos are accepted
**If you pay with a credit or debit card:** You will need to sign a receipt and/or supply a PIN number, depending on the card account requirements (onboard sales terminals accept both.)
**NOT accepted:** *Personal checks or Discover card.*

2) **Optional tour account:** This bill is for optional tours taken during the trip; it is calculated in U.S. dollars.

**Payment Options:**
**Credit card:** American Express, MasterCard, or Visa cards are accepted
**Debit card:** Cards with Visa or MasterCard logos are accepted. The card must allow you to ***sign*** for purchases — you will ***not*** be able to enter a PIN. You will need to sign an optional tour form as proof of payment.
**NOT accepted:** *Personal checks, cash,, Discover card or PIN-only debit cards.*

***Please note:*** Shipboard and optional tour account payments made by credit card may take up to 3 months to process. We ask that you use a credit card that will not expire until three months after your trip ends. Because our headquarters are in Boston, charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as "**OPT Boston**" (depending on your credit card company).

**Exchange services:** Onboard ship we will break down or change larger U.S. bills into smaller ones (for example, one U.S. $50 bill into U.S. $20, $10, $5, and $1 bills), and change U.S. currency into Euros (for example U.S. $20 into Euro €*XX* — depending on exchange rate). This service is available only for the Euro & U.S. dollar currencies. The daily exchange is **limited to a maximum of U.S. $50 per person**. You can exchange larger amounts at local banks in port towns.

## In Switzerland

**Banking hours:** Swiss banks generally are open Mon.-Fri., 8–noon and 2–5 pm. Currency exchange offices do business from around 6:30 am–9 pm daily. Some hotels also offer currency exchange services.

**Currency—Switzerland not adopting the Euro:** The Swiss monetary unit is the Swiss *franc* (Fr.), divided into 100 *rappen* (known as *centimes* in French-speaking areas).

- Banknotes**:** 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 1,000 *francs*.
- Coins: 5, 10, 20 and 50 *rappen* pieces and 1, 2 and 5 *franc* pieces.

## In France

### Banking Hours

Banks are generally open on weekdays from 9 am to 5 pm. Most banks are closed on Mondays.

## In Belgium

**Banking hours:** Hours vary from bank to bank. Generally banks are open 9 am to 4 pm, Monday through Friday; some banks close for lunch between noon and 1:30 pm. On Saturday, certain branches are also open 9 am – noon (except during July and August). You can also exchange money in any of the numerous *Bureaux de change* offices in Brussels.

## Shopping

It is Grand Circle Cruise Line's goal to identify and provide you with shopping opportunities that highlight unique, locally produced products with good value from reliable vendors. For this reason there may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is **no** requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. **Grand Circle Cruise Line cannot be responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.**

If you plan a major purchase, we strongly recommend that you research the prices and quality available at home before your trip. Just one visit to an import shop or gold dealer will put you way ahead when you go shopping. This is the only way to know if you are getting a good price. It is Grand Circle Cruise Line's goal to identify and provide you with shopping opportunities that highlight unique, locally-produced products with good value from reliable vendors. Grand Circle Cruise Line cannot be responsible for purchases you make on your trip.

## In Brussels

**Best Buys:** Brussels is not a city for bargain shopping, but you will get top quality for the price you pay. Lace, of both antique and recent manufacture, is the product of choice. Excellent European antiques may be found in shops and street markets. Leather goods are of very high quality, and edibles like chocolates, pralines, and the thin, spicy biscuits called *speculoos* are very popular Belgian souvenirs.

**Hours:** Shopping hours are generally 10 am to 6 pm, Monday through Saturday; some stores observe these same hours on Sunday. Department stores stay open later on Friday, until 8 or 9 pm.

**Tip on a Shopper's Guide:** An excellent magazine devoted almost entirely to Belgian shopping, *Belgian Promenade*, is published by the Chamber of Commerce for Art, Quality Goods, and Services. Your hotel may provide free copies; if not, look for it at newsstands.

## In Basel

Popular Swiss souvenirs include chocolate, cheese, clocks, embroidery, and Swiss Army knives. Switzerland's bargains are to be discovered during sales in July and August. The sales tax (or VAT) is already included in the price. The amount on the price tag is the one you pay. Grand Circle Cruise Line cannot be responsible for purchase made on your trip.

**Hours:** Most shops in Switzerland are open 8 am to noon and 1:30 to 6:30 pm.

# U.S. Customs Regulations and Shipping Charges

### Exemption Amounts

Articles totaling $800, at fair retail value where they were acquired, may be imported free of charge if you bring them with you. A flat rate of duty—usually a percentage—will be applied to the next $1,000 worth (fair retail value) of merchandise. The U.S. Customs Inspector determines the value of your items when you enter, and is not bound by your bill of sale. In almost every case, however, a genuine bill of sale will be honored.

### Fees on Items Shipped Home

Items shipped home are *always* subject to duty when received in the U.S. There will also be charges for shipping. Although some shops abroad may offer to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the customs facility closest to you and payment of the *export* duties (the fee to remove an item from its country of origin) not door-to-door shipping or *import* duties (the fee the U.S. government charges to bring an item into the U.S.). All additional duties or shipping charges would be the responsibility of the purchaser—you.

Therefore unless the item is small enough to mail or to be sent by a global parcel service (like FedEx) you should be prepared to pay customs duties and for shipping or pick-up from the nearest customs facility. This is why the U.S. Customs & Border Protection service states: “The most cost-effective thing to do is to take your purchases with you if at all possible.”

### Illegal Items

It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins. For more information on what you may or may not bring back into the United States, you can obtain the publication “Know Before You Go” from the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection by phone, mail or from their website:

U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20229
Tel. **1-877-227-5511**
**www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/**

## Problem with a Purchase?

The best way to address a problem with a purchase is to not have one in the first place! So don't forget to examine merchandise before paying for it, check contracts or agreements before signing, and review your receipt before leaving the shop. For major purchases, don't hesitate to ask in advance about the return policy—local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up.

But what if you do discover an issue with an item later on? In that case, your best recourse is to contact the vendor directly. For this reason we recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. due to delays in communication, the complexities of international shipping/customs duties, and even cultural differences in how business is conducted.

## To Tip or Not to Tip …

Sometimes *that* is the question. The good news is twofold: we're fresh out of Shakespearean soliloquies, so no thesauri will get injured in this production; and the answer the question "**to tip or not to tip** (and how much to tip if you so choose)" is ***always*** a personal decision. Tipping is a common practice both at home and abroad and we offer these guidelines to answer requests for appropriate tipping amounts. It can be useful to have this information on site – when the question *must* be answered – and ahead of time for travel budgeting purposes. Tips below are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency (usually preferred) or in U.S. dollars (personal/traveler's checks should ***never*** be used for tips).

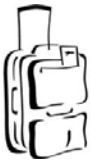
**Shipboard:** Shipboard gratuities to the cruise personnel are not included in the cost of your cruise. The ships' tipping guidelines recommend a flat tip of $10-$12 U.S. per person, per day, which will be pooled among all cruise staff. For your convenience tips for the crew can be paid with a credit card.

**GCCL Program Director:** It is customary at the end of your trip to express a personal "Thank You" to the Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Director assigned to your group, especially if he/she has provided you with individual assistance. We recommend $4-$6 per person, per day. Please note that tips for our Program Directors can only be in the form of cash, and local currency is appreciated.

**Tours & Excursions:** During your vacation, you have the opportunity to participate in included and optional tours. A tip to your motorcoach driver (and local tour guide, if one accompanies the tour) is customary, and the following are the suggested amounts: $2 per person for each half-day tour, $3 per person for each full-day tour.

**Port Stops & Land Stays:** During your port stops and land stays, you may dine in a local restaurant, take a taxi, or avail yourself of some other service where tipping is customary. A service charge is usually included in restaurant and bar bills, but it is customary to leave an additional tip of around 10% of the bill for your waiter or bartender. As for taxis, in many cities the tip is included in the fare, and will be announced on a sign inside the cab; otherwise a 10% tip is appropriate.

# 6. PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP



## In General

**Travel light.** It's a good practice to gather together everything you want to bring and then take just half of that. Eliminate all but the essentials and start packing a few days before you leave. That way, you'll have time to think—not fret—about what you might be forgetting. To have a varied travel wardrobe—yet keep your luggage light—we recommend you select a color scheme and pack color-coordinated pants and shirts, skirts and blouses, or pantsuits that can be mixed to create different outfits.

**Pack casual clothes.** Comfortable, low-key apparel is acceptable at each of your destinations and aboard ship. Basic pants, shirts, walking shorts, sportswear, everyday dresses and skirts, supportive shoes, and functional outdoor clothes are recommended. At dinner, you will not need to don "dressy" clothing; men do not need a tie or jacket. You may want one or two "smart casual" outfits for the Welcome Reception or Farewell Dinner, but it's completely up to you.

**Plan to dress in layers on shore excursions.** But do be prepared for a variety of weather conditions: rain, snow, sun, and clouds. Temperatures are likely to range from the 30s to the 40s. If you're lucky, you may get a day or two in the low 50s. Pack for wintry conditions: a warm jacket, hat, and gloves; one or two fleece tops or heavy sweaters; turtlenecks and a few woolens or thick knits; warm pants; wool or fleece socks; folding umbrella; and waterproof warm shoes with good tread for walking on snow-covered ground. A top-and-bottom set of silk long underwear will provide an extra layer of insulation and is lightweight to pack. Your best bet is to dress in layers. You can then easily remove or add on layers according to any temperature shifts.

**Good walking shoes are critical.** This program features many included tours that follow steep, unpaved or cobbled routes; and even an average day of light sightseeing or shopping can put great demands on your feet. Supportive, waterproof sports shoes are ideal for daytime shore excursions. If you prefer more ankle support, take light hiking boots. Bring five to seven pairs of socks. In case you get caught in the rain, we suggest you bring an extra pair of walking shoes, and rain boots or galoshes. Aboard ship, you'll want non-slip shoes with rubber soles. In addition to your waterproof snowboots or galoshes, bring a pair of comfortable walking shoes that you can wear if the weather conditions do not include snow or rain. Aboard ship, you'll want to wear non-slip shoes with rubber soles.

### Luggage Suggestions

**Consider a duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase for your checked luggage.** Due to space limitations on our motor coaches, you are allowed one piece of checked luggage per person. Porterage at airports and hotels is provided for **one** bag per person. All bags should have luggage tags.

**Consider a daypack or small backpack as your carry-on bag.** It will do double duty during excursions and walking trips. A daypack leaves your hands free and distributes its weight onto your back. Packed with daily travel needs (sweater, camera, rain/wind jacket, water bottle, etc.), it will compress to fit the storage space of foreign motorcoaches, and yet still have room for an impulse buy at a local street market.

**Inner bags**: Packing is easier if you use inner bags to help organize your gear. Use plastic bags, nylon stuff sacks, or packing cubes to organize inside your suitcase. Isolate liquids, store camera gear and important papers in heavy-duty Ziploc style bags.

***Tip*****:** *Bring a second, empty lockable bag folded into your main suitcase, with a luggage tag and small lock. Use this to carry souvenirs home – but remember that you may incur extra luggage fees. If you're traveling with a companion we recommend "cross-packing," i.e., pack 2 outfits of your clothing in your companion's luggage and vice-versa, in case one bag is delayed.*

## Packing Your Carry-On

Using a daypack as a carry-on bag for your flights is a smart solution. We **strongly urge** you to pack your carry-on with at least one full change of clothes, your camera gear, medications, changes of socks and underwear, your important travel documents, and other irreplaceable items, in case your checked bags go astray. Store camera gear and important papers in plastic bags to protect them from dirt and moisture. With a daypack you can then remove these items on arrival and load your bag with the gear you'll need on walking tours and excursions.

**NOTE:** Restrictions on what can be included in your carry-on luggage change frequently. To avoid inadvertently packing any restricted items in your carry-on luggage, we strongly suggest that you consult the Transportation Security Administration website, at **www.tsa.gov** which keeps a current list of restricted items. From the main website click on *Our Travelers*, then *Air Travel*, and then you will see a link for *Prohibited Items*.

## Clothing Options

We've included information below on the weather you can expect for the regions you'll be visiting on your travels. Taking into account the climate you'll encounter and the general suggestions we offer above will enable you to create a flexible wardrobe that's light enough for sophisticated travel and will guarantee comfort in all the conditions you can expect to encounter. The luggage weight and size restrictions imposed by travel realities today have made traveling light an absolute necessity. With modern fabrics – Gore-Tex, Polarfleece, polypropylene, etc. – lightweight packing for comfort and protection through a wide range of weather is easy. A visit to any on-line or local sporting goods/outdoor stores (L.L. Bean, REI, EMS, etc.) will yield a treasure trove of lightweight, specialized, and fashionable clothing and gear that is readily adaptable to your itinerary.

## Travel Gear Suggestions

Though it's often fun to do things as the locals do, it can be frustrating when daily necessities or conveniences from home aren't available. To travel wisely these days you must juggle your personal needs and preferences against the physical constraints of your transportation—whether it's an international airplane, a transfer motorcoach, a small ship or a day-long trek on a camel. You'll have to distinguish between what you **must** have, what you'd *like* to have, whether you can zip your suitcase closed, and what you can reasonably expect to wrestle through airport hallways and security checkpoints. Consult the following items to create your personal checklist – ignoring what you don't need and making the tough decisions over borderline cases. Remember that many airlines today will charge you extra for added luggage.

Do not pack aerosol cans, as they tend to leak during air travel. Also avoid packing glass bottles; use plastic containers instead. Leave checkbooks, unnecessary credit cards, valuable jewelry, and anything that you would hate to lose at home. For more packing and luggage tips, you might want to visit the web site: **www.travelite.org**.

**Cabin amenities include:** shampoo, conditioner, hair dryer, liquid soap, body lotion, shower cap, washcloth, and towels. We have still mentioned some of these items in the checklists below, in case you have preferred brands you want to bring with you on your cruise.

## Consider …

- ❑ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, shampoo/conditioner, shower cap, body soap, etc.
- ❑ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses and your prescription
- ❑ Sunglasses with a neck strap
- ❑ Travel money bag or money belt
- ❑ Moisturizer, lip balm
- ❑ Wide-brim sun hat or visor
- ❑ Pocket-size tissues
- ❑ Moist towelettes (packets) and/or anti-bacterial hand lotion
- ❑ Flashlight, extra batteries/bulb
- ❑ Compact umbrella
- ❑ Photocopies of passport, air ticket, credit cards (and your originals)
- ❑ Extra passport-sized photos

## Medicines

- ❑ Your own prescription medicines
- ❑ Vitamins
- ❑ Cold remedies: Sudafed/Dristan
- ❑ Pain relievers: Ibuprofen/naproxen/aspirin
- ❑ Laxatives: Senokot/Ex-Lax
- ❑ Stomach upset: Pepto-Bismol/Mylanta
- ❑ Anti-diarrheal: Imodium
- ❑ Band-Aids, Moleskin foot pads
- ❑ Antibiotics: Neosporin/Bacitracin

## Other Gear

- ❑ Camera gear
- ❑ Travel alarm
- ❑ Compact binoculars
- ❑ Hanging toiletry bag with pockets
- ❑ Hair dryer
- ❑ Wash cloth
- ❑ Handkerchiefs
- ❑ Basic sewing kit
- ❑ Hand-wash laundry soap (Woolite), clothespins/travel clothesline/stopper
- ❑ Electrical transformer & plug adapter—see "Regional Electricity" below
- ❑ Reading materials
- ❑ Travel journal/note pad
- ❑ Swimsuit, if your ship/hotel has a pool or a whirlpool
- ❑ Home address book
- ❑ Photos, small gift for home-hosted visit
- ❑ Phrase book
- ❑ Water bottle for land excursions
- ❑ Collapsible walking staff
- ❑ Pocket calculator for exchange rates

# 7. REGIONAL CLIMATE INFORMATION

We can't predict the weather you'll have on your travels – our local weathermen are lucky to get tomorrow right! So, as your departure nears, it's a great idea to visit the *My Account* feature of **www.gct.com** for a current 10-day forecast of temperatures and conditions at your destinations. Or check Internet weather sites (www.wunderground.com is very comprehensive) for those forecasts and tweak your wardrobe accordingly. You'll find historical averages and general information on local climates below – but, given recent weather extremes, it's even more important to consult up-to-the-minute resources.

**Holland:** Holland is so compact in size that any difference in temperature between regions is usually within two degrees Fahrenheit. Weather systems affect the entire country in a similar manner, too. The northern part of Belgium is low-lying, with a climate that is almost identical to that of Holland, its adjoining neighbor. As in most areas of northwest Europe, the weather in these two small countries is frequently rainy and can be very changeable from day to day throughout the year. Bruges, in particular, gets a lot of rain—but rainfall is lighter in wintertime and the sprinkles rarely turn into heavy downpours.

**Switzerland:** Basel is located on the central Swiss plateau. Summers here can be quite warm and damp, as this season is Switzerland's wettest period of the year. Much of the summer rainfall is heavy and can be accompanied by severe thunderstorms. Summer weather conditions also can vary considerably from year to year in terms of the number of days with sunshine versus those with overcast skies and rain. Spring and fall are drier and cooler. Like other parts of west-central Europe, Switzerland is open to climatic influences from the Atlantic and from eastern Europe. At all times of the year, the weather is changeable.

**Germany:** Germany has a central European climate. Variable weather reigns, and rain and drizzle are common occurrences year-round. The hill slopes along the Rhine and Mosel valleys have a climate particularly suitable to the cultivation of vineyards. Though summer weather is often volatile, it is generally sufficiently warm and sunny to make this a notable area for wine. Spring and fall weather is moderate with intermittent sun; cloudy, wet days are common. On the Rhine and Mosel Rivers, fog and mist appear frequently, especially in the early mornings. Evenings on the water can be quite chilly. The farther south you head, the milder the climate tends to become.

In the upper Rhine valley of southwest Germany, site of Baden-Baden and the Black Forest, the spring and summer temperatures are the warmest in the country, allowing for a variety of crops to grow, including vines and tobacco. Autumn can be noticeably cooler, and winter quite cold, due to the area's proximity to the Alps and distance from the ocean.

Here is the data from the weather observation stations closest to our destinations.

| WHAT'S THE TEMPERATURE?<br>*Average* highs (taken at 2 pm) and lows (taken just before sunrise) in °F. | NOV | DEC |
|---|---|---|
| **Amsterdam** | | |
| High | 48 | 44 |
| Low | 39 | 36 |
| **Strasbourg** | | |
| High | 47 | 41 |
| Low | 36 | 32 |
| **Cologne** | | |
| High | 48 | 43 |
| Low | 37 | 34 |
| **Basel (optional extension)** | | |
| High | 45 | 37 |
| Low | 35 | 29 |
| **Brussels (optional extension)** | | |
| High | 48 | 44 |
| Low | 39 | 36 |

**Please note:** The data cited here reflect *climate* as opposed to *weather* conditions, and serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. A 60 degree ***average*** high temperature means that days may be as warm as 80 or as cool as 40 – but it's most likely you'll encounter temperatures in the 50 to 70 degree range.

# 8. TRAVEL AND TECHNOLOGY

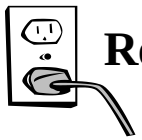
## In General

Smartphone, tablet, digital camera/camcorder, MP3 player: travel today can involve technology that didn't exist even five years ago. The usefulness of digital devices is enormous: smartphones can keep you connected and offer up-to-the-minute information via your cell plan or a local Wi-Fi connection. With a tablet (or smartphone) you can store multiple country guidebooks, access maps and connect to the internet in a small, lightweight device. (***Tip****: you can download* ***this*** *document from the Grand Circle Travel website and import it into your tablet or e-reader, many of which can display PDF files.)*

Compact and lightweight, digital camcorders and cameras take high definition movies and still images of the people you meet and places you visit. For robust use a laptop may be effective; for occasional use it's wiser to rely on Internet cafes or a tablet and hotel Internet access rather than shoulder the heft and size of a laptop.

To use these devices you should first consider the services available at your destinations. You'll encounter a range of electrical standards, varied plug configurations to access the local current, erratic availability (electricity and internet access), and differing technological standards.

You'll need to assess your power and data storage needs, and the accessories required to recharge/connect/use these devices. Finally, it's smart to read the owner's manual *before* you depart. Pay particular attention to electrical, power and storage requirements to ensure that you understand exactly what you need. Thorough preparation is the best guarantee that your devices will work up to their potential.



## Regional Electricity

The standard U.S. electrical system — 110V 60Hz current and flat two- or three-pronged polarized plug system — is rare elsewhere. The overwhelming choice for the rest of the world is 220-240V and 50/60Hz current with a variety of plug shapes, sizes, and configurations. Some plugs will work with multiple receptacles, while others won't. Europe is largely standardized to the Type C "Europlug."

Plugging a 110V U.S. appliance into 220/240V 50/60Hz service will ruin the motor. We suggest that you bring *dual* voltage appliances (widely available) that work on both 110 and 220/240 voltage. Dual voltage appliances are inexpensive and need only plug adapters.

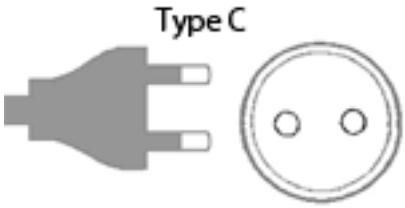
If you bring 110V appliances, such as a hair dryer (note that hotels often supply hairdryers and coffee makers) or shaver, you'll need a transformer (to halve the 220/240V current) in addition to plug adapters. Regional transformer/adapter kits can often be found at hardware or online stores but transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave those larger items at home.

France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland all use the Type C "*Europlug*" and receptacles that accommodate it, and use 230 V, 50 Hz current.

# Electricity onboard

***River Concerto, River Rhapsody, River Harmony & River Melody***
Cabin bathrooms are equipped with a 110-volt outlet for electric shavers. The rest of the cabin has 220 volts, with European-style outlets. To operate 110-volt appliances outside of your bathroom, you will need a transformer as well as plug adapters.

On all ships, a *limited* number of transformers and adapter plugs are available at the ship's reception desk for occasional use. If you need these items for the duration of the cruise, we recommend you bring your own.




Even though you'll only need a Type C plug adapter on this trip, it may be a good idea to invest in an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, this item will ensure that you are prepared for your current trip as well as future vacations. If you use multiple digital devices—cell phone, digital camera, and MP3 player for instance – it's also handy to have a travel power strip, perhaps with a surge suppressor and USB-style port for charging cell phones, MP3 players or e-readers without the use of device-specific plugs.
.

# Smartphones

It will require some effort to get the most out of your smartphone when you travel. Even with an international roaming plan, costs can add up quickly – those handy apps often pile up download fees. The simplest solution is to shut down all cell phone functions, automatic data feeds and roaming options, and take advantage of the apps via available Wi-Fi. With an Internet VOIP app (like Skype) you can make inexpensive calls. If necessary, turn international roaming back on and your phone will work as usual – albeit at some cost. If your phone doesn't support international roaming (most smartphones do), some carriers offer loaners.

App quality, availability and costs vary – as do platforms (iPhone, Android, Blackberry …), so again you'll need to do some legwork. Apps come in all forms: packing lists, currency converters, language translators, maps, journals, Wi-Fi hotspot finders … one problem is going to be searching through the vast array of available apps to uncover what works best and what you're likely to use most. Smartphones have a lot to offer, but their small size can be a drawback for some uses (maps, extended reading, etc.)

## Cell Phones

If you want to use a standard cell phone while traveling overseas, be sure to check with your service provider (www.verizon.com, www.t-mobile.com etc.) to see if your phone will work outside the U.S. or whether you're better off renting an international phone. The websites www.travelcell.com and www.globalcellularrental.com have good information on rentals. Or, consider buying an inexpensive local phone for your stay.

**Phone Calling Cards**
If you don't carry a phone, you can use a prepaid calling card to call the U.S. with minimal additional charges. Besides the prepaid long distance charges, you might have a local fee of a few cents and possibly a connection fee if you are using your card at a hotel. Check with the reception desk prior to using it to avoid unexpected charges.

Calling cards purchased locally are usually less expensive than those purchased in the U.S. and are more likely to work with the local system. Note that dialing a U.S. 1-800 number outside the continental United States will incur costly long distance fees, since 1-800 does not work outside the U.S.

# Photo Gear

For many people, capturing the highlights of their travel experiences in photographs or movies and sharing them is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the journey. Remember, however: some individuals and cultures and are less tolerant of photography than others. It's always best to respect local customs. And in some places you may be charged for photography at specific sites, or restricted from any photography at all.

Digital cameras and camcorders are excellent travel companions—and many do dual duty by recording movies *and* still images. Fist sized camcorders can capture HD movies and high quality still photos; cameras the size of a deck of cards are great for snapshots and casual movie clips. With an ample supply of high-capacity memory cards you can record your whole trip with a small, lightweight package.

But you must remember the batteries. Recharging batteries is sometimes impossible, cameras can drain batteries *very* quickly, and replacements may be unavailable. Whether you need standard or proprietary batteries, it's good to have spares. Be sure your charger will work with the local electrical system, and bring more than enough memory cards—they may be hard or impossible to find. Memory cards are small, thin and light: you can never have too much storage.

Compact cameras are impractical for distant subjects. Some models have a zoom lens of up to 120mm, which is good for middle distances. For distant subjects a *megazoom* (with a zoom lens of at least 300mm) or a single lens reflex (DSLR) camera with up to a 300mm telephoto lens are good choices. With a DSLR you can use multiple lenses, though your gear can quickly get complex, weighty and cumbersome. Cameras or lenses that need a tripod are impractical for travel photography. A single mid-range telephoto lens coupled with a small, fast prime lens (for low light/no flash situations) is an effective, flexible and compact kit. Consider mirrorless interchangeable lens cameras (MILC), which combine small bodies and multiple, small lenses with high quality for both still and HD movie images.

If you use a DSLR or MILC camera, protect the lenses with a UV filter and bring lens caps, covers, cleaning paper and a waterproof bag (a heavy duty Ziploc-style bag is good) to protect your gear. Be sure your camera has a flash that you can turn off, and if it's detachable, remember to pack it. (At many sites and museums, flashes are ***not*** permitted.)

Consider disposable cameras, as well. They are inexpensive and capable of acceptable photos as long as the light is not too dim *or* bright. X-rays do not damage the data of digital cameras (in any media format), and so pose no problems for travelers using digital cameras.

# 6. GRAND CIRCLE CRUISE LINE'S EUROPEAN RIVER SHIPS

### M/S *River Concerto, M/S Rhapsody, M/S Harmony, M/S Melody*

Our private fleet of custom-built river ships—with designs incorporating suggestions from Grand Circle Cruise Line travelers—offers a host of amenities to make you feel right at home. Each ship is designed to carry a moderate number of passengers, ensuring an intimate shipboard atmosphere, plus the ease of maneuverability that's so important when entering small river ports. Amenities on each ship include a restaurant with panoramic windows and wraparound promenade, sun deck with lounge chairs, a whirlpool, library, sauna, bar, lounge, dance floor, and small souvenir shop.

By owning our ships, we can assure that you'll be sharing this unique travel experience with only like-minded Grand Circle Cruise Line travelers. You'll find your ship to be an intimate haven that's especially conducive to camaraderie. We'll all be together for the joint celebrations, such as the Welcome cocktail party, where you'll experience the gala ambiance of a larger group. At other times, such as when we venture ashore, we'll break into smaller groups with individual Program Directors to allow for more intimate and personal discoveries.

**Included features of all Grand Circle Cruise Line European river ship cabins:**

- A layout of at least 150 square feet
- All outside cabins
- Individual climate control (heat and air conditioning)
- Twin beds that ship staff convert into a daytime couch
- Storage space under beds of 57 inches x 22.8 inches x 11.8 inches (length x width x height)
- Sufficient closet and dresser space
- Color TV, including CNN programming and a bow camera for ship-front views
- Direct-dial international telephone
- Hair dryer
- Desk
- Private bath with shower

Cabins on the Serenade deck have small balconies with sliding doors; those on the Sonata deck have large picture windows; cabins on the Cantata deck have two picture windows, and Prelude Deck cabins have a square window, placed high in the cabin. For safety reasons, cabin windows do not open.

**An important word:** While our fleet features larger-than-usual riverboat cabins, please keep in mind that these ships are river vessels, not large ocean cruise ships. Riverboat cabins, in comparison, are relatively small, and ship amenities, in general, are comfortable but not lavish.

## Shore Excursions

Your cruise includes many sightseeing tours. Other optional tours are available for purchase. Your Program Director will provide information on these optional excursions on your arrival. Please note that most optional tours can only be purchased with a credit card.

# Onboard Activities

During your cruise you'll enjoy exclusive Discovery Series events, such as folklore and local music entertainment, theme dinners, organized discussions, group activities that relate to the region (may include a language lesson), and talks on upcoming ports of call.

## Dining

You'll enjoy fine cuisine and excellent views in your ship's dining room, featuring a warm decor of dark woods, rich carpeting, floor-to-ceiling windows, and white-linen and china table settings. Your ship's daily service includes a breakfast buffet, lunch, and a more formal dinner. Our professional chefs will create unique menus for you that feature regional specialties. Included with dinner are two complimentary drinks (choose from house wine, draft beer, or soft drink) per guest, per meal. In addition, a selection of other fine wines and beer is available for purchase. Passengers may also bring a bottle of their own favorite wine to dinner to enjoy at their table. Should you care to avail yourself of this service, there will be a corkage fee of approximately €10 Euro per bottle, charged to your passenger account.

Please note that if you bring your own alcohol aboard, it can only be consumed in the dining room as described above, or in your cabin. Consumption of alcohol purchased outside the ship is not permitted in the lounge or public areas. We also offer complimentary coffee and tea throughout the day, available at meals and from the machine in the reception area.

**Open-table, single-seating for all meals:** Each meal is open seating—reservations of any kind are not accepted. Dinner has only one designated time for its open seating, announced each day aboard ship.

**Dining times:** Dining times for all meals may vary depending on the day's sightseeing and sailing schedule, but in general, meal times are as follows:

**Early riser breakfast:** 6:00-7:00 am
**Breakfast:** 7:00-9:00 am
**Lunch:** 1:00-2:00 pm
**Dinner:** 7:00-9:00 pm

**Special diets & celebrations:** Special diets, such as low-cholesterol or vegetarian, can be accommodated, as well as the recognition of an anniversary or birthday. Please call Grand Circle Cruise Line to submit your request no later than 45 days prior to departure. Religious dietary regimens, such as kosher or halal meals, cannot be prepared aboard ship.

**Dress code:** The dining-room dress code is casual, though most travelers dress nicely for the Captain's Welcome Reception and Farewell Dinner.

**Non-smoking policy:** The entire dining room is non-smoking at all times.

### Embarkation/Disembarkation

On the day you board ship, your cabin will be available at around 11:30 am. The restaurant will open at 12:30 pm and serve a light lunch. On the day of disembarkation, your cabin will no longer be available after breakfast. You may sit in the ship's lounge or on the sun deck until disembarkation.

### Dock and Landing Etiquette

River waterways are simply not big enough to support large landing docks such as those built on ocean shorelines. It is common for river ships to tie up alongside each other at some piers—particularly in ports where docking area is restricted. While we try to arrange the most convenient mooring available in each port of call, outboard boats may occasionally obstruct views, and you may have to step across other ships when you want to go ashore.

## Onboard Facilities

### Headsets

During the cruise portion of your trip, complimentary headsets will be provided on all of your included and optional tours, so that you can better hear your Program Director or local guide.

### Elevator/Chairlift

Each ship has an elevator and chairlift service to the sun deck from the deck below (or you can use the staircase to the sun deck, which has one flight of ten to twelve steps). The elevator does not provide service to or from the Prelude Deck. The staircase to/from the Prelude Deck features about six stairs, with a banister to hold on to. The chairlift is a single-seat transport that slides up the staircase banister.

### Wi-Fi Access

Limited Wi-Fi service is available for free in the lounge, library, reception and bar areas on board these Grand Circle Cruise Line ships: *Concerto*, *Harmony*, *Melody*, and *Rhapsody*. Wi-Fi service is not available in individual cabins, restaurants or other common areas. If you want to use the Wi-Fi connection you'll need to bring your own device (laptop/tablet/netbook) — ships do **not** rent or loan these devices. To use the Wi-Fi service, please visit Reception after you board for access information. Shipboard access is subject to the challenges of travel: ship location, signal availability, and usage volume on board will affect connectivity and speed. The ship's Internet connection demands a strong 3G cell phone signal, which is unavailable in many of the areas we visit. You can expect disruptions of both long and short duration.

### Fitness Center

A fitness center with an exercise bike and walking/running treadmill is available on each ship.

### Laundry Service

Laundry service is available for a fee. Please note that neither self-service laundry facilities nor dry cleaning services are available.

## Linen Service

Bed linens are changed once a week (twice during the 14-night cruise); towels are changed daily.

## Lounge/Bar

The bar is open from 9:30 am to 1 am, with soft drinks, beer, wine, and liquors for sale. Prices are in Euros.

## Medical Care

Our entire fleet adheres to stringent European safety standards. In addition to an emergency call button in all cabins, ships also feature fully-staffed reception desks, 24 hours a day.

## Recreational Facilities

These include a sun deck with lounge, library, and lounge with bar and dance floor.

## Drinking Water

Tap water aboard ship is safe for drinking. Bottled water is also available. There are two ice machines onboard. When ashore, it is best to drink bottled water.

## Smoking/Non-Smoking Policy

Smoking is not allowed anywhere inside our Grand Circle Cruise Line European River Ships, including in individual cabins. The only area on the ship where smoking is permitted is outside on the sun deck.

# Ship Specifications

| | *Entered service* | *Length* | *Width* | *Passenger capacity* | *Crew members* | *Decks* | *Cabins* | *Elevator* | *Chairlift to sun deck* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M/S ***River Concerto*** | 2000 | 361 | 38 | 140 | 32 | 4 | 70 | yes | yes |
| **M/S *River Harmony*** | 1999 | 361 | 38 | 140 | 32 | 4 | 70 | yes | yes |
| **M/S *River Melody*** | 1999 | 361 | 38 | 140 | 32 | 4 | 70 | yes | yes |
| **M/S *River Rhapsody*** | 1999 | 361 | 38 | 140 | 32 | 4 | 70 | yes | yes |

# 7. ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS

We're including some handy practical details and a brief introduction to the places you'll visit on your cruise. If you expect to explore in depth on your own, we recommend that you consult one of the many available book-length guides to your destinations. If you have one or two specific sites, museums or features that you're interested in, an internet search is the ideal way to get-up-to-date information and details. And of course your Grand Circle Cruise Line Program Director or Hospitality Desk Representative will be able to assist you with suggestions and arrangements of activities you wish to participate in during your stay.

### Internet Access and Email

Internet cafés are available in many of the cities you visit on your cruise; however it prices for use may vary. While sailing Internet access may be unavailable, depending on locks, bridges, and regional remoteness. Internet access will be most consistently available when the ship is docked in larger cities.

### Laundry Service

Laundry service and dry cleaning are available through your hotel for an additional fee.

## Brussels in Brief—Optional Extension

### City Layout and Details

The city is relatively compact and most of its interesting sights are situated within the inner circle of boulevards, known collectively as the Petite Ceinture, which encloses the central sections of town. A great majority of attractions lie in the rather small area between the Grand Place and Parc de Bruxelles and can easily be covered on foot.

Geographically, the city is shaped like a diamond. It is flat in its center and western areas. The eastern side of town is hilly, and here the Royal Palace is perched high up among some of Brussels most affluent residential areas and prestigious office buildings.

### Cuisine

**Belgian specialties:** Brussels' pride in good food is evident in its 1,500-plus restaurants, which range in cuisine, size, ambience, and price. French cooking prevails, but there are many distinctly Belgian specialties too. These include the inevitable Brussels sprouts; asparagus from Malines; fresh seafood, especially *crevettes* (tiny shrimp from the cold waters of the North Sea); red cabbage prepared *a la flamande* (with apple); *frites* (twice-fried French fries with a Belgian difference); *carbonnades flamandes* (beef braised in beer); *Moules* (mussels), a Belgian national dish; *jambon d'Ardenne* (smoked ham from the Ardennes); and, of course, *gaufres* (waffles, topped with sugar, fruit, and/or whipped cream). In addition to the wonderful Belgian waffles, there are excellent custard tarts and other pastries, as well as superb chocolate.

**Beer and wine:** Belgium is famous for its brewing tradition and there are more than 4,000 brands produced within its borders. Among names to look for that you won't find outside Belgium are those still

brewed by Trappist monks, Orval and Westmalle; Faro, Krieklambiek, and Lambiek from the area around Brussels; and Leuven.

**Hours:** Most Belgian restaurants are generally open seven days a week from noon to 2:30 pm for lunch, and from 7 to 10 pm for dinner. These hours may vary.

### Drinking Water

Tap water in Brussels is perfectly fine for drinking.

### Local Transportation

**Metro:** Brussels has an excellent network of subway lines that cover 28 miles through the city. Metro entrances are clearly marked by signs bearing a white M on a blue background. Maps of the metro network are free at tourist offices, and service is continuous from 6 am to midnight, with timetables displayed at each stop.

**Bus and Tram:** Above ground, yellow trams and buses run from 6 am to midnight, and timetables are posted at stops. Tram and bus stops are marked by red-and-white or blue-and-white signs. You may purchase a ticket for a single ride, or a card for five or ten trips, or a card for a 24-hour unlimited ride.

**Taxis:** Taxis are plentiful, but quite expensive. The tip is not included in the fare. There are taxi stands on all principal streets.

## Basel in Brief—Optional Extension

### City Layout and Details

Basel, Switzerland's third-largest city, has an international flavor since it borders both France and Germany. The city spans both sides of the Rhine River, which divides it into Grossbasel (Greater Basel) on one side and Kleinbasel (Small Basel) on the other. Grossbasel was the old imperial city, and contains most of the city's historic churches and museums (of which there are more than two dozen).

There are half a dozen bridges over the Rhine, of which the major one is the Mittlere Rheinbrücke (Middle Rhine Bridge). From the Grossbasel side of this bridge, it's a short walk to the colorful Rathaus (Town Hall) and the Marktplatz, the city's bustling market square. If you follow the street named Rheinsprung along the riverbank, you'll pass 15th- and 16th-century houses and come to the city's Museum of Culture and Natural History. Continuing in the same direction, you'll soon reach Basel's cathedral (Münster), where the great Dutch humanist Erasmus is buried, at the square named Münsterplatz. From the Pfalz, a terrace beside the cathedral, there is a fine view of Kleinbasel across the Rhine.

Across the river in Kleinbasel, you'll find many restaurants and the Mustermesse, a large trade fair and exhibition center. It's possible to cross the Rhine by ferry as well as the bridges to add variety to your explorations of the city.

## Cuisine

Basel has some of the finest restaurants in Switzerland. Traditional menus feature Swiss fare like cheese fondues, cheese raclette, roesti, dried beef and pork, hearty soups, sausages, sweetmeats, buns and cakes, and delicious wines. Other international cuisines, such as French, Italian, and Chinese, are represented, too.

**Meal costs:** Dining out in Switzerland can be pricey. Lunch with a beverage typically ranges between $15 and $25 U.S. per person. Dinner with wine averages $25 to $35 U.S. per person.

**Hours:** Lunch is typically served daily from 11:30 am to 2:30 pm; and dinner from 5:30 pm to 10 pm. A few restaurants are open from 9 am to midnight.

## Drinking Water

Water in Switzerland is tasty and very safe to drink. In restaurants, most Swiss will bring you mineral water, which you pay for, if you do not specify tap water.

## Local Transportation

**Buses:** Basel has a good network of buses. The fare ranges from about $1.25 to $3.50, depending on how far you want to travel within the city limits. You can purchase your ticket at automatic vending machines before you board. A one-day, two-day, and weekly ticket is also available. Your hotel may offer an included transportation ticket with your room.

**Bicycles:** These can be rented at the railroad station from 7 am to 7:45 pm daily.

## Public Holidays/Festivals

**Please note that all shops are closed on Christmas Day.**

# 8. COUNTRY DEMOGRAPHICS

## Belgium

**Area**: 11,780 square miles
**Capital**: Brussels
**Languages**: Dutch (57%), French (32%), bilingual (Brussels) 10% German (1%)
**Location**: Belgium is located on the western edge of continental Europe. It has about 40 miles of seacoast on the North Sea, at the Dover Strait. France is south of Belgium, the Netherlands is directly north. The country measures only 150 miles across from the sea to the Ardennes.
**Population (2005 estimate)**: 10,364,388
**Religion**: Roman Catholic 75%
**Time zone**: Belgium is on Central European Time, which is six hours ahead of U.S. EST.

## France

**Area:** 211,208 square miles
**Capital:** Paris
**Language:** French
**Location:** France is a large country, two and a half times as big as Great Britain, extending for some 600 miles from north to south and from east to west. It has coastlines on both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Its southern land border is Spain; to the north are Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany; to the east are Switzerland and Italy.
**Geography:** Except for extreme northern France, which is part of the Flanders plain, the country may be described as four river basins and a plateau. Three of the streams flow west—the Seine into the English Channel, the Loire into the Atlantic, and the Garonne into the Bay of Biscay. The Rhône flows south into the Mediterranean. For about 100 miles, the Rhine is France's eastern border. In the Alps, near the Italian and Swiss borders, is Europe's highest point—Mont Blanc, at 15,781 feet.
**Population (2007 estimate):** 64,057,790
**Religion:** Roman Catholic (85%), Muslim (7%), Protestant (2%), Jewish (1%), unaffiliated (5%)
**Time Zone:** France is ahead of U.S. Eastern Time by six hours, Central Time by seven hours, Mountain Time by eight hours, and Pacific Time by nine hours. The French use the 24-hour clock (they do not use the am and pm system): after midday, just continue counting 13, 14, and so on to provide the 24-hour clock time. For example, 1 pm = 13:00.

## Germany

**Area:** 137,846 square miles
**Capital:** Berlin
**Language:** German is the official language. Many Germans are impeccably fluent in English. Italian and French are also widely spoken.
**Location:** Located in central Europe, Germany is bordered in the north by Denmark and in the south by Austria and Switzerland. On the west are the Benelux Countries and France; on the east are Poland the Czech Republic. Germany has coastlines on both the North Sea and the Baltic.
**Population (2004 est.):** 82,424,609
**Religion:** Protestant, 38%, Roman Catholic, 34%, unaffiliated or other, 28 %.
**Time zone:** Germany is on Central European Time, which is six hours ahead of U.S. EST.

## Holland (The Netherlands)

**Area:** 16,036 square miles
**Capital:** Amsterdam
**Language:** Dutch is the official language. A large percentage of the Dutch are also fluent in English and German.
**Location:** Situated on the coast of the North Sea, Holland borders Germany to the east and Belgium to the south.
**Population (2004 est.):** 16,318,199
**Religions:** Roman Catholic 34%, Protestant 25%, Muslim 3%, other 2%, unaffiliated 36%
**Time zone:** Holland is on Central European Time, which is six hours ahead of U.S. EST: when it's 6 am in New York, it's noon in Amsterdam.

## Switzerland

**Area:** 15,952 square miles
**Capital:** Bern
**Languages:** German, French, Italian, and Romansch. English is widely spoken in tourist and business circles.
**Location:** Switzerland, in central Europe, is the land of the Alps. About the size of New Jersey, it is surrounded by France, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, and Italy.
**Population (2004 est.):** 7,450,867
**Religion**: Roman Catholic (49%), Protestant (48%)
**Time zone:** Switzerland is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Time.

## The Rhine River

The Rhine starts high in the Swiss Alps, runs a course of some 840 miles through or alongside six countries—Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, France, Germany, and Holland—then empties into the North Sea at Rotterdam. Though the Danube is twice as long as the Rhine, it is the latter that, throughout history, has served as the most important route for river-trade between the European continent and the North Sea.

Of particular significance is the segment of the Rhine that forms a natural geographical boundary between Germany and France; this stretch of the river was once Europe's major link between Basel and the Atlantic, before the onset of efficient land transportation. Prominent cities—such as Strasbourg, Mainz, Cologne, and Dusseldorf—cropped up along the Rhine's shores, and further established the river's commercial importance, not only to this region, but to all of Europe.

For the artistic community, too, the Rhine has been an endless source of inspiration—from Heinrich Heine's famous poem about the Lorelei legend to Wagner's epic operas, *Der Ring der Nibelungen*, to William Turner's paintings of the Rhine's foggy sunsets to Lord Bryon's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Indeed, to travel the Rhine by boat, and witness the rising mists enshrouding the castles perched above, is to comprehend why the river has so strongly stimulated the creative imaginations of Germany's greatest poets and composers.

# 9. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## Books, Maps, and Movies

If your local store or library doesn't stock the books or movies below, the Internet offers a wide variety of options for finding older or rare stock – try AbeBooks (abebooks.com), Alibris (albris.com), Amazon (amazon.com) or Barnes & Noble (bn.com) — or any of the smaller websites. Of course, this selection is not meant to be comprehensive, and is offered as a starting point for your research.

***Germany and the Germans*** *by John Ardagh.* A contemporary study of the Germans, written by a noted British author and historian.

***Why Switzerland***
*by Jonathan Steinberg.* This book is based on the author's premise that Switzerland is a unique country from which the world can learn much about how democracy rests ultimately on the community level. The author has been a lecturer at Cambridge and is married to a Swiss-German woman.

***The Low Countries, 1780-1940*** *by E. H. Kossman.* Published by Oxford University Press as part of their History of Modern Europe series, this is one of the definitive resources on the political and cultural events that shaped Belgium and the Netherlands over the last two centuries.

**Guidebooks:**
Your Program Director Leader will be happy to provide recommendations and suggestions during the trip, so a guidebook is not a necessity. But a good one can be invaluable as a one-stop reference, so for those travelers who have asked for suggestions, we offer these guidelines. Since different guidebook series each have their own target audience and structure, it is well worth your time to browse your local library or bookstore to find the one(s) you like best. To get you started, here is some general information on the most popular series:

***Culture Smart!*** – Focuses on local customs and etiquette instead of sights, dining, etc.
***DK Eyewitness*** – Innovative visuals make these books easy to use and a nice souvenir once the trip is over. The focus is primarily on the sights and activities.
***Fodor's*** – A classic guidebook with strong information on activities, shopping, and dining. Good mix of upscale recommendations and budget suggestions.
***Frommer's*** – A comprehensive guide series that is known for its restaurant recommendations.
***Insight*** – Offers more information on history and culture than usual, nice visuals, good maps.
***Lonely Planet*** – Practical guides geared towards a more adventurous traveler on a budget.
***National Geographic*** – From the same company that publishes the magazine. Excellent photographs, good information on history, nature, and culture.
***Rough Guides*** –For the independent traveler on a budget. Particularly known for their maps.

**Maps:**
Most hotels will provide maps free of charge at the reception desk or in your room. These maps are usually sufficient for our travelers, but if you plan on any independent exploration, you may wish to consider purchasing a map before your departure. This can be especially useful in a country that doesn't use the Roman alphabet as the hotel maps may only be printed in the local language.

Some recommended map series include: Rand McNally international maps (especially the StreetWise series), Insight's FlexiMaps, and Rough Guide's destination maps. We suggest that you visit your local bookstore or library to get a better sense of which type of map is best for your needs before making a purchase.

**Suggested Movies**

Here are few of our favorite movies that are about, or set in, or from the region you'll be traveling. Most are available at movie rental stores and websites—or even your public library. Sometimes films produced outside of the US may be hard to find, but they are usually available online. Lists are highly subjective – if your favorites are missing, start a chat with fellow travelers and you'll likely find even more treasured movies to share.

**Germany**

*Goodbye Lenin!*

In this 2003 comedy drama from director Wolfgang Becker, a young German boy named Alex pulls off an elaborate scheme to prevent his fragile mother from experiencing fatal shock after waking from a long coma. Alex strives to keep the fall of the German Democratic Republic a secret from his socialist mother for as long as possible. This sophisticated satire offers a glimpse into a turbulent time of European history while revealing the great lengths one will go to when it comes to matters of the family.

*Das Boot*

One of the most authentic war films ever made *Das Boot* is a raw and compelling portrayal of a German Atlantic U-boat crew and captain as they struggle to survive during World War II. This 1981 gem from director Wolfgang Petersen revolves around the U-boat crew as battles break out, the submarine's claustrophobic interior comes to life, and the soldiers' ideals and professionalism are put to the test.

*The Lives of Others*

*The Lives of Others* is a 2006 drama, marking the feature film debut of German filmmaker Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. Set in East Berlin in 1984, an agent of the secret police conducts surveillance on a writer and his lover. As the story unfolds, he finds himself becoming increasingly absorbed by their lives. As intoxicating as it is chilling, *The Lives of Others* quietly depicts the secret world of German espionage.

**France**

*Au revoir, les enfants*

A 1987 film from director Louis Malle about an 11-year-old boy's experience at a Catholic boarding school during the Nazi occupation of France. Rivals at first, the two students Julien and Jean Bonnet form a bond and eventually become best of friends. Julien learns that Jean is Jewish and the priests at their school are hiding him from the Nazis. On one cold morning in January 1944, the boy's friendship is cut short by a traumatic moment in history that will never be forgotten.

*Amélie*

*Amélie* is a romantic comedy about a girl named Amélie Poulain and her magical journey to help others and find true love of her own. This 2001 gem tells the heartwarming story of a shy waitress in Paris who decides to change the lives of those around her for the better, while struggling with her own isolation. The award-winning film from director Jean-Pierre Jeunet is a whimsical depiction of contemporary Parisian life, sure to capture the hearts of its viewers time and time again.

*Jules and Jim*
A 1962 film, *Jules and Jim* from Director François Truffaut, is about three people in love and how their relationship evolves over the years. Set in Paris before World War I, two friends, Jules and Jim, fall in love with the same women, Catherine. This French cinematic masterpiece has it all—a dissection of the uniquely French concept: *ménage a trois*, thoughtful insights on friendship, love, and war, and an oddly endearing connection between the three.

**Netherlands**

*Soldier of Orange*
The 1977 Dutch film directed by Paul Verhoeven depicts World War II through the eyes of several Dutch students. Soldier of Orange is set during the German occupation of the Netherlands and revolves around a group of six students and their different roles in the World War II—either as collaborators or part of the resistance. Based on the book Soldaat van Oranje by Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema—who lived the story himself—*Soldier of Orange* provides a powerful glimpse into the horrors of war.

*Black Book*
*Black Book* is the 2006 war thriller about a young Jewish woman named Rachel who becomes a spy for the resistance during World War II after tragedy befalls her in an encounter with the Nazis. Based on a true story, Black Book is set in German-occupied Holland and revolves around the dangerous double life that Rachel is forced to live in order to survive. Paul Verhoeven's WWII drama shows how an ordinary person is capable of doing extraordinary things when it’s a matter of life and death.

*Girl with a Pearl Earring*
Director Peter Webber paints a mysterious masterpiece with his debut film *Girl with the Pearl Earring*. This 2003 gem tells a story about the events surrounding the creation of the painting "Girl with A Pearl Earring" by Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. The story unfolds when Griet, a mysterious teenage girl, leaves her family to become a servant for the Vermeer household, soon becoming the subject of perhaps the most enduring portrait from Vermeer.

**Belgium**

*Peace in the Fields*
A French-language Belgian film directed by Jacques Boigelot, *Peace in the Fields* takes place around 1925, and revolves around the troubles of a middle-aged farmer whose mother has been accused of being a witch. Nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, this 1970 gem explores issues of prejudice and superstition in the Belgian countryside.

*In Bruges (2008)*
In this 2008 dark comedy Ken and Ray, two Irish hit men seek shelter in the city of Bruges, Belgium after a job gone wrong in London. While in Bruges, Ken gains a new appreciation for life as he takes in the sights of the medieval city. Meanwhile, things start to change for Ray when he meets a woman named Chloe. Both attempt to carve a new life for themselves, but can’t escape their past as they are obligated to take the next order from their boss.

# Grand Circle Community & Useful Websites

If you have access to the Internet, the following sites offer a wealth of information:

**Visit the Grand Circle Community** website for a world of travel news and information:
www.gct.com/community

**Government websites:**
**International health information: CDC (Centers for Disease Control)**
www.cdc.gov/travel
**U.S. Customs & Border Protection: traveler information**
www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel
**Transportation Security Administration (TSA): agency responsible for screening luggage in U.S.**
www.tsa.gov/public
**National Passport Information Center (NPIC): for passport information**
www.travel.state.gov

**General travel information websites:**
**Travel books**
www.amazon.com
www.barnesandnoble.com
**World weather**
www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
**Foreign languages for travelers: basic terms in more than 80 languages**
www.travlang.com/languages
**Travel tips: packing light, choosing luggage, etc.**
www.travelite.org
**Net café guide: 100s of locations around the globe**
www.cybercafes.com
**Electric current and plug types**
www.kropla.com/electric2.htm
**Foreign exchange rates**
www.oanda.com/converter/classic
**ATM locators**
www.mastercard.com/atm for **Cirrus ATMs**
www.visa.com/pd/atm **for PLUS ATMs**

**Country information:**
www.germany-tourism.de **Germany**
www.switzerlandtourism.com **Switzerland**
www.goholland.com **Holland**

# Tourist Board Addresses

For further information, contact:

**Netherlands Board of Tourism**
225 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1854
Chicago, IL  60601
Telephone: 1-888-GO-HOLLAND (1-888-46-4655263)
Toll-free in USA and Canada

**Switzerland Tourism**
608 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY  l0020
Telephone: 212-757-5944  Fax: 212-262-6116

**German National Tourist Office**
122 E. 42nd St.
New York, NY 10168
Telephone: 212-661-7200