

Grand Circle Cruise Line®

THE LEADER IN VALUE AND WORLDWIDE DISCOVERY SINCE 1958

Your Grand Circle Travel Planning Guide



Christmas Markets Along the Rhine

2026

Grand Circle Cruise Line®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with Grand Circle Cruise Line. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

When you cruise with us, you can expect an award-winning experience aboard our privately owned river ship. In addition to the convenience of unpacking just once, you will also enjoy the warm hospitality provided by our friendly, English-speaking crew, coupled with camaraderie of your fellow American travelers.

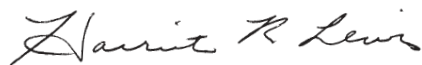
In addition, up to four **expert, local Program Directors** will accompany you from the beginning of your trip to the end. Assigned to a group of 38 travelers on average, these passionate leaders are ready and eager to share their homeland and insights as only a local can. Whether it is recommending their favorite restaurant, connecting travelers with people and culture, or providing the best ways to enhance your leisure time, your Program Director will be available to take care of all the details and ensure that you have a fun and carefree travel experience. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Throughout your journey, you will experience Exclusive Discovery Series events designed to connect you with local people and culture. From sharing traditional fare and lively conversation during Home-Hosted Visits, to discussing Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, you will gain an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our low-cost Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-2610**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis
Chair
Grand Circle Cruise Line

CONTENTS

CHRISTMAS MARKETS ALONG THE RHINE

Your Vacation at a Glance:

Where You're Going, What it Costs,
and What's Included **4**

Your Detailed Day-To-Day Itinerary **6**

Pre-Trip Extension **13**

Post-Trip Extension **15**

Deck Plans **18**

ESSENTIAL TRAVEL INFORMATION

Travel Documents & Entry Requirements... **20**

Rigors, Vaccines & General Health **22**

Money Matters: Local Currency &
Tipping Guidelines..... **25**

Air, Optional Tours & Staying in Touch **29**

Packing: What to Bring & Luggage Limits... **33**

Climate & Average Temperatures **40**

Aboard Your Ship: Cabin Features,
Dining & Services on Board **43**

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

The Cultures of the Rhine **48**

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs,
Shipping & More **60**

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Netherlands..... **63**

Germany..... **65**

France..... **67**

Switzerland **69**

Belgium **71**

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading **75**

Suggested Films & Videos **79**

Useful Websites **82**

Useful Apps **83**



Strasbourg, France

Christmas Markets Along the Rhine

Switzerland: Basel | **France:** Kayserberg, Riquewihr, Strasbourg | **Germany:** Baden-Baden, Speyer, Mainz, Koblenz, Cologne | **The Netherlands:** Nijmegen, Amsterdam

12 days starting from \$4,495

including airfare

Single Supplement: **\$795**

For departure dates & prices, visit

www.gct.com/rxs2026pricing

Medieval landscapes glittering with lights, familiar carols sung in German, traditional *Christkindlmarkt* brimming with handmade toys and ornaments. Christmastime in the Old World is a wonderful way to experience the holidays. Spend 10-nights aboard the **privately owned 140-passenger M/S River Harmony**, and create a treasured memory for yourself.

IT'S INCLUDED

- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges, unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- **Accommodations** for 10 nights aboard a private river ship with wireless Internet access now in all common areas and cabins
- **ALL meals:** 10 breakfasts, 10 lunches, and 10 dinners—plus all onboard house beer & wine, as well as soft drinks
- **7 included tours** with personal headsets, **up to 7 Christmas markets**, and **4 Exclusive Discovery Series events**—Home-Hosted *Kaffeeklatsch* • German Christmas Traditions conversation • *Stollen* baking demonstration • German language lesson
- **Local Program Directors, a Grand Circle Cruise Line exclusive:** These dedicated experts are with you and your group of 38-45 travelers from beginning to end to provide insider's knowledge and a local perspective
- **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- **Baggage handling** for 1 piece of luggage per person, including tips
- **All port charges**
- **5% Frequent Traveler Credit** toward your next trip

Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.



ITINERARY SUMMARY

1 • Depart U.S.

2 • Basel, Switzerland

Embark ship
Port Basel

3-4 • Germany • France

Ports Breisach • Riquewihr • Strasbourg

5-6 • Speyer

Port Speyer

7-9 • Germany: Middle Rhine

Ports Mainz • Koblenz

10-11 • Germany & the Netherlands: Lower Rhine

Ports Cologne • Nijmegen • Amsterdam

12 • Return to U.S.

Disembark ship

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 2 3 4 5 Easy

Group Size

- This trip has a group size of 38-45 travelers (with approximately 3 groups onboard) each with a local Program Director exclusive to Grand Circle

Pacing

- 11 days, with 10 nights aboard a river ship
- Return flights often require departing in early morning hours

Physical Requirements

- Walk 1-3 miles unassisted over a period of 1-2 hours, and participate in 3-4 hours of physical activities each day, including stairs and cobblestones
- Optional activities and walks may be offered in addition to the activity level above
- Agility and balance are needed for boarding small canal boats and navigating steep, at times slippery stairs
- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters

- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must travel with a companion who can assist them throughout the trip
- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

Terrain & Transportation

- Diverse terrain and uneven walking surfaces, including steep and unpaved paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones
- Travel by 140-passenger river ship and 49-seat coach
- Changes in water-level depths may require adjustments to your itinerary, including your Strasbourg canal cruise

Climate

- Daytime temperatures range from 38-45°F during cruising season
- Rain, ice, snow, and wind are possible during the holiday season

MAXIMIZE YOUR DISCOVERIES & VALUE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

all with FREE Single Supplements

Basel, Switzerland

PRE-TRIP: 3 nights from \$845

Brussels & Bruges, Belgium

POST-TRIP: 3 nights from \$1,095

Christmas Markets Along the Rhine

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

3 nights in *Basel, Switzerland*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Arrive Basel, Switzerland

Day 3 Basel

Day 4 Basel

Day 5 Basel • Embark ship

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. today on your flight to Basel, Switzerland.

Day 2 Arrive Basel, Switzerland • Embark ship

- Destination: Basel
- Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Activity Note: The ship is docked outside of the city center; it will take about 20 minutes to reach the city by bus.

Morning: Arrive at the Basel airport, where you are met and transferred to the pier to embark your river ship. From Basel, located where Switzerland, Germany, and France all meet, ships can navigate the Rhine all the way to the North Sea.

Lunch: A light lunch will be served onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: The balance of the day is at leisure. Unpack, and get settled into your comfortable cabin.

Later, gather to meet your Program Director and traveling companions for a ship briefing on your upcoming Grand Circle River Cruise.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 3 Breisach, Germany • Riquewihl, France

- Destination: Riquewihl
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: You'll sail toward Breisach, Germany, set just on the edge of the Black Forest.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Upon arrival, you'll head into the Alsace region, the French side of the Rhine, to visit the nearby commune of Riquewihl,

a renowned “wine village” known for its Rieslings. After an informative stroll, you’ll have free time to explore on your own.

Dinner: Gather this evening with your fellow travelers and Program Director for a Captain’s Welcome Drink and Dinner onboard the ship.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you’ll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 4 Strasbourg • Baden-Baden, Germany • *Germany & the EU’s support of Ukraine* conversation

- Destination: Strasbourg
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Activity Note: Christmas markets typically open one week before, or at the start of Advent observances in mid- to late-November. Hours of operation for the holiday markets vary depending on region, and may be limited or closed between December 24 and December 26, as well as on New Year’s Day. We will dock outside of the city center today; a 20-minute streetcar ride will take us into the city to begin the day’s activities.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship’s dining room.

Morning: Discover Strasbourg, a unique confluence of French and German culture and traditions. Strategically important since ancient times, Strasbourg became a free imperial city in 1262, and then was occupied by France in 1681 and Germany in 1871. France recovered the city in 1919 after World War I. From the comfort of your glass-covered tour boat, you’ll cruise the city’s famous canals and see the major sights and admire the city’s remarkable Renaissance architecture. In mid-morning, your guided tour concludes at the Palais Rohan in the town center, which you will travel to via city tram

using your included single-day transit pass. If you like, you may walk on your own from the Palais to visit the city’s magnificent cathedral, one of the finest of Europe’s great Gothic cathedrals. Its lofty single spire dominates the city.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship’s dining room.

Afternoon: After lunch, journey by motorcoach to the spa town of Baden-Baden, nestled in the tranquil Black Forest. Since Roman times, Baden-Baden has been renowned for its thermal baths, with mineral waters thought to have restorative powers. After a walking tour of Baden-Baden, we’ll return to the ship, arriving in late afternoon

Dinner: Onboard in the ship’s dining room.

Evening: This evening, you can take part in an **Exclusive Discovery Series** conversation about Germany and the EU’s support of Ukraine.

Day 5 Speyer • Home-Hosted Kaffeeklatsch

- Destination: Speyer
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Activity Note: It is not always possible to dock in Speyer, so we sometimes dock in Worms or Germersheim. If that happens, you will be transferred to Speyer by bus and all program features will remain as scheduled.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship’s dining room.

Morning: This morning, disembark in Speyer, a city whose charms—including portions of its medieval wall and gates—date back more than 2,000 years. Founded by the Romans in approximately AD 50, Speyer flourished during the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, much of Speyer was destroyed in the 17th century during the

Palatine War of Succession and few remnants of its glorious past survive. During your free time in this imperial city, you can, however, explore one exception: the Romanesque Cathedral. Built between 1030 and 1125, it set a new architectural standard for the era. Learn more about the city during a walking tour, then set off to explore its charming Christmas market—complete with an ice skating rink by its medieval gates.

Lunch: Enjoy lunch in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Shortly after our ship arrives in Speyer, we'll depart by coach to visit a local family for a traditional *Kaffeeklatsch*. You'll share coffee, cake, and conversation during this **Exclusive Discovery Series** Home-Hosted Visit. Later, consider strolling through the Christmas market and browsing its festive stalls.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 6 Speyer • Optional Heidelberg tour

- Destination: Speyer
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Enjoy a free morning to explore Speyer. On your own, you might take in the Historical Museum of the Palatinate, which has large collections of pre-Roman and Roman materials and includes a wine museum. Or, consider visiting Speyer's four-towered Imperial Cathedral. Dating to the eleventh century, it's one of the greatest Romanesque buildings in Germany and contains the tombs of eight emperors. This was also an early center of printing as the home of the 15th-century

printers John of Speyer and his brother Wendelin. The ship begins cruising towards Mainz before lunch onboard.

Or, perhaps you'll take our all-day optional tour to discover romantic Heidelberg, a historic university town nestled between wooded hills at the edge of the Odenwald Forest and crowned with the ruins of Heidelberg Castle. Begun in the Gothic style of the 14th century and built up gradually over the next 400 years, the castle demonstrates the evolution of architectural style, finally completed in the Baroque period.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room. Or, for those who join the optional tour, enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy a leisure afternoon of sailing as your ship heads toward Mainz.

Or, if you've chosen our optional tour, continue exploring Heidelberg on a walking tour, including a stop at the university's infamous *Studentenkarzer*, a jail built to confine rowdy students. The facility operated from the late 18th century until 1914, eventually falling into disuse as the jurisdiction to hand out prison sentences transferred from the university to government officials. Today, the jail is a museum, where you can still see some of the graffiti left behind by students found guilty of various offenses such as drunkenness, dueling, and other crimes against public order. You'll also visit Heidelberg's lively Christmas market before riding to Mainz to re-board the ship.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 7 Mainz • Optional Eberbach Abbey tour & Rudesheim dinner

- Destination: Mainz
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Enjoy a walking tour of Mainz. The city is best known for its most famous son, Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of movable type, who was born here in 1397. Gutenberg began his career by creating and selling indulgences—papers that could be purchased and used as “coupons” by the faithful to absolve them of some of the time they had earned in Purgatory. Gutenberg realized he could absolve himself of some of his own monetary debts if he could mass-produce the indulgences. To do this, he created uniformly sized metal molds for letters that allowed him to create error-free, repeatable text. This was the beginning of the movable type that transformed the world.

You'll see the Gutenberg Bible and the printing press, which are housed in the town's Gutenberg Museum. The museum exhibits one of the 47 extant copies of the Latin Gutenberg Bible—a 42-page volume with elaborate Gothic lettering, dating from the 1450s.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: You have free time in the afternoon to visit the *Christkindlmarkt* in Mainz. You'll have ample opportunity to explore the myriad craft stalls, and to explore the rest of the city as you please.

Or, choose our optional tour and enjoy a memorable visit to the gothic Eberbach Abbey, followed by an evening in Rudesheim's renowned Drosselgasse wine alley, a narrow street lined with charming taverns serving the area's famed wines.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room. Or, for those on the optional tour, savor an included dinner, locally produced wine, and live entertainment.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 8 Rhine River Valley • Koblenz

- Destination: Koblenz
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Today, the ship cruises along some of the most beautiful and inspiring parts of the Rhine as you sail for Koblenz.

You'll pass the Lorelei, a large rock rising 440 feet above the river. Since ancient Greek mythology, there have been legends of sirens, women-creatures who lure sailors to their death with sweet songs. Ancient Germanic legend places one such siren (Lorelei) here, and it is said she enticed sailors to destruction on the reef below the rock.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Embark on a walking tour of Koblenz, the 2,000-year-old city that stands at the confluence of the Rhine and Mosel rivers. Sitting amidst hills populated with castles and fortresses, this strategic location has made the city vital to European trade—and explains why it was heavily bombed during World War II. Many of its historic buildings have since been restored and the *Altstadt* (Old Town) features distinct architecture like the *Liebfrauenkirche* (Church of Our Lady), a 13th-century Gothic basilica with twin towers capped by onion-shaped spires, and the Basilica St. Kastor or *Kastorkirche*, dedicated to Castor of Karden,

featuring four towers. Across the Rhine you'll find the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress, central to a ring of fortifications built to protect the town and the region.

The afternoon is free to explore on your own.

Dinner: Return to the ship for dinner onboard in the dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 9 Koblenz • *Stollen* baking demonstration

- Destination: Koblenz
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Your morning is at leisure to explore Koblenz and stroll among the stalls of its wonderful Christmas market. Savor the smell of chestnuts roasting over open fires, and perhaps savor an authentic *Bratwurst* as you shop for handmade gifts and enjoy watching artisans at work. Perhaps you'll visit the *Deutsches Eck*, or "Corner of Germany," where both the *Altstadt* and the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress, across the Rhine, are visible.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Enjoy an afternoon of sailing as you cruise to Cologne. En route, perhaps you'll participate in an **Exclusive Discovery Series** baking demonstration where you'll learn how to make *Stollen*, a traditional German bread made with fruit and nuts and topped with powdered sugar.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 10 Cologne

- Destination: Cologne
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Activity Note: We will dock outside of the city center today; we will drive for approximately 30 minutes by bus into the city to begin the day's activities.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Disembark for a guided walking tour of Cologne's Old City. A Roman settlement called Colonia Agrippina after AD 50, Cologne came under Frankish control in the fifth century. You can still see the ruins of Roman temples scattered through the city, and the Roman Tower near the cathedral was once part of the medieval town walls. During the 15th century, the city flourished as a member of the Hanseatic League.

Your tour ends in front of the city's magnificent Gothic cathedral (*Dom*), which you may visit on your own. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the cathedral largely escaped the World War II damage that ravaged the city and the rest of Germany. It's the largest Gothic cathedral in northern Europe, boasting beautiful stained-glass windows, an ornate gold shrine on its elaborate altar, and the intricate detail common to 14th-century Gothic churches.

Lunch: Return to the ship for lunch onboard in the dining room.

Afternoon: Enjoy some time on your own in Cologne. Perhaps you'll spend time at the Romano-Germanic Museum, with its beautifully restored Roman mosaics and

reconstructed tomb. The museum is the home of the largest collection of Roman glass vessels in the world and also holds a significant collection of Roman and early medieval jewelry. You could also visit Cologne's Christmas market, and browse its wide assortment of Christmas creations.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 11 Nijmegen, the Netherlands • Captain's Farewell Dinner • Amsterdam

- Destination: Amsterdam
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Harmony*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Arrive in Nijmegen, a Dutch city built on seven hills overlooking the Waal River just west of its confluence with the Rhine. You'll see the arching bridge that spans the Waal, which was the site of an important battle

during World War II that caused devastating damage to the city. As a result, Nijmegen, one of the oldest towns in Holland, was almost completely rebuilt. The town center, however, was remarkably unscathed by shelling, and provides a striking contrast to the newer architecture that surrounds it. Enjoy a guided walk throughout the city.

Lunch: Savor lunch onboard in the dining room.

Afternoon: Enjoy an afternoon of sailing and take in the passing landscapes as you cruise to Amsterdam.

Dinner: Tonight, gather with your fellow travelers for a Captain's Farewell Reception and Dinner.

Evening: Arrive tonight in Amsterdam, where you will dock for the night.

Day 12 Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Transfer to the airport for your return home, or begin your optional extension in *Brussels & Bruges, Belgium*.

END YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

3 nights in *Brussels & Bruges, Belgium*

Day 1 Amsterdam, the Netherlands • Delft • Brussels, Belgium

Day 2 Brussels

Day 3 Bruges

Day 4 Return to U.S.

OPTIONAL TOURS

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with us. You will be asked to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept MasterCard and Visa on all trips, and Discover on all trips except river cruises in France. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

Please note: *Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.*

Heidelberg

(Day 6 \$140 per person)

Discover Heidelberg, a historic university town nestled between wooded hills at the edge of the Odenwald Forest and crowned with the ruins of Heidelberg Castle. Begun in the Gothic style of the 14th century and built up gradually over the next 400 years, the castle demonstrates the evolution of architectural style, finally completed in the Baroque period. After lunch, visit Heidelberg university's *Studentenkarzer* (a museum that once functioned as an on-site jail built to confine rowdy students) and lively Christmas market.

by free time to explore on your own. Then you'll go on to enjoy dinner, which will feature locally produced wine and live entertainment.

Eberbach Abbey Visit & Rudesheim Dinner

(Day 7 \$165 per person)

Learn the rich history surrounding gothic Eberbach Abbey, from its founding as a monastic house in 1116 to the role it played as a setting for the 1985 film, "The Name of the Rose." Afterwards, spend a memorable evening at Rudesheim's renowned Drosselgasse wine alley, a narrow street lined with charming taverns serving the area's famous wines. This tour includes an informational stroll, followed

PRE-TRIP

Basel, Switzerland

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » **Accommodations** for 3 nights
- » **4 meals:** 3 breakfasts and 1 dinner
- » **Included tour** with personal headsets: Basel
- » Basel tram day pass
- » Dedicated services of a local Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- » All transfers

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Join us on this extension to discover Basel, Switzerland's third-largest city and a center of history and culture. With a heritage that spans more than 2,000 years and a fortunate geographic location, Basel offers a cosmopolitan blend of Swiss, German, and French influences.

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. today on your flight to Basel, Switzerland.

Day 2 Arrive Basel, Switzerland

- Destination: Basel
- Accommodations: Hotel Pullman Basel Europe or similar

Morning: When you arrive in Switzerland, you are met at the airport and transferred to your hotel in Basel. In the late afternoon, you'll be escorted on a walk in the vicinity around your hotel, followed by time to explore on your own.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Join your Program Director for a Welcome Drink and a briefing on what to expect during your time in Basel.

Dinner: On your own. Your Program Director will have suggestions for dining among the many fine restaurants in the city.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 3 Basel

- Destination: Basel
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Pullman Basel Europe or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: You have the day to relax or explore Basel on your own. With more than 30 museums, the city is a well-known center of art and culture. Dating to 1662, the Museum of Fine Arts is considered the oldest public art museum

in Europe. Inside, you can view Old Masters such as Hans Holbein, along with modern masters, such as Jasper Johns.

Lunch: On your own. Try some local cuisine, such as *basler mehlsuppe*—a simple soup requiring few ingredients, usually topped with cheese.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you will visit the Historical Museum, housed in 14th-century church, which contains a collection relating to the history of culture in Central Europe. Its most notable piece is the *Lallenkonig* (Babbling King), a crowned head with moveable tongue and eyes.

Dinner: Savor an included dinner with your fellow travelers.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 4 Basel

- Destination: Basel
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Hotel Pullman Basel Europe or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Explore Basel on your own today. Stroll across a bridge or ride a ferry across the Rhine, and explore the city's two sides: historic *Grossbasel*, where many cultural attractions are clustered, and more modern *Kleinbasel*.

Or, join our optional tour to Bern, Switzerland's capital.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Dinner: On your own—you can seek out another of Basel's many excellent restaurants or ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 5 Basel • Embark ship

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Transfer to the pier to embark your river ship. Travelers arriving for the main trip will join you and you will continue from Day 2 of the main itinerary.

OPTIONAL TOUR

Bern

(Day 4 \$145 per person)

Travel about an hour and a half by bus, then take a guided walking tour, beginning at the city's bear pit. The bear is the symbol of Bern, and the live animals housed here are as well-treated as some of the city's most valued residents. Stroll through the historic center of this city on the Aare River, which was founded

in 1191 by Duke Berchtold of Zahringen. The tour brings you to Bern's 16th-century clock tower, after which you'll have free time to get lunch on your own. Then continue on to Emmental to see how Swiss cheese is made before returning to Basel.

POST-TRIP

Brussels & Bruges, Belgium

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » **Accommodations** for 3 nights
- » **4 meals:** 3 breakfasts and 1 dinner
- » **Included tours** with personal headsets:
Delft • Brussels • Bruges
- » Dedicated services of a local Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- » All transfers

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Join us on this extension to experience the many delights of Brussels, Belgium. Once a sleepy village that grew up around a chapel on an island in the Senne River, Brussels is now a thriving city and the headquarters of NATO and the European Union. An included city tour, visits to porcelain and chocolate workshops, and free time to explore will give you a unique chance to experience this timeless capital city. And a day trip to neighboring Bruges allows you to explore that wonderfully preserved medieval seaport city.

Day 1 Amsterdam, the Netherlands • Delft • Brussels, Belgium

- Destination: Brussels
- Accommodations: Hotel NH Collection Brussels or similar

Morning: Disembark and begin your motorcoach transfer to Brussels, Belgium's capital. En route, visit a porcelain factory in Delft, the Netherlands, known for its blue pottery, called Delftware. After the Delft factory visit, you'll have free time to explore on your own.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: You'll have some more free time in Delft before we gather back at our bus to continue our journey to Brussels, arriving at our hotel late this afternoon.

Dinner: On your own, and your Program Director will be happy to offer dining suggestions.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 2 Brussels

- Destination: Brussels
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Hotel NH Collection Brussels or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Discover Brussels—known for producing delicious chocolate—on an included city tour, then delve into the Belgian capital's sweeter side on a special excursion.

First, you'll set off on a tour of this lovely old city. See the buildings of the European Union and the Atomium, an enormous steel construction representing an iron atom with nine spheres connected by corridors. Pass by the impressive Cinquantenaire Arch, the Chinese Pavilion and Japanese Pagoda, and the Royal Park. Everywhere, you'll see the beautiful architecture of the city and the art nouveau style represented by the famous architect Victor Horta. Your tour ends in Brussels' Grand Place, the famed market square and heart of medieval Brussels. The square is dominated by the magnificent 15th-century Town Hall, with its hundreds of little statues, and ringed with 17th-century buildings and guild houses with their golden inlays.

Then, visit a family-run chocolate factory to see fine Belgian chocolate being created. Chocolate arrived here in the 1870s, following Belgium's colonization of the Congo and its cocoa plantations. Traditional Belgian chocolates are filled with creams, liqueurs, nuts, or a special dark chocolate called ganache. Today the finest chocolates, characterized by a smooth, velvet quality and a rich flavor, are produced in Brussels. At the factory, you'll see a chocolate-making demonstration and learn about the painstaking process from cocoa bean to delicious chocolate confection.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Free to explore on your own. You may want to visit the Royal Museum of Ancient and Modern Art, which houses a special section on the well-known Belgian surrealist, Magritte. Or perhaps you'll visit the Bruparck, an amusement park featuring (among other things) "Mini-Europe," a permanent outdoor exhibit of small-scale, precision-made replicas of Europe's most famous architectural achievements.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 3 Bruges

- Destination: Bruges
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel NH Collection Brussels or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Set off in a private motorcoach for Bruges, one of Western Europe's great medieval cities. Originally a ninth-century fortress built to protect the Flemish coast from marauding Vikings, Bruges today retains its reputation as one of the best-preserved Old World cities on the continent. Its museums hold some of the oldest and finest collections you will find anywhere, and its narrow, winding streets meander through the city beside a centuries-old canal system. You'll discover the intricacy and beauty of this system on a guided walking tour, led by your Program Director.

Then, enjoy some free time to explore. Perhaps you'll learn about a classic Belgian craft—lace—by visiting a local lace shop. Lace-making has a long history but came into its own in the 15th century. Lace was intended to replace embroidery. Unlike embroidered clothing, lace pieces could be changed as fashion changed and attached decoratively to different articles of clothing. Belgium soon gained a peerless reputation for fine lacework. In the 17th century, Belgian lace was prized throughout Europe.

Lunch: On your own. Today you may choose to try *moules-frites*—local mussels served with Belgium's beloved fries.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries. Upon our return to Brussels, enjoy a Farewell Drink with your fellow travelers.

Dinner: Toast to your favorite travel memories during an included Farewell Dinner with your fellow travelers.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll seek out some of Belgium's famous sweets for an after dinner treat, such as waffles topped with ice cream.

Day 4 Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

YOUR RHINE, MOSEL, MAIN, AND DANUBE RIVER SHIPS

Sail aboard our privately owned 140- to 162-passenger vessels

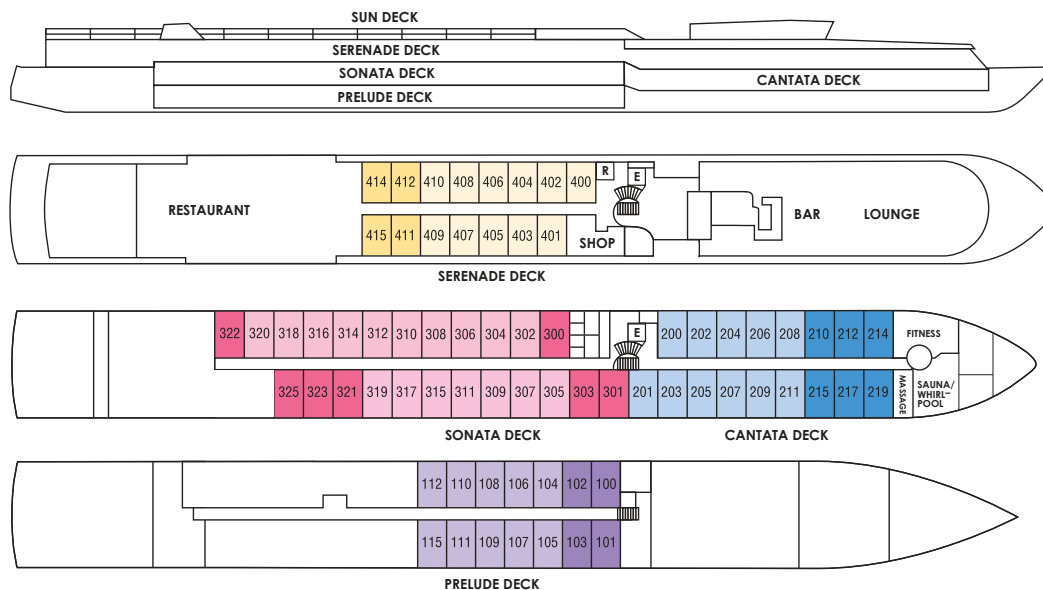
Grand Circle Cruise Line's Rhine, Mosel, Main, and Danube ships were designed specifically to create an unforgettable European river cruise experience for American travelers. Explore storybook landscapes with up to four groups of no more than 38-45 travelers, each with one of our dedicated, local Grand Circle Program Directors, and enjoy the attentive onboard service of our top-notch English-speaking ship crew.



SHIPBOARD FEATURES

- **Dining room with single, open seating:** Enjoy regionally-inspired cuisine in your ship's dining room.
- **Bar & lounge:** Relax with friends old and new.
- **Complimentary beverages:** Enjoy house beer and house wine—as well as soft drinks—at any time of day while onboard.
- **Complimentary wireless Internet access:** Connect online in cabins and common areas.
Please note: Wireless Internet access may be limited at certain points throughout your River Cruise.
- **Sun Deck:** Sit outside and enjoy the view as your ship glides past the European countryside.
- **English-speaking crew:** Our staff is dedicated to your comfort, and all shipboard announcements are made in English.
- **Smoking/non-smoking:** Smoking is not permitted indoors, but is permitted on the Sun Deck.
- **Shipboard security:** State-of-the-art shipboard radar ensures safe navigation at night and in low visibility; safe docking space; onboard security staff; state-of-the-art fire safety system; and secured entryway doors.

M/S RIVER HARMONY



Registry: Malta

Width: 38 ft.

Length: 366 ft.

Passenger capacity: 140

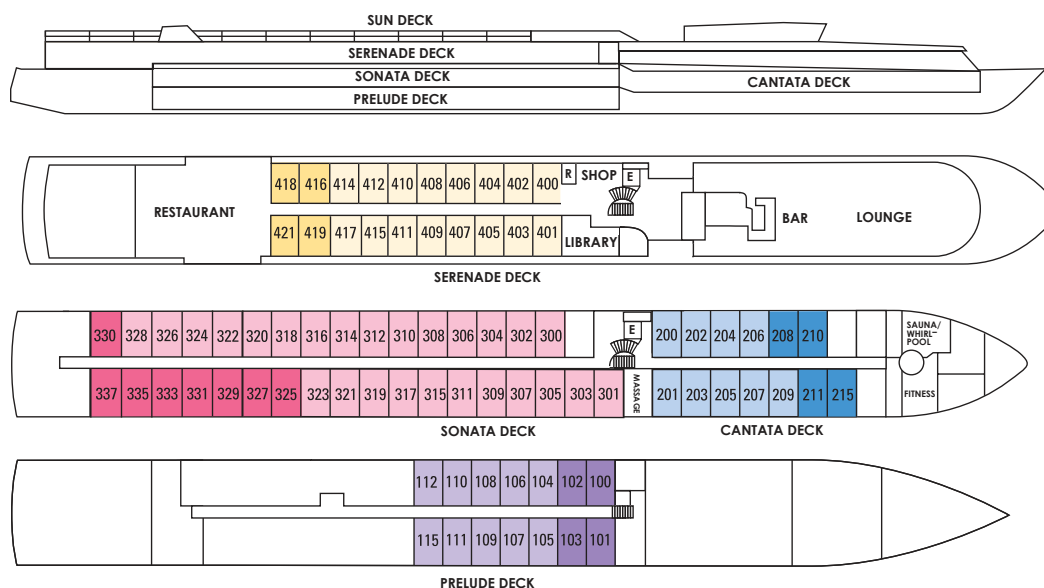
International crew: 34

Decks: 4

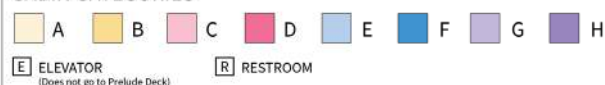
Number of cabins: 70—all outside

Elevator: Yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

M/S RIVER ARIA & M/S RIVER ADAGIO



CABIN CATEGORIES



Registry: Malta

Width: 38 ft.

Length: 418 ft.

Passenger capacity: 162

International crew: 38

Decks: 4

Number of cabins: 82—all outside

Elevator: Yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this vacation.

- **Main trip only:** You will need 2 blank passport pages.
- **Pre- and/or post-trip extension:** No additional blank pages are needed for any of the extensions.

Visa Required

We’ll be sending you information with detailed instructions, application forms, and fees about 100 days prior to your departure. In the meantime, we’re providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. This info is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.

- **Europe (The Netherlands, Germany, France, Switzerland, Belgium):** Starting in 2025, U.S. citizens will be required to fill out an online European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) visa-waiver to enter countries in the European Union. There is no confirmed start date for the ETIAS at the time of printing. The ETIAS will be valid for 3 years.

Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **www.pvsinternational.org**.

Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).

RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

Keep Your Abilities in Mind

Please review the information below prior to departing on this vacation. *We reserve the right for our Program Directors to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home if their limitations are impacting the group's experience.*

GROUP SIZE

- This trip has a group size of 38-45 travelers (with approximately 3 groups onboard) each with a local Program Director exclusive to Grand Circle

PACING

- 11 days, with 10 nights aboard a river ship
- Return flights often require departing in early morning hours

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Included features on your trip may consist of 3-4 hours of physical activity each day. Travelers should be able to walk 1-3 miles unassisted within a time frame of 1-2 hours, and walk on uneven surfaces, including steep and unpaved paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones, which can be slick in wet, colder or frozen conditions
- Optional activities and walks may be offered in addition to the activity level above
- Agility and balance are needed for boarding small canal boats and navigating steep, at times slippery stairs
- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters
- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must travel with a companion who can assist them throughout the trip
- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Diverse terrain and uneven walking surfaces, including steep and unpaved paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones
- Travel by 140-passenger river ship and 49-seat coach
- Changes in water-level depths may require adjustments to your itinerary, including your Strasbourg canal cruise

- Docking for the following locations may be up to an hour outside of the city center, with transportation to and from the ship by motorcoach: Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Cologne, Germany; Speyer, Germany; Strasbourg, France; Basel, Switzerland

CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures range from 38–45°F during cruising season
- Rain, ice, snow, and wind are possible during the holiday season

Health Check

Feeling healthy and confident of your mobility is essential to fully enjoy your trip abroad. If you have ongoing medical conditions or concerns about your health, we highly recommend that you schedule a checkup with your personal physician at least six weeks in advance of your departure date.

- Discuss with your doctor any aspects of your itinerary that may affect your health and be guided by his or her advice. (You can use the “Keep Your Abilities in Mind” on the previous page as a guideline to discuss with him or her.)
- You may want to have a dental exam before your trip. A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling.
- If you have a condition that requires special equipment or treatment, you must bring and be responsible for all necessary items related to your condition.

No Vaccines Required

Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: **travel.state.gov** (Select “Find International Travel Information” then select “Country Information”; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Your Health Abroad” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- 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.
- 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.

Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-321-2835**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

Water

- Tap water aboard ship and in the countries you visit is perfectly safe for drinking.
- Bottled water is usually for sale in hotels, food shops, and restaurants.

MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as local currency, an ATM card, and a credit card.
- **Traveler's checks are not recommended.** They can be difficult to exchange and the commission fee for cashing them is quite high. It's more practical to view them as a last resort in the event of a special situation.
- **You will not be able to pay with U.S. dollars on this trip;** you will need euros instead (and Swiss francs if you are taking the Lucerne extension).

Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like www.xe.com/currencyconverter, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

Euro Countries: European Euro (€)

Switzerland: Swiss Franc (Fr.)

How to Exchange Money

If you want to exchange money before your trip, you can usually do so through your bank or at an exchange office. Your departure airport in the U.S., a travel agent, or an AAA office are also possible outlets. Or you can wait and change money on the trip instead—but it might be helpful to arrive with some local currency in case you run into a bank holiday or an “out of order” ATM.

On your trip, the easiest way is to withdraw funds from a local ATM. The ATM will give you local money and your bank at home will convert that into U.S. dollars.

You can also exchange cash at some hotels and large post offices. To exchange cash, you'll usually need your passport and bills in good condition (not worn, torn, or dirty). New bills (post 2004) are best.

Please note that many banks in Europe do not provide exchange services and exchange offices not commonly found in this part of Europe. Never exchange money on the street. All exchange methods involve fees, which may be built into the conversion rate; ask beforehand.

ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We

recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.

Netherlands: International ATM networks are widely available in the Netherlands.

Belgium: ATMs are widely available in large cities, but are less common in smaller towns.

Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world.. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

France: Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in France. For small purchases or markets, you may need cash instead.

Using Your Credit Card in Europe

Most of us are used to credit cards with the embedded computer chip (the ones you insert instead of swiping). In Europe—where they've had this type of card longer than us—these credit cards usually require a PIN (personal identification number) to make a purchase. And in contrast, most U.S. credit cards either do not require a PIN or don't have one. So what do you do if you want make a purchase with your credit card in Europe?

Don't worry. 90% of the time you won't need to do anything special. You'll insert your card and the purchase will go through as normal. Often you won't even be asked to sign anything.

But bring more than one form of payment with you. For those rare cases when your credit card doesn't work, the best plan is to already have a backup form of payment with you. Debit cards are a good alternative as they have a PIN. And there's always cash.

Consider asking your credit card company. You can try contacting your credit card company before you leave to see if they will issue you a PIN. Many won't—but at least you'll know. You could also try looking at their website to see if they have guidance about getting a PIN.

Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

Onboard Ship

Two Separate Bills Will be Issued

- **Shipboard account:** This bill is for any on board purchases (drinks, souvenirs, etc.) and is calculated in Euros. The bill is payable at the ship's front desk; we accept cash or credit/debit card only. For cash we accept Euros. For credit/debit cards, we accept MasterCard and Visa. Other forms of payment, such as checks, American Express, and Discover Card are not accepted for this bill.
- **Optional tour account:** This bill is for any optional tours taken during the trip and is calculated in U.S. dollars. The bill is paid at the ship's front desk (they will have you fill out a form) by credit/debit card only; other forms of payments such as cash and checks are not accepted. For more information on optional tours—including which cards we accept for payment—see the “Preparing for Your Trip” chapter.

Please note: Payments made by credit card may take up to three 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, the charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as “OPT Boston” (depending on your credit card company).

Exchange Services: Policy Update

Due to international banking laws, we are not able to exchange money onboard the ship. If you need to obtain local currency, please see the “How to Exchange Money” section for helpful tips and information.

Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. For those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines. All tips below are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency (this is usually preferred) or in U.S. dollars. Do not use personal or traveler's check for tips.

- **GCCL Program Director:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Grand Circle Program Director at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$7–\$10 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Program Director is with them. *Please note that tips for your Program Director can only be in the form of cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Program Director during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*

- **Shipboard Crew:** We recommend a flat tip of \$10–\$12 U.S. per traveler, per day. You’ll give this tip once—at the end of your cruise—and it will be pooled among the entire cruise staff. ***Policy Update:** Due to international banking laws, we are no longer able to process crew tips on a credit card; crew tips can only be in the form of cash.*
- **Housekeeping Staff at Hotels:** We recommend \$1 per traveler, per day. (This is for hotels only; on the ship Housekeeping are part of crew, so you don’t need to tip them separately.)
- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides and motorcoach drivers on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

Time at Leisure

When you are exploring on your own, it’s useful to know when to tip and how much, because local customs often differ from the U.S. Here are a few helpful guidelines for the most common services a traveler might use:

- **Taxis:** 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.
- **Restaurants, cafes, and bars:** Throughout Europe, the tip for the waiter or bartender is usually included in the prices or added on as a service fee. Look for a statement on the menu like *inclusief service*, *bedienung*, or *service compris*—which mean “service is included”, or for a service charge on the bill. In cases when the service is not included, then 10% would be considered generous.
- **Public restrooms:** Most public restrooms in Europe have attendants that take care of cleaning and supplies. It is customary to leave a small tip for them—usually half a euro—so hold on to those coins! Some restrooms are pay-toilets; you pay the staff at the entrance to the restroom or drop the appropriate coin into the slot on the stall door. Many restaurants, cafes, and shops offer only pay-toilets or reserve their restrooms for patrons only.

AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Customized Air:** You booked international air with us, and have customized it in some way. If you have customized your trip's dates to arrive early, stay longer, or stop on your own in a connecting city, airport transfers will NOT be included. You must also arrange your own accommodations for any additional nights. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at www.gct.com/myplanner under "My Reservations".

Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with Grand Circle Cruise Line, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Overseas Arrival:** Once you arrive overseas, you'll need to collect your luggage and clear customs. A Grand Circle representative will meet you outside of customs and assist you with your transfer to the hotel or ship. Important note on porters: Airport porters are NOT allowed in the baggage claim area. On arrival, you must take your luggage off the baggage carousel and load it onto a cart, which you will then move through customs. When you exit customs, you'll handle your cart until reaching your transfer vehicle. Your driver will load your luggage into the transfer vehicle.
- **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.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45-30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

Arrival Time: If you are booking your own international airfare or have personalized your flights, we recommend that you choose flights that arrive by 2pm on Day 2 of your trip (or pre-trip extension, if you are taking one) if you are interested in joining your Program Director for an orientation walk in the vicinity of your hotel.

Arrival in Europe: Once you arrive overseas, you'll need to collect your luggage and clear customs. A Grand Circle representative will meet you outside of customs and assist you with your transfer to the hotel or ship. Travelers who land in Basel should keep in mind that since Basel borders on both France and Switzerland, there are exits on both sides. We'll tell you in your Final Documents which exit to use. (At time of writing it was the French side, but that could change in the future, so please wait until your Final Documents are issued and check them.)

Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as GCCL travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-321-2835**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: **www.rome2rio.com**

Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your vacation by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved onsite can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard and Visa on all trips, and Discover on all trips except river cruises in France. We can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.) We do not take Amex, cash, or checks for optional tours.
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".

- We will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at www.gct.com/myplanner).

Communicating with Home from Abroad

Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone is “unlocked”, meaning it can accept a local SIM card. If your cell is “unlocked” then you will be able to purchase a local SIM for it and then buy minutes with “Pay as You Go” cards, so that you have a local contact number for your friends and family.

Calling Apps

We recommend you use WhatsApp while abroad to communicate home and with your Program Director while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as Skype or FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

Calling Cards & 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.). One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

Receiving Calls from Home

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one is to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

Netherlands: +31

Switzerland: +41

Germany: +49

Belgium: +32

France: +33

PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

Luggage Limits

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 50 lbs 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	
Same 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. Luggage rules: Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.	

Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.

- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.

Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** Consider a duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Due to space limitations on our motorcoaches, 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.
- **Carry-on Bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.
- **Locks:** For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

- **Travel light:** A good rule of thumb is to gather together everything you want to bring; then take half of that. To have a varied travel wardrobe, yet keep your luggage light, we recommend you select a color scheme and pack color-coordinated clothing items that can be mixed to create different outfits.
- **Pack casual clothes:** Comfortable, informal apparel is acceptable at each of your destinations. At dinner, you will not need to wear “dressy” clothing; men do not need jackets or ties and women do not need fancy dresses. You may want one or two “smart casual” outfits for the Welcome Reception or Farewell Dinner, but it's completely up to you.
- **Consider clothing designed for travel, sports, or camping:** With modern fabrics, lightweight packing for comfort and protection through a wide range of weather is easy.
- **Plan to dress in layers on shore excursions.** Be prepared for a variety of weather conditions: warm days with sun, chilly temperatures with showers, and evenings that could dip into the 40s or 50s, depending on your travel season.
- **Bring rain gear:** Regardless of your month of travel, rainfall is certainly a possibility. We suggest you bring a folding umbrella and waterproof shell. Water-resistant walking shoes are advantageous in case heavy downpours pass through.

- **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. If you prefer more ankle support, take light hiking boots. 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.
- **Be prepared for winter weather.** 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 long underwear will provide an extra layer of insulation and is lightweight to pack.

What to Bring

We have included suggestions from former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. We recommend using www.weather.com and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

Your cabin already has: Shampoo, conditioner, hair dryer, soap, body lotion, shower cap, and towels. **And don't forget a reusable water bottle**—you'll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

Recommended Clothing

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts to layer
- ☐ Trousers, jeans, or skirts
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes and/or water resistant shoes
- ☐ Warm winter coat
- ☐ Rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ☐ Sleepwear
- ☐ Socks and undergarments
- ☐ A jacket or sweater for layering
- ☐ Gloves, scarf, and a warm hat

Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc.

- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses and your prescription
- ☐ Sunglasses with a neck strap
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- ☐ 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
- ☐ Light folding umbrella
- ☐ Photocopies of passport, air ticket, credit cards
- ☐ Camera, spare batteries, and memory cards

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

Optional Gear

- ☐ Travel alarm
- ☐ Compact binoculars

- ☐ Hanging toiletry bag with pockets
- ☐ Washcloth
- ☐ Travel-size tissues
- ☐ Basic sewing kit
- ☐ Hand-wash laundry soap (Woolite), clothespins/travel clothesline/stopper
- ☐ Electrical transformer and plug adapter
- ☐ Reading materials
- ☐ Travel journal/note pad
- ☐ Swimsuit, if your ship/hotel has a pool or whirlpool
- ☐ Addresses for postcards
- ☐ Photos, small gift for Home-Hosted visit
- ☐ Phrase book
- ☐ Pocket-size calculator for exchange rates
- ☐ Insect repellant
- ☐ For hotel stays: Many hotels will provide hair dryers, but not all. If a hair dryer is essential to you consider a travel-size version. Hair dryers are provided on your ship.

Electricity

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

Voltage

Aboard the ship, cabins are equipped with 220-volt outlets. In your bathroom you will find a 110-volt outlet; this outlet is only for low-voltage appliances, like electric shavers. (Your bathroom also comes equipped with a hair dryer).

Electricity in this region is 220-240 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smart phones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220-240. But you should check the item or the owner's guide first to confirm this before you

plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B; standard European plugs are Type C, E, and F. **Of the three, a Type C adapter is the most useful as it fits into Type E and F sockets.** Type C is usually what is sold in stores as a European adapter.

Aboard ship, the plugs in your cabin bedroom are Type F. The 110V socket in your cabin bathroom takes U.S. plugs, but not polarized ones (where one prong is bigger than the other). *Previous travelers have mentioned this because some small appliances, like Waterpiks, have polarized plugs.*

Note that if you are taking the extension in Switzerland (which can have a different plug than the rest of Europe), it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

For your reference, here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

Netherlands: C

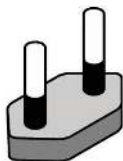
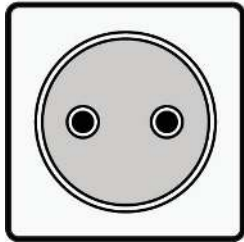
Germany: C and/or F

France: C and E

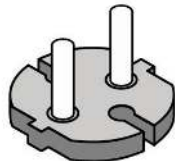
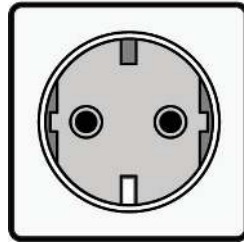
Switzerland: C and/or J

Belgium: C

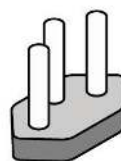
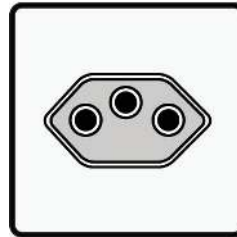
Type C



Type F



Type J



CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Netherlands: As in most areas of northwest Europe, the weather in the Netherlands is frequently rainy and can be very changeable from day to day all through the year. During spring, a fine, warm spell may last for weeks, or a stretch of cool, unsettled weather may prevail. Daytime temperatures are generally mild, averaging in the upper 50s and low 60s, but weather shifts do occur on a regular basis. In summer, fine warm periods may last for weeks on occasions; but then again, the weather could also be cool and unsettled. By autumn, overcast skies occur more frequently, and the overall weather pattern consists of longer, heavier, rains and colder temperatures. Generally, the flat countryside of the Netherlands makes it a rather windy place in all seasons. In the past, the Dutch relied on this weather element to run the windmills that pumped the seawater from the low-lying lands.

Germany: Germany has a central European climate, with variable weather; rain and drizzle are common 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. In this southwest region, autumn can be noticeably cooler, and winter quite cold, due to the area's proximity to the Alps and distance from the ocean.

Strasbourg, France (Alsace): Strasbourg is in the eastern area of France, known as Alsace. Here, the Vosges Mountains accentuate the area's continental climate, making springs warmer and summers hotter. Showers and drizzle frequently alternate with bright skies. Early autumn can still be mild, but by November, the weather is usually colder.

Switzerland: Basel and Lucerne are located on the central Swiss plateau, meaning it is open to climatic influences from the Atlantic and from eastern Europe. The weather is changeable any time of the year, but winter tends to be cold and rainy. 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.

Belgium: The northern part of Belgium is low-lying, with a climate that is almost identical to that of the Netherlands, its adjoining neighbor. Showers are common—Bruges, in particular, gets a lot of rain—but the sprinkles rarely turn into heavy downpours. The weather can change quite frequently from day to day throughout the year. Though generally the daytime temperatures are mild, summer may bring a warm spell for a few weeks. Fall brings overcast and rainy days and the temperature will start to drop.

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.

Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use www.weather.com for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS			KOBLENZ, GERMANY		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	41 to 34	91 to 86	8	39 to 28	--	12
FEB	42 to 32	91 to 79	11	43 to 29	--	11
MAR	48 to 37	92 to 74	9	49 to 35	--	12
APR	53 to 40	90 to 66	12	57 to 39	--	12
MAY	61 to 46	87 to 62	12	66 to 48	--	14
JUN	66 to 52	89 to 66	9	71 to 54	--	12
JUL	69 to 55	90 to 68	12	74 to 57	--	13
AUG	70 to 55	91 to 65	11	73 to 56	--	13
SEP	64 to 51	93 to 72	10	68 to 51	--	12
OCT	57 to 46	93 to 78	9	57 to 44	--	10
NOV	48 to 39	92 to 85	7	46 to 36	--	11
DEC	44 to 39	92 to 88	7	40 to 31	--	12

MONTH	STRASBOURG, FRANCE			BASEL, SWITZERLAND		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	39 to 30	88 to 81	18	38 to 29	82	10
FEB	42 to 30	88 to 72	16	43 to 31	78	9
MAR	51 to 36	87 to 61	18	50 to 35	74	11
APR	57 to 40	85 to 55	18	57 to 40	71	11
MAY	66 to 48	87 to 57	18	65 to 47	73	13
JUN	72 to 54	86 to 57	18	71 to 52	72	11
JUL	76 to 57	86 to 54	18	75 to 55	71	10
AUG	76 to 56	90 to 56	18	74 to 55	74	10
SEP	69 to 51	92 to 61	19	69 to 51	78	8
OCT	58 to 44	92 to 73	21	59 to 44	82	8
NOV	47 to 36	90 to 78	21	47 to 36	82	10
DEC	41 to 32	88 to 82	19	40 to 31	82	10

MONTH	BRUGES, BELGIUM		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	39 to 35	87	18
FEB	39 to 34	88	16
MAR	45 to 38	86	17
APR	51 to 44	82	16
MAY	58 to 49	79	14
JUN	63 to 54	81	14
JUL	66 to 58	82	15
AUG	68 to 59	81	14
SEP	64 to 55	78	15
OCT	58 to 51	82	16
NOV	48 to 43	86	19
DEC	45 to 41	89	20

ABOARD YOUR SHIP: CABIN FEATURES, DINING & SERVICES ON BOARD

Our River Ships

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 travelers, 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 + width + 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.

Cabin Assignments

You will receive confirmation of your deck and/or cabin category upfront in writing; it will be on your invoice and online in My Planner at **www.gct.com/myplanner**. However, your cabin number may not be assigned until you arrive onboard the ship. (This is normal procedure for ships in many parts of the world, including Europe.) If there's no cabin number on your invoice or online, you can presume it will be assigned later and communicated to you when you board.

Dining

You'll enjoy fine cuisine and excellent views in your ship's dining room, featuring a warm decor of dark woods, rich carpeting, and white-linen and china table settings. Your ship's daily service includes breakfast and lunch buffets, and a more formal dinner. Our professional chefs will create unique menus for you that feature regional specialties. Complimentary house wine, draft beer, and a selection of soft drinks are included with both lunch and dinner. In addition, a selection of other fine wines and beer is available for purchase, starting at approximately \$20–35 per bottle (prices vary according to vintage). Travelers 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 per bottle, charged to your cabin 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.

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 bird breakfast: 6:00–7:00 am
- Breakfast: 7:00–9:00 am
- Lunch: 1:00–2:00 pm
- Dinner: 7:00–9:00 pm

Celebrations: Recognition of an anniversary or birthday can be accommodated. Please call Grand Circle Cruise Line to submit your request no later than 45 days prior to departure.

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

Electricity

Cabin bathrooms are equipped with a 110V outlet for electric shavers. The rest of the cabin has 220V, with Type C/F “Europlug” outlets. See the electricity section of the packing chapter for more details.

Embarkation/Disembarkation

On the day you board ship, your cabin will be available at around noon. 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 8:00am. 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, other boats may occasionally obstruct views, and you may have to step across other ships when you want to go ashore. On some rivers influenced by the tide, the ship might get below the level of the shore. It might be more difficult to see the ship from the riverbank, and the view from the cabins might be obstructed by the docking wall.

Docking Accessibility

For certain cities along your trip, your ship may be docked up to 1 hour outside the city center. Transportation to and from the city proper will be done via motorcoach.

Headsets

During your trip, complimentary headsets, or *Whispers* receivers, are provided on our guided tours through the cities we visit. These receivers and headsets allow you to hear your Program Director and our local guides better. If you use a hearing aid or have strong preferences for headphones, we highly encourage you to bring your own headsets/ear buds with you. The plug size is usually the same as that used by iPods, computer jacks, etc.

Wireless Internet Access

Limited Wireless Internet service is available for free in the cabins and common areas on board your Grand Circle Cruise Line ship. If you want to use the WiFi connection you’ll need to bring your own device (laptop/tablet/netbook) — ships do not rent or loan these devices. To use the WiFi, 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.

Laundry and Linen Service

Laundry service is available for a fee. Please note that neither self-service laundry facilities nor dry cleaning services are available. Bed linens are changed at the start of your cruise and then once a week (i.e. twice during a 14-night cruise); towels are changed daily.

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.

Onboard Activities

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

Recreational Facilities

These include a fitness center, sun deck with lounge, library, and lounge with bar and dance floor. The bar is open from 9:30 am to 1 am, and features both complimentary drinks (soft drinks, house beer, house wine, and non-alcoholic cocktails/beer) and drinks for purchase (spirits, alcoholic cocktails, bottled beers, and a selection of wines). Prices are in Euros. The fitness center has an exercise bike and walking/running treadmill. A massage therapist is available as well (prices listed on board).

Bicycles

We're pleased to offer complimentary bicycle rentals onboard your ship for use during free time, including all of the necessary safety gear, such as a helmet, brightly-colored safety vest, and a lock. Because there is a limited supply of bicycles available, they will be offered on a first-come first-served basis. For more information or if you are interested in using one of the bicycles, please speak to the Front Desk staff or Hotel Manager onboard your ship.

Smoking/Non-Smoking Policy

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

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.

Passport Procedures

For your convenience, your passport will be held by the hotel manager after embarkation and returned to you on disembarkation day. This is standard ship's procedure, and is designed to speed up border crossings and to ensure the crew has all the necessary documents on hand during potential controls in our ports of call.

Lost & Found

Any lost or forgotten items found on board the ship will be held for 90 days from disembarkation. After 90 days, all unclaimed items will be discarded or donated.

Ship Specifications

M/S River Adagio

- **History:** Built in 2003
- **Size:** 410x38 ft
- **Capacity:** 163 passengers, 38 crew members
- **Layout:** 82 cabins, 4 decks; Elevator-yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

M/S River Aria

- **History:** Built in 2001
- **Size:** 410x38 ft
- **Capacity:** 163 passengers, 40 crew members
- **Layout:** 82 cabins, 4 decks; Elevator-yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

M/S River Harmony

- **History:** Built in 1999
- **Size:** 361x38 ft
- **Capacity:** 140 passengers, 32 crew members
- **Layout:** 70 cabins, 4 decks; Elevator-yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

Your Program Director

Grand Circle Cruise Line is committed to showing you a destination through the perspective of those who live, work, and play there. How better to do that than to have a resident with you every step of the way? We are proud to be the only cruise line to provide you the dedicated services of an expert Program Director, a resident or native of the country who is delighted to share their in-depth knowledge of local history, culture, and hidden gems.

Fluent in English and skilled in fostering camaraderie among travelers, our Program Directors are constantly cited by our travelers as the main reason they continue to travel with us. During your cruise, you'll enjoy multiple Program Directors aboard your ship, who will each be with you and your group of 25-47 travelers throughout your journey—both on ship and on land. And with personal headsets on every included and optional tour, you'll be able to enjoy their perspective and enthusiasm as you explore at a level deeper than most Americans go.

The Cultures of the Rhine

Visiting this part of Europe during the holiday season reveals the culture at its most colorful, congenial, and festive time of year. It's also when a little bit of modernity steps aside to shine a spotlight on Old World traditions—many of which date to medieval times.

All the countries on this journey were once part of the Holy Roman Empire, with many common religious, linguistic, and historic roots that are evident in their shared holiday customs. But there is nuance and variety, too, as the folk icons of one country find different expressions in the country next door. As all these discoveries unfold, you'll also enjoy plenty of familiar charms, since quite a few of these holiday traditions (especially those of Germany) inspired many of our own in the U.S.

One thing you may notice is that Christmas here is far less consumption-oriented than in the U.S. Though gift giving is a common, it's generally less lavish, and the shopping experience is much less frenzied. The Christmas markets that will be a highlight of your cruise are as much about artisanry, food, music, socializing, and general aesthetics as they are about shopping. And the wares on offer are generally handicrafts, not mass-market items.

Even so, in some places, there has been a public outcry against the commercialization that is referred to here as "Christmas Creep." Much of this has to do with complaints about stores bringing out holiday decor and gift items too early, instead of limiting it to the traditional Advent season, which technically begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. In Germany, some have even called upon the government to restrict when holiday events can begin. (Today, most holiday markets start opening in mid-November.)

One of the markers of the season is the Advent Calendar, popular in all the destinations on this journey. It is a beautifully illustrated, oversized card with 24 “doors” (one for every day before Christmas) that when opened, reveal a candy or trinket. Many households also place Advent wreaths with four candles on tables, and light one candle every Sunday before Christmas.

An important part of the holiday takes place on December 5 or 6, when a beloved figure leaves small gifts in the freshly polished shoes and boots that children have left on windowsills and doorsteps. He goes by different names—Sankt Nikolaus in Germany, Sinterklaas in the Netherlands, Samichlaus in Switzerland, and Saint-Nicolas in Alsace. In the Netherlands, Saint Nick’s arrival by boat is televised. You may run into this benevolent figure (based on Saint Nicholas of Myra) when he appears at local Christmas markets.

Saint Nick is often accompanied by sidekicks who range from the mischievous (Germany’s Knecht Ruprecht, Switzerland’s Schmutzli, or the Netherlands’ Zwarte Piet) to the sinister (such as the demonic Krampus of German-speaking regions, the furry Belsnickel of the Palatinate, or the warrior Hans Trapp of Alsace.) They were all intended to scare kids into behaving well. In the Netherlands, Zwarte Piet is very controversial, as he was traditionally depicted as a dark-skinned Moorish servant with stereotypical features—by white celebrants in blackface. Today, the character is much toned down but continues to be a divisive issue.

But these are not the only gift bearers. The Christkind (Christ Child) often brings presents on Christmas Day, though the character is depicted not as baby Jesus but as a blonde female angel with a golden crown and wings. It was invented by Martin Luther during the Reformation as an alternative to the Catholic Saint Nicholas. Over time, everything became muddled as characters like the Weihnachtsmann (Christmas Man) and Père Noël (Father Christmas) gained popularity.

The tradition of the Christmas tree (Weihnachtsbaum or Tannenbaum) was popularized in Germany in the late 19th century, though the Alsatian town of Sèlestat claims to have done so as early as 1521. (In truth, the decorative use of evergreens for winter celebrations goes back at least as far as the pagan Druids and Celts.) Today, most Germans wait till Christmas Eve to put up their tree, but others may do it around December 6. Christmas Eve is usually a quiet family night with simple fare, and perhaps a church attendance. Otherwise, December 25 (and also, the 26th) is when a lavish dinner, extended family visits, and gift exchanges take place.

The season continues with New Years (called Silvester in Germany and le Saint-Sylvestre in France), a time for massive fireworks and parties. Then there are the Magi—the Three Kings or Three Wise Men—who bring gifts on Epiphany (January 6). Named Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, their initials are often chalked above doorways as a blessing.

Above all, the richest gifts are the historic, cultural, and natural treasures that make exploring this part of the world something to celebrate—every day of the year.

Language

Famously multilingual, **Switzerland** has four official languages: German French Italian and Romansh. Of these, German is the most widespread, spoken by about 63% of the population. While most people speak a regional dialect of German (Swiss German), in school they are taught

Standard German. The German-speaking region of Switzerland is called Deutschschweiz, and it is roughly in the east, north and center of the country. French is the second most common language, spoken by about 23% of the people, mainly in the western regions (called la Romandie.) About 8% of Swiss people speak Italian, including Swiss Italian dialects as well as Lombard dialects. This is mainly in the Swiss-Italian area (Svizzera italiana) in the south. There remains a small (less than 1%) Romansh-speaking native population in Graubünden in the east.

Almost all Swiss people speak more than one language, and school children are required to learn at least one of the four official languages as a second language. In addition, they may study foreign languages, especially English, which can be understood by two thirds of the people.

The official language of **France** is French. Even in places where people occasionally speak a regional dialect, all official communications are in French. The most widely spoken regional languages in France are the German dialects along the border (such as Alsatian); Megreb (an Arabic-French mix from North Africa); and Occitan, a Gallo-Romance language spoken in some southern areas such as Languedoc, Gascony, and parts of Provence. The vast majority of people speak French as a first language. English is the most common foreign language, spoken by more than 39% of people.

You may have heard the stereotype that the French will refuse to speak English with you, even if they understand it. This is not true. However, it is true that the French are very proud of their language (it was once the language of international diplomacy) and they are mindful about preserving it. So if you make even the slightest effort to speak a few words in French, your hosts will be very appreciative.

The official language in **Germany** is Standard German, which is spoken by 95% of the people and taught in schools. There are also several dialects, and members of Germany's large immigrant communities may speak their native language at home. The most prevalent of these is Turkish, spoken by 1.8% of the people. You will not have much trouble being understood if you do not speak German, because many Germans (about 56%) speak English. It is the most popular foreign language, followed by French, which is understood by about 18% of the people.

The official language of the **Netherlands** is Dutch, whose roots (like those of English) are West Germanic. Officially, the language is called Nederlands (Netherlandic) or Hollands, a reference to the historic provinces of North and South Holland upon whose dialect standard Dutch is based. For a small country, the Netherlands has many regional dialects, three of which are protected: South-Eastern Limburgish, West Frisian, and Dutch Low Saxon. Nearly 93% of Dutch people speak English. In fact, the municipality of Amsterdam recognizes English as an official language. In towns you may find signs and advertisement in Dutch and English (and even in English only.)

Religion and Religious Observances

Arriving in this part of the world during an immensely popular Christian holiday season, you might be surprised to learn how observant (or not) your hosts are during the rest of the year

Switzerland's religious landscape is as diverse as its linguistic one. As in many other European nations, secularism is the dominant theme, and even among those who identify with an organized religion, church attendance is low. There is no state religion, but all Swiss cantons have state-recognized religions including the two main Christian churches. Many regional traditions and celebrations have roots in Christian practices, and many Swiss people participate in these on a cultural basis.

Of the 62% of Swiss people who identify as Christians, about 37% are Roman Catholic, and 25% belong to the Swiss Reformed Evangelical community. Until the 1970s, the Swiss Reformed church was the largest, but Catholicism has overtaken it, propelled largely by the steady rise of those who are unaffiliated with any religion (now at around 30%); and an influx of Catholic immigrants from countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Croatia. The largest minority religion is Islam, practiced by about 5.5%; followed by Judaism, practiced by 0.2%.

In **France**, 63–66% of the people identify as Catholics, with another 7–9% identifying as Muslims. The second largest group are those who claim to be unaffiliated with any religion (23–28%), followed by small numbers of Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, and others. That does not mean that religion has not impacted everyday customs. For example, people do have church weddings, baptisms and funerals. But most French people consider belief to be a private matter, and do not attend church regularly.

All these figures are estimates because the government has not officially collected any data on religious preferences since 1972. This has to do with an important aspect of French culture called *laïcité*. *Laïcité* is the complete separation of religious spheres from public spheres. Its underlying aim is to ensure religious freedom for all, and it is constitutionally enshrined. But *laïcité* is not without controversy. The concept has come under fire as France has become less homogeneously Christian. Some critics say it actually impedes religious freedom, and they cite the 2004 ban that made it illegal to display conspicuous religious symbols in public schools or civil workplaces. In addition to banning the wearing of crucifixes, the ruling forbade the wearing of the *hijab*, the traditional head covering worn by observant Muslim women.

Germany is a very secular country, especially in the east, where religion was not just discouraged but actively suppressed during the Soviet era. Overall, nearly 38% of Germans say they are not religious; 27.7% identify as Roman Catholics; and 25.5% identify as Protestant. Among the Christian population, church attendance has declined and only 21% say that religious observance is an important part of their lives. The next largest religious group are Muslims, who comprise just over 5% of the population, mainly among the country's growing immigrant sector.

The **Netherlands** is another highly secular country. Nearly half of the population (50.7%) does not identify with any organized religion. Some 23.6% identify as Roman Catholic; 14.9% identify as Protestant, 5.1% are Muslim; and 5.6% practice other faiths such as Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Even so, spirituality continues to be respected, and many Dutch people profess to *ietsisme* ("somethingism"), being spiritual but not religious. Though religious practice has declined over the past 50 years, an exception is Islam, which has grown with increased immigration to the Netherlands.

There is also a so-called “Dutch Bible Belt” or Bijbelgordel, a strip of rural communities stretching from the southwest to the northeast. Comprised mostly of orthodox Calvinists, they espouse traditional family values and gender roles, dress conservatively, and are opposed to the policies of mainstream Dutch society on issues such as gay rights, euthanasia, and recently, state-run vaccination programs. The Constitution of the Netherlands guarantees freedom of religion and freedom of education for all. This means that all schools, including religious ones, receive government funding as long as they adhere to state quality standards.

Waterways of the Netherlands

Nearly half of this small country—it measures just over 16,000 square miles—is below sea level, making the famous Dutch dikes a requisite for the use of a lot of the land. As early as 100 years ago, as much as 1,000 square miles of the Netherlands were still under water. Over the 20th century, however, it was a never-ending Dutch pursuit to extract more and more land from the sea. With the completion of ingenious water-control designs like the Zeeland Delta Project—a massive system of dikes, storm-surge barriers, and sluice gates—the Netherlands now has working solutions to its centuries-old problem of recurrent flooding by the North Sea.

Even so, the country still contains a lot of water, at least 1,100 square miles of it. That water, however, due to Dutch ingenuity and modern technology, is now mostly channeled into manageable canals, lakes, and rerouted rivers that were once open sea. It is the Netherlands’ waterways, which, despite being a hazard when flooded, have long enabled the commercial success of the country. Throughout history, the rivers’ strategic positions have given the Netherlands a prominent role in world shipping and trading. Essentially, the Netherlands is Europe’s delta. Here three of Europe’s major waterways—the Rhine, the Maas, the Waal, and their tributaries (including the Kil and the Merwede Rivers)—come to empty into the North Sea. Since the earliest seafaring days, products from the rest of Europe have come to this point on their way to the Atlantic Ocean for shipment to markets around the world.

The rivers also serve as natural boundaries that dissect the country into several different topographical regions. The land to the north of the rivers is relatively low; south of the rivers, elevations are somewhat higher, but no spot in the Netherlands would ever be considered mountainous. There is just one modest hilltop peak—only 1,093 feet high—among the rolling hills in the southeast province of Limburg. The central provinces of Gelderland and Utrecht are forested; otherwise most of the countryside is flat green fields. In addition to natural geographical divisions, the rivers also designate religious boundaries. Above the rivers, the population is predominantly Calvinist; below the rivers, most of the people are Catholic.

Dutch Cuisine

Until the first half of the last century, the cuisine of the Netherlands had a reputation for being bland. Today, it is surprisingly diverse, thanks to a bounty of ingredients and influences. The modern Netherlands is one of Europe’s largest exporters of produce and dairy goods, both of which figure prominently (and freshly) in the national cuisine. Along with continental favorites, dishes from former Dutch colonies, particularly Indonesia, have entered the Dutch diet. And every town has its favorite place for Turkish and Middle Eastern *kebabs*, *shawarma*, and *falafel*.

For truly patriotic fare, nothing beats **hollandse nieuw haring** or “Holland new herring.” Every May or June, pop-up shops fly the red, white, and blue Dutch flag to say that Holland “new” herring are here. It’s the lead-up to **Vlaggetjestdag** (Flag Day) on June 15th. The traditional way to eat herring is to grab the tail, toss your head back, and pop the fish in your mouth. Or try **broodje haring**: cut-up herring and onions, tucked in a bun with a Dutch flag toothpick.

Right off the bat, you’ll notice that Dutch city streets abound with food stalls, kiosks, trucks, and automat-style snack bars called **raampje** (where you select your food from a wall of tiny glass windows.) You might encounter dishes like these:

- **Stampopot**: Which is hot mashed potatoes mixed with veggies such as kale, carrots, leeks, turnips, or sauerkraut. There are even versions made with fruit such as apples (called hete bliksem or “hot lightning”). Sometimes stampopot is served with gravy and a side of smoked **rookworst** sausage, or simply with gherkin pickles.
- **Snert**: Or pea soup is the quintessential Dutch comfort food—a thick stew of split peas, bacon, celery, onions, carrots, potato, and slices of smoked **rookworst** sausage. What sets it apart from other pea soups are the spices—ginger, allspice and cloves.
- **Hachee**: A hearty stew of beef and caramelized onions.
- **Hutspot met klapstuk**: (“hotpotch”) A mix of potatoes, onions, and **winterpeen** (a sweet, winter carrot), served with braised beef. It’s as close to a Dutch national dish as it gets, eaten every October 3 to honor the 1574 siege of Leiden.
- **Stroopwafel**: Two wafer-thin waffles sandwiched with caramel or syrup. They come in convenient discs to top your cup of coffee and keep it warm.
- **Poffertjes**: Tiny, yeasty buckwheat pancakes dusted with sugar and smeared with butter. You can also get toppings like **stroop** (syrup), **slagroom** (whipped cream), or **aardbein** (berries).

German Cuisine

German Cuisine varies greatly from region to region. The southern regions of Bavaria and Swabia share many dishes among them and with their neighbors to the south, Switzerland and Austria. In the West, French influences are more pronounced, while the eastern parts of the country have much in common with Eastern European cuisine and there are marked Scandinavian influences in the northern coastal regions. But the region that is often viewed as having the most classic German cuisine is Saxony.

- **Sauerbraten**: A tangy pot roast that is eaten all over Germany. *Sächsischer Sauerbraten* uses beer instead of wine to marinate the beef before its long, slow braising. *Rheinischer Sauerbraten* is made with raisins and crumbled *lebkuchen* (gingersnaps) to give the tangy gravy a touch of sweetness

- **Dresdner Wiegebraten:** A Dresden meat loaf made with minced pork, veal and beef bound with eggs, breadcrumbs, anchovies, bacon and herbs that gets slathered with butter before roasting.
- **Sächsische Kartoffelsuppe:** (Saxon potato soup), a rich, creamy puree of potatoes and broth studded with onions fried in bacon fat, finely chopped greens, and bacon and sausage bits—all seasoned with ginger, nutmeg, salt and pepper. A special version is made with succulent shrimps and shrimp broth.
- **Leipziger Allerlei:** A casserole of shrimp or crayfish mixed with cauliflower, carrots, peas, asparagus, and mushrooms, baked with a creamy sauce topped with bread crumbs.
- **Buchweizenpfannkuchen:** A buckwheat pancake that may be served with syrup and cranberries, or with salmon and a salad.
- **Dresdner Eierschecke:** A three-layered cake filled with custard and cream.
- **Currywurst:** A bratwurst flavored with curry, ketchup and Worcestershire sauce. It was invented in 1946 by Herta Heuwer, a Berlin housewife who decided to spice up her family's diet by trading some booze for seasonings from some British soldiers. *Currywurst* is a classic example of post-war, East German cuisine—a style that arose during a time of severe shortages, when the people of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany) had to get inventive with very economical ingredients.
- **Westfälischer Schinken:** Or Westphalian ham is made from pigs raised solely on acorns. The meat is dry cured and smoked over beechwood and juniper.
- **Dampfnudeln:** A yeasty steamed dumpling with vanilla sauce. If they are topped with *powidl* (a plum jam) and sprinkled with poppy seeds, they are called *germknödeln*. If you prefer your dumplings savory, *dampfnudeln* can be enjoyed with mushrooms and béchamel sauce; or with gravy and rolls of beef stuffed with bacon and pickles called *Rouladen*.
- **Badische Schaeufele:** Smoked pork shoulder simmered in wine with garlic, leeks, juniper berries, and other spices.
- **Maultaschen:** In this dish, pockets of dough are stuffed with spinach, meat or cheese; and eaten as a main course or in a beef broth.
- **Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte:** Or Black Forest Cake. It's a chocolate layer cake filled and frosted with fresh cream and cherries soaked in *Kirschwasser* (cherry schnapps), and decorated with chocolate shavings.
- **Nürnberger bratwurst:** These were the first sausage to receive the European Union's Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) status. To be labeled as *Nürnberger bratwurst*, these small, coarsely-ground pork sausages must be 2 ¾–3 ½ inches long; contain mace and marjoram; and be made within the metropolitan Nuremberg limits. The most popular way to eat them is *Drei im Weggla* or “three in a bun.

French Cuisine

It would be an understatement to say the French have an appreciation for fine food. They have a reverence for it, and it shows in the quality of French cuisine, which was designated by UNESCO as part of the World's Intangible Cultural Heritage. You certainly don't need to dine at a Michelin-starred restaurant to experience the best of French cuisine. A visit to just about any local *marché* (open-air market), *pâtisserie* (pastry shop), *boulangerie* (bakery), *café*, *bistro*, or *brasserie* may well be as memorable an outing as visiting the famed monuments and museums.

Classical French dishes formed the basis of what we once called *haute cuisine*. But some of these dishes were regional in origin. Fortunately, because there is such widespread regard for gastronomy, regional dishes may appear on menus far from home, especially in large cities. Some of these dishes include:

- **Soupe à l'oignon:** a sweet and savory broth of caramelized onions, beef stock, and sherry with a crust of grilled Comté or Gruyère cheese.
- **Coq au vin:** a specialty of Burgundy, made with chicken braised with red Burgundy wine, lardons, mushrooms, and garlic.
- **Entrecôte à la Bordelaise:** A traditional dish in Bordeaux. It is a rib eye steak cooked in a red wine sauce with bone marrow.
- **Bouillabaisse:** A seafood soup made from fish and shellfish cooked in a broth of onions, tomatoes, saffron, and herbs.
- **Coq au Riesling:** A flavorful dish of chicken braised in white Riesling wine, accented with lardons of bacon and button mushrooms, and enriched with a silky touch of crème fraîche
- **Flammekueche** (or in French, *tarte flambée*): A chewy flatbread smothered with *fromage blanc* (a tangy fresh cheese), *crème fraîche* or sour cream, slivered onions, and crispy *lardons* of bacon.

Swiss Cuisine

Swiss gastronomy reflects the best traditions of neighboring France, Germany, Italy, and Austria. But often these borrowed dishes have a Swiss twist. Then, there are uniquely Swiss specialties that tend to be simple, but stand out for the freshness and quality of their local ingredients.

One of the most well-known dishes is *fondue*, which is cheese melted with white wine in a special pot called a *caquelon*. It's as much a social experience as gustatory one, because it is meant to be shared by all at the table. Each diner will dip small pieces of bread into the melted cheese. Another cheesy classic is the Valais specialty, *raclette*. This is not only a type of cheese, it's a way of enjoying it. The cheese is slowly grilled over a fire, and as each layer melts it is sliced off to blanket boiled potatoes, pickles and onions. Friends will patiently wait for their slices of *raclette* to melt while sharing conversation and glasses of local **Fendant wine**.

- **Roesti:** These potato cakes are grated, pan fried till golden and crispy, and topped with salty **speck** (bacon), a fried egg, and melted *raclette* cheese. They are delicious paired with gherkins and pickled pearl onions.
- **Papet Vaudois:** A mix of leeks and potatoes that are simmered for hours. This makes a creamy base for the plump, red **saucisson Vaudois** or sausage of the Vaud canton.
- **Risotto:** This famous rice dish is popular all over northern Italy, but here it is flavored with dark red saffron grown in the canton of Valais. It is one of the best in the world, referred to as red gold. In the Ticino, your risotto may come with veal and bacon.
- **Zurcher geschnetzeltes:** This dish hails from Zurich but is a national dish. This is diced veal, calves kidneys, and sweetbreads sautéed in a sauce of onions, butter, white wine, cream, and mushrooms.
- **Zopf:** Try this sweet, yeasty bread that is braided and baked and served with butter and jam for breakfast.
- **Birchermüesli:** A glass of oat flakes mixed with milk, yogurt, grated apple, hazelnuts and almonds. It's all left in a fridge overnight and served in the morning.
- **Cordon bleu:** You may think this is a French dish, but it was actually invented in Switzerland. It is a meat cutlet of chicken, veal, or pork that is pounded thin, layered with a thin slice of ham and **Gruyère cheese**, then breaded and fried.
- The French also made **absinthe** fashionable, but it was introduced here by a Swiss doctor, Pierre Ordinaire, who created this potent spirit that is anything but ordinary.
- **Leckerli:** If you want something sweet try these sticky, spicy, sweet gingerbread cookies with a hint of hazelnut. They originated in Bern but are now a Christmas favorite all over Switzerland.
- Of course, your sweet tooth will crave the heavenly **Swiss chocolate**, but when you want something lighter, the Swiss are wizards with **meringue**. You'll find it whipped into cake frosting, mounded on pies, or mixed into chewy cookies with chocolate, fruits, and ground nuts.

Belgian Cuisine

It's said that in Belgium one can savor food that has the quality of French cuisine, in German portion sizes. Belgians have cosmopolitan tastes, so in addition to dishes that borrow from their neighbors (France, Germany, and the Netherlands), you'll find many ethnic eateries. But there is also an inherently Belgian gastronomy that goes well beyond the famous chocolate and beer.

Perhaps the most iconic Belgian dish is one you may not recognize as Belgian at all: **pommes frites** (fried potatoes) or *frites* for short. Don't call them French fries, because they were invented in Belgium, where they are a national obsession. City streets abound with fry carts (*freitkot*) and

fry shops (*friteries* or *fritures*) that serve up paper cones filled with hot, crispy fries, and a dazzling array of toppings. Mayo, ketchup, and curry sauces are common, but the most popular sauce is called **andalous**, a purée of red peppers, tomatoes, shallots and garlic.

- **Moules frites:** Belgium's national dish made of plump and sweet North Sea mussels are steamed in a savory broth of white wine, shallots, parsley, and butter (or sometimes, cream) that you can soak up with your fries.
- **Chicon au gratin:** These endive heads are braised, wrapped in ham slices, and smothered with a Gruyère sauce. It's usually served with mashed potatoes.
- **Waterzooï:** A flavorful fish stew or thick soup with vegetables, herbs, and cream. It can also be based on chicken.
- **Tomates aux crevettes:** Grey shrimp stuffed inside a tomato.
- **Garnaalkroketten:** Grey shrimp that is formed into breaded, cylindrical croquettes served with lemon and parsley.
- **Paling in't groen:** Also known as "eels in the green" in which delicate chunks of (sometimes smoked) eel are simmered in a sauce made of herbs fresh from the riverbanks: usually sorrel, chervil, parsley, and watercress.
- **Carbonnade flamande:** A rich beef stew simmered in Belgian beer with bacon, carrots, and herbs.
- **Vol-au-vent:** This means "windblown," in reference to the light, flaky pastry that tops this deconstructed chicken pot pie, which sometimes also comes with meatballs.
- **Frikadellen met krieken:** Meatballs in a sour cherry sauce. It's a favorite at town fairs or family gatherings as either a main course or dessert.
- **Spekuloos:** These crispy caramel-y cookies are perfect for dessert.
- **Gauffres:** Also known as waffles. Belgian waffles are here called Brussels waffles, and they are large and rectangular.
- **Liège waffles:** These waffles have rounded edges and are flecked with pearls of sugar that caramelize into chewy goodness. You can have *gauffres* with syrup, whipped cream, jam, drizzled chocolate, fruits, and more. Or satisfy your sweet tooth with world-famous, hand-made Belgian chocolate. It shouldn't be hard, since Belgium boasts more than 2,000 chocolatiers.

The only thing more prolific is Belgian beer: there are more than 450 varieties. Trappist beers are strictly regulated and must be brewed in Trappist monasteries. Abbey beers are brewed in the monastic style, but can be made anywhere. In general, Belgian beer is a bit yeastier and higher in alcoholic content than other beers. In 2016, UNESCO added Belgian beer culture to its list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. To that, we say, "*Op uw gezondheid.*" Cheers!

Amsterdam in Brief

City Layout & Details

At the center of Amsterdam, Dam Square is the best place to begin exploring the oldest part of the city, which lies between the Singel and Kloveniersburgwal canals. Dam Square is also next to two of the city's main shopping streets (both of which are pedestrian malls). Amsterdam's 17th-century canal belt extends in concentric rings outward from the city center, lined with narrow canal houses that reflect the prosperity that Dutch merchants enjoyed in past centuries. This entire historic area of the city is compact enough to be explored on foot.

Cultural Insight

Apart from being the largest renaissance city with lots of great architecture from the last 400 years, world class museums and fantastic sights along the canals, contemporary Amsterdam offers an insight in how a modern Dutch society deals with issues like gay communities, drug abuse and prostitution. Based on a 400 year old tradition of openness and tolerance towards different religious denominations and life choices, the Dutch government took a leading role in legalizing cannabis to a certain extent, legalizing window prostitution and recognizing gay marriage. Understanding the pragmatic Dutch approach to controversial issues in their society will form a part of a learning and discovery experience during your stay in Amsterdam.

Safety

Amsterdam attracts visitors for different purposes. These visitors attract pick pockets, as in any other grand city. Please be cautious and leave your valuables in the hotels' or ship cabins' safe. Generally it is safe to stroll around in Amsterdam—the biggest danger is the possibility of being overrun by a Dutch cyclist.

Anne Frank House

Simply put, tickets to the Anne Frank House are hard to get. If you have your heart set on visiting the Anne Frank House during your free time in Amsterdam, **make sure you plan ahead and buy your ticket on the museum's website (www.annefrank.org/en) in advance. Tickets are available to purchase 2 months prior to the date of your intended visit.**

Please note:

- Even when purchasing in advance tickets sell out quickly – there is no guarantee they will be available for your trip.
- Tickets purchased online are for a specific date and time. They cannot be rescheduled or transferred; they are also non-refundable.
- Because this is an independent activity that is not included in the cost of your tour, Grand Circle will not reimburse you for unused tickets for any reason.

If you haven't decided yet whether you want visit the house—or if tickets are sold out/unavailable online—the museum does issue a LIMITED number of same-day tickets that you can buy at the museum. Keep in mind: The lines are long and tickets usually sell out early. But on the bright side, if you don't get a ticket, there's still a wealth of other things to do in town—from seeing the Old Masters at the Rijksmuseum, to exploring the decks of the SS Amsterdam at the National Maritime Museum, to finding the hidden church known as “Our Lord in the Attic”. Ask your Program Director for suggestions.

Van Gogh Museum: You must book tickets on the museum's website (www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/) at least two months in advance.

Rijksmuseum: You must book tickets on the museum's website (www.rijksmuseum.nl/en) at least three weeks in advance.

Local Transportation

On foot: Amsterdam lends itself to walking, just be sure to wear your sturdy walking shoes.

Public Transportation: Amsterdam's GVB operates a comprehensive public transportation system for which pre-paid fare cards are readily available.

Brussels in Brief

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.

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

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.

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.

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your vacation. 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 is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, 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 or that you are guaranteed a refund.

Crafts & Souvenirs

Netherlands

There is an abundance of art/prints and antiques available in the Netherlands, in addition to bargains on clothing and textiles. Keep an eye out for traditional items like *stroopwafel* (a cookie consisting of two thin wafers filled with caramel syrup), Delftware (famous blue and white pottery), Dutch cheese, wooden clogs, and salted licorice.

Germany

Popular German buys include Nymphenburg porcelain, cutlery, high-quality cameras and binoculars, loden clothing, goose-down comforters, Rosenthal china and glassware, and chocolate. Munich is Germany's fashion capital—there are plenty of chic boutiques, especially on Theatinerstrasse, Maximilianstrasse, and Schwabing's Leopoldstrasse.

Value Added Tax: Depending on how much you spend on certain goods, you may be eligible for a partial refund of Germany's 16% Value Added Tax (VAT). You must obtain a special form for VAT from the store. Ask the shopkeeper or salesperson for details, and be sure to save all receipts for Customs.

France

Popular French souvenirs include fashion, art, antiques, perfume, food, and wine. Each region has its own specialties, but you can often find them for sale in other parts of the country. If time is short, try checking out a big department store, like Galeries Lafayette or Printemps. Or look for Monoprix chains, which have lower prices and are more for everyday shopping (sort of like the French version of Target).

The French value-added tax (VAT) is typically 19.6% and can be as high as 33.33% on luxury articles. Depending on how much you spend on certain goods, you may be eligible for a partial refund of this tax. Ask the shopkeeper or salesperson at the time of purchase. Be sure to save all receipts for Customs. (Generally, you have to spend over 175€ at the same shop, on the same day, and have filled out a special form for this process.)

Switzerland

Popular Swiss souvenirs include chocolate, cheese, clocks and watches, 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.

Belgium

Popular items include porcelains, Belgium (the most famous laces to look for are *bloemenwek*, *rozenkant*, and *toveresseteek*), European antiques, leather goods, and edibles like chocolates, pralines, and the thin, spicy biscuits called *speculoos*.

U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, **www.cbp.gov** has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- 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.

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Netherlands

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 16,034 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, the Netherlands borders Germany to the east and Belgium to the south.
- **Population:** 16,947,904 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 28%, Protestant 19%, other 11% (includes about 5% Muslim and lesser numbers of Hindu, Buddhist, Jehovah's Witness, and Orthodox), none 42%
- **Time zone:** The Netherlands is on Central European Time, which is six hours ahead of U.S. EST: when it's 6 am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Amsterdam.

National Holidays: Netherlands

In addition to the holidays listed below, the Netherlands celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter and Ascension Day. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day
04/27 King's Birthday
05/05 Liberation Day
12/25 Christmas Day
12/26 Second Day of Christmas

The Netherlands: A Brief History

Peaceful, tolerant, and prosperous, the Netherlands enjoys an enviable level of comfort and influence. But as its history proves, its success was hard won.

Germanic and Celtic tribes lived here by 750 BC, protected from invasion by the area's extensive wetlands. This changed in 57 BC, when Julius Caesar conquered the south, and established a military post in Nijmegen. Under the Romans, there was relative stability for 400 years. Franks came in the 5th century, bringing Christianity with them. By 800, the Emperor Charlemagne had a palace in Nijmegen. After his death, the Low Countries were split amongst various nobles.

With increasing attacks by Viking raiders, local rulers fortified their towns. These feudal lords also enlisted their subjects to fight against rival lords, and in return they granted certain rights that were set down in charters. By the 12th century, many Dutch trade towns were enjoying limited self-government as communes. Many joined the Hanseatic League, and a strong merchant class grew. But their prosperity was threatened by constant wars.

In the 14th century, the dukes of Burgundy rose to power, and generally dismissed the local charters. There were frequent rebellions but eventually, the communes grudgingly accepted the unity provided by the Burgundians. Shipbuilding thrived, and there was a brisk trade. The Dukes were patrons of the arts, and this ushered in the cultural flowering of the Northern Renaissance. In 1425, Jan van Eyck became the court painter of Duke Philip the Good. Italian financiers settled in the area, strengthening trade and cultural links with Italy, and commissioning artworks.

When the Hapsburgs inherited the Burgundian territories in 1482, their ruler, Charles V (born in Ghent), cherished the Low Countries and business went on as usual—until he abdicated in 1555 and gave the region to his son, Philip of Spain. The Reformation had taken hold in the Netherlands and Philip, a staunch Catholic, began a brutal Inquisition. Religious violence erupted, and Philip sent the Duke of Alba to slaughter thousands. This caused great resentment against Spanish rule, and a sense of Dutch nationalism arose, even among some Catholics.

What followed was an Eighty Years War for independence. But a hero emerged in Prince William of Orange, who went into exile; hired pirates to attack Spanish ships; and led a revolt. The first Dutch victory occurred when rebels drove the Spanish from Leiden in 1574 after a year-long siege. William's victorious forces distributed bread and herring to the starving residents—an event still celebrated today. In 1581, the Union of Utrecht proclaimed the "United Provinces" independent from Spain. In 1648, Spain finally recognized Dutch sovereignty.

Despite the wartime destruction, Amsterdam experienced tremendous growth, fueled by waves of immigrants. Trade expanded; intellectuals flocked to the city; and Dutch explorers charted new courses and established colonies around the world. In 1602, the Dutch East India Company became the world's first global corporation. By the mid-17th century, the republic was the biggest maritime power of Europe, and arguably the wealthiest and most scientifically advanced. Calvinism was the official religion, but other Protestants, Jews, and Catholics were allowed to worship. In a society dependent on trade, freedom and tolerance were essential.

The Golden Age began to tarnish as conflicts arose with Britain and France, and the United Provinces erupted into civil war in 1785. Enter Napoleon, who established the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1806. It passed in 1815 to Willem I (of Orange-Nassau), whose dynasty continues today. As nationalism swept 19th-century Europe, the Netherlands made constitutional reforms, beginning the liberal, modern state, and sustaining a slow but constant economic growth.

During World War I, the Netherlands remained neutral. They tried to do this again during World War II, but the Nazis leveled Rotterdam in 1940 and within days, the rest of the country fell. Queen Wilhelmina fled to England, and broadcast inspiring messages via the BBC and Radio Orange. But Dutch resistance was slow to rise in the face of a harsh occupation, the mass deportation of Dutch Jews, and pervasive collaboration. Towards the end of the war, resistance gained momentum as the Nazis forced thousands of Dutch men to work in German factories. As

the Allies advanced, Dutch defiance grew. The “Hunger Winter” of 1944–45 was especially brutal, as the Nazis deliberately cut off food supplies, causing mass starvation. Many Dutch people had to eat tulip bulbs to survive. Canadian troops liberated the country in May, 1945.

The postwar years were times of material hardship and moral reckoning. As reconstruction got underway, 66,000 Dutch collaborators were tried in war trials. Many more never saw justice. To provide basic necessities, Prime Minister Willem Drees extended the welfare state. When the North Sea flooded in 1953, massive public works programs enabled the reclamation of 6,800 square miles of land, while providing jobs.

In the ‘60s, Dutch baby boomers came of age, demanding change. Social welfare programs reduced people’s reliance on the “pillarization” that once kept them beholden to sectarian groups. New ideas about equality, the environment, religion, sex, and drugs gained credence. Ever pragmatic, Dutch authorities adopted a policy of tolerance for things that couldn’t be enforced without causing more harm. Called *gedoogbeleid*, it persists to this day, but not without challenges.

Many immigrants arrived over the ensuing decades, often from Muslim countries, for family reunification, political asylum, and economic opportunity. After the assassination of two anti-immigrant/anti-Islamic Dutch figures—politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002, and filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004—far-right populists have preyed on the anxieties of their countrymen to challenge multiculturalism. The elections of 2010 saw a shift when the coalition government included the far-right Freedom Party of Geert Wilders, who decries the “Islamicization” of the Netherlands and advocates against the EU. Mark Rutte, who has been Prime Minister since 2010, leads the centrist People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy, or VVD.

Germany

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 137,846 square miles
- **Capital:** Berlin
- **Languages:** German is the official language; Turkish is also spoken in Berlin.
- **Location:** Germany is bordered by Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, the North Sea, and the Baltic Sea.
- **Geography:** Located in central Europe, Germany is bordered on the west by the Benelux countries and France, and on the east by Poland and the Czech Republic. Switzerland and Austria are to the south. Germany’s northern coastline is met by the North Sea and the Baltic.
- **Population:** 80,854,408 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Protestant 34%, Roman Catholic 34%, Muslim 3.7%, other 28.3%

- **Time Zone:** Germany is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Berlin. Daylight Saving Time begins the last Sunday in March and ends the last Sunday in October.

National Holidays: Germany

In addition to the holidays listed below, Germany celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. There are also some holidays that are not national holidays, but are widely observed. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/01 New Year's Day

05/01 May Day

10/03 Day of German Unity

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/24 Christmas Eve

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 Boxing Day

Germany: A Brief History

For many contemporary travelers, the history of Germany has been overshadowed by its role in the two World Wars of the past century. But that belies the two millennia of history and culture that is the legacy of Europe's Germanic people, and which awaits your discovery.

During the Bronze and Iron Ages, Germanic tribes from southern Scandinavia and Northern Germany expanded, mixing and clashing with Celtic, Baltic, Slavic, Gaul, and Indo-European people. Settling east of the Rhine and north of the Danube, in a region the Romans dubbed "Germania," they never unified. But they repulsed nearly all efforts of Rome to colonize them. The Romans were only ever able to subdue Germania's southern and western flanks.

With the 5th century fall of the Western Roman Empire, Germanic Franks rose as the largest tribal confederacy of the middle Rhine. They spread to Gaul, absorbing all of France; and as far west as Poland. There was no unified German nation but by 800 AD, there was a Holy Roman Empire with the Frankish king Charlemagne as Emperor. For 1,000 years, the Holy Roman Empire mostly controlled Europe, and German prince-electors mostly controlled the Empire.

The Holy Roman Empire became a collection of duchies, principalities, Free Imperial Cities, and ecclesiastical states that spread across the larger kingdoms of Germany, Italy, Bohemia, and Burgundy. In 1440, the Austrian Hapsburg dynasty took control of the Holy Roman Empire (and held it until 1806). But all the imperial states became embroiled in the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), which was sparked by a revolt of Bohemian Protestants, but grew into a deadly struggle between Bourbon and Hapsburg powers. Most of Central Europe was devastated by the conflict.

The prospect of a unified German nation began to coalesce during the Seven Weeks War in 1866, when the Prussian army under Otto von Bismarck defeated Austria. Prussia's superior firepower convinced other German states that Austria was no longer a force. Bismarck then formed a North German Confederation without Austria—the forerunner to the unified German Empire of Kaiser Wilhelm I. Bismarck fostered alliances and instituted universal health care, pension plans, and

other social welfare programs. But after Wilhelm I died in 1888, his grandson Wilhelm II rejected liberal reforms in favor of imperialism, which led to Germany's involvement in World War I. Its defeat ended the German Empire with the 1919 Treaty of Versailles.

The punitive provisions of the Versailles agreement opened the door for the Nazis. In 1933, a government was formed with Hitler as Chancellor. By 1934, Hitler took over as Fuhrer and established a totalitarian regime. German Jews were targeted by vicious propaganda and stripped of their rights. By 1939, half of Germany's 500,000 Jews had fled. The Final Solution was implemented in 1941, and the ensuing Holocaust killed 6 million Jews and 11 million others. Meanwhile, Germany began annexing territories and the world was drawn into war.

The Allies defeated the Axis powers in 1945, leaving a partitioned Germany with a decimated political, social, and economic infrastructure. Yet despite its ruin and enormous burden of shame, the Federal German Republic (West Germany) became a parliamentary democracy, a NATO member, a founding member of the European Union, and one of the world's richest countries. When the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) demanded reform. German reunification took place in 1990. Since then economic integration of East Germany has been difficult, but progressing. Angela Merkel, the Chancellor from 2005 to 2021, helped Germany retain its position as a leader of the EU, and indeed, of the free world.

Merkel stepped down from her position following the COVID-19 pandemic and was succeeded by Olaf Scholz, who has since weathered the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine. Scholz responded to the invasion by significantly increasing Germany's defense budget and supplying weapons to the Ukraine resistance.

France

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 248,573 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:** 66,580,729 (Estimate)

- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 29%, None 51%, Islam 10%, Other Christian 9%, Buddhist 1%, Jewish 1%, Other 1%
- **Time Zone:** France is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Paris. Daylight Saving Time begins the last weekend in March and ends the last weekend in October.

National Holidays: France

In addition to the holidays listed below, France celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter and Whit Monday. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

05/01 Labor Day

05/08 World War II Victory Day

07/14 Bastille Day

08/15 Assumption of Mary

11/01 All Saints' Day

11/11 Armistice Day

12/25 Christmas Day

France: A Brief History

That the French do things with flair has been borne out by history. Even their most famous prehistoric treasure, the 17,000-year old cave paintings of Lascaux, are a dazzling work of art. The rest of French history is just as dazzling, colored by events and ideas that have impacted all of humanity, far beyond the borders of this hexagon-shaped crucible of culture.

When the Celts arrived in Gaul in the 5th century BC, it was already occupied by Iberians, Ligurians, and Greeks, who established the oldest city in France, Massilia (Marseille). It was a major port with temples, theaters, an agora, and a flourishing wine trade. The city had forged an alliance with Rome by the time Julius Caesar conquered Gaul in 57–52 B.C. Julius often gets credit for founding Lutetia (Paris), but the Gallic Parisii tribe had already established a settlement there on the banks of the Seine. The Romans erected their own magnificent cities whose ruins still stand in Arles, Nimes, Vienne, Lyon, and beyond.

During the 5th century AD, the Franks invaded and converted to Christianity under Clovis I. A national spirit emerged when Charlemagne, King of the Franks, was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800 AD. Though his reign left an indelible imprint, French national history is considered to begin in 987, when Hugh Capet centralized the monarchy. During the 12th and 13th centuries, trade prospered, guilds were founded, and cathedrals were built. But the 14th century brought the Hundred Years War with England (1337–1453), whose Norman kings held vast estates in France. The English were expelled and as in the days of Charlemagne, the throne held a powerful mystique, this time with the aid of Joan of Arc, whose divine voices urged her to lead France to victory at Orleans in 1429 and to champion Charles VII as king.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, France moved closer towards absolute monarchy, best exemplified by Louis XIV, whose reign was unequalled for its autocracy—and magnificent style. From Versailles, he presided over a gloriously gilded France—so resplendent that it earned him

the title of “the Sun King.” Ironically, the very splendor of the French monarchy precipitated its downfall, for it was exorbitant to maintain. That burden fell to the peasants and middle class, as nobles and the clergy were exempt from the taxes. That ended with the French Revolution in 1789. King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were guillotined, the monarchy was abolished, and the new (but short-lived) First Republic was established.

The ensuing chaos led to the rise of Napoleon, who became emperor in 1804 and built an empire across nearly all of Europe. Though Napoleon was a dictator, his Napoleonic codes brought unprecedented legal rights and civil liberties to his domains, in many places ending feudalism. With his fall in 1814, the monarchy was restored. France’s Third Republic was founded in 1870, during which the groundbreaking Impressionist school of painting emerged, as well as the Modernist movement. From 1914–18, France fought with the Allies in World War I, prevailing but suffering devastating losses. Between wars, France nourished major intellectual movements: Constructivism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Existentialism.

In 1940, France was invaded by Germany who set up a puppet government in Vichy under Marshal Philippe Petain. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Allies landed in Normandy and went on to liberate Paris in August. A provisional government was set up under General Charles de Gaulle. He remained France’s most influential statesman of the 20th (or perhaps any other) century, becoming president in 1958 until his resignation in 1969. Post-war France saw the break-up of its remaining colonial outposts. The country was one of the leaders in the founding of the European Union (1993) and the Eurozone (1999).

More recently France, like its European neighbors, had to contend with the fallout of the 2008 global economic crisis. Unemployment, immigration, structuring the post-Brexit EU, climate change, and post-pandemic life are some of the issues France must address with its historic resourcefulness—and characteristic flair.

Switzerland

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 15,940 square miles
- **Capital:** Bern
- **Languages:** German is the main language of Switzerland. French and Italian also are widely spoken in certain areas. English is spoken widely 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.
- **Geography:** Switzerland is a small country nestled amidst the Jura Mountains and the Alps. Situated between Germany, Austria, Italy, France, and Liechtenstein, it offers a combination of towering glaciers, crystalline lakes, rolling hills, fertile river valleys, and a broad central plateau.
- **Population:** 8,738,791 (estimate)

- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 38.2%, Protestant 26.9%, Muslim 5%, other Christian 5.6%, other 1.6%, none 21.4%, unspecified 1.3%
- **Time Zone:** Swiss time is six hours later than Eastern Time; when it is 6 am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Switzerland. Daylight Saving Time begins the last Sunday in March and ends the last Sunday in October.

National Holidays: Switzerland

In addition to the holidays listed below, Switzerland celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. Each region can also set its own holidays as well. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/02 Berchtold Day

05/01 May Day

08/01 Swiss National Day

08/15 Assumption of Mary

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/08 Immaculate Conception

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 St. Stephen's Day

Switzerland: A Brief History

Archaeological evidence suggests that Switzerland's history dates back to Paleolithic times, when hunter-gatherers began to settle in the lowlands north of the Alps. Swiss territory became integrated into the Roman Empire in the centuries following Julius Caesar's invasion of Gaul in 58 BC. Under Roman rule, important cities were established including Geneva, Basel, and Zurich. These remained linked to Rome and the northern tribes by military roads and trade routes.

After the decline of the Western Roman Empire, Germanic tribes including the Burgundians and Alamanni invaded and forced the Celto-Roman inhabitants to retreat into the surrounding area. The Burgundians took over the western territory, while the Alamanni settled in the north. Both Burgundy and the dukedom of the Alamans eventually came to be known as the kingdom of the Franks, and by 800 AD they fell under the rule of Charlemagne, the first of the Carolingian kings.

The land that would eventually become Switzerland was divided in the aftermath of the three-year Carolingian Civil War. Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious, signed the Treaty of Verdun in 843, the first in a set of treaties that would ultimately divide the Swiss territories into three distinct kingdoms. These kingdoms would not be re-integrated until the middle of the 10th century, when the Carolingian territories fell under the rule of the Holy Roman emperors.

In centuries to come, the Swiss territories would become an area of great importance as north to south trade routes opened up through the Alps. After the death of the Holy Roman Emperor in the 13th century, the three regions finally came together and signed a charter on August 1, 1291, leading to the formation of the Old Swiss Confederacy. The confederation experienced substantial growth as more of the surrounding regions, known as cantons, joined. This was the beginning of Switzerland as we know it today. But it wouldn't be until 1648 that Switzerland finally gained legal independence from the Holy Roman Empire.

After 1798, a post-Revolutionary French invasion led to the disintegration of the cantons and a period of severe economic decline. Napoleon's Act of Mediation eventually restored partial autonomy to the original cantons. But it was not until the map of Europe was redrawn in 1815 with the Congress of Vienna that Switzerland's independence was reestablished, and the confederation was recognized as a permanently neutral territory.

This neutrality has withstood ever since, but peace was never a given. In 1847 a civil war broke out pitting a largely Protestant army against a special league of Catholic cantons. The Protestants made quick work of it in only 26 days, but the result was a new constitution that established a compromise between those who wanted a centralized government and those who supported cantonal authority. This balance is one that was honed over time and is still a hallmark of the Swiss Confederation. So is direct democracy, which was affirmed in 1874 with constitutional amendments that require many federal laws to be approved by national referendum. Today, a petition with 50,000 signatures can challenge a proposed law, and 100,000 signatures can force a public vote.

Switzerland's neutrality left it untouched during World War I, when its only involvement was to organize Red Cross units. During World War II, surrounded by fascist-run states, Switzerland again proclaimed its neutrality, though some of its leaders advocated appeasement. But the world took note when Swiss General Henri Guisan led an army to the Rütli Meadow (site of the 1291 Oath of Allegiance) in a show of force that displayed just how ready and well-prepared the Swiss were to defend their own soil. There were some "accidental" Allied flyovers that went unpunished, and Switzerland provided a safe haven for escaping Allied POWs and other refugees. But that shelter was infamously not extended to Europe's Jews, and Switzerland's banks have been condemned for being havens for stolen Nazi assets. (In 1998, the two largest banks, UBS and Credit Suisse, paid \$1.25 billion in compensation to Holocaust survivors and their families.)

Switzerland's postwar history has been characterized by remarkable economic growth and stability; and buffeted by its armed neutrality, the country has moved away from its previous isolation to become a major player on the world stage. The country hosts the European headquarters of the UN and World Health Organization, despite the fact that Switzerland did not join the UN until 2002. Switzerland is also not a member of the EU, though it joined the EU's Schengen passport-free travel zone. This opened the borders to workers from the other EU members, but in 2014, Swiss voters approved a referendum to reinstitute immigration quotas.

Belgium

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 11,780 square miles
- **Capital:** Brussels
- **Language:** Dutch, French, and German are the official languages.
- **Location:** Belgium is bordered by France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands

- **Geography:** 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:** 11,323,973 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 75%, other 25%
- **Time Zone:** Belgium is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in New York, it is noon in Brussels. Daylight Saving Time begins the last Sunday in March and ends the last Sunday in October.

National Holidays: Belgium

In addition to the holidays listed below, Belgium celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter and Ascension Day. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

07/21 Belgian National Day

08/15 Assumption of Mary

11/01 All Saints' Day

11/11 Armistice Day

12/25 Christmas Day

Belgium: A Brief History

The modern state of Belgium was officially born in 1830, but its story begins long before that, and is inextricably entwined with those of its neighbors. It has been called the "crossroads of Europe" and the "battlefield of Europe." The Romans were the first organized invaders to experience it as both. Julius Caesar arrived here in 57 AD and made the unhappy acquaintance of the native tribes, whom he called "Belgae." The name stuck even longer than the Romans did, who remained in Gallica Belgica for 500 years.

Germanic Franks swept into the north in the 5th century AD, while the southern part of the region was overtaken by the Romanized Merovingians, who were Latin-based. This established the linguistic (and cultural) divide between the Germanic Dutch (Flemish) speakers of Flanders and the French speakers of Walloon that still exists today. During the 9th century, Vikings made frequent raids, prompting the fortification of many towns.

As the control of French kings and Holy Roman Emperors waned, Belgium was divided into feudal states. Coastal Flanders was the wealthiest, thanks to its burgeoning trade. In the 12th and 13th centuries, cities like Bruges, Ghent and Ypres became important cultural centers, dominated by a rich merchant class that gained increasing political power and challenged the local counts. But the nobles prevailed by calling in the French army to squelch any dissent.

The Dukes of Burgundy ruled for less than a century but had a profound impact. The Burgundian Duke Philip, the wealthiest man in Europe, built an elegant palace in Brussels, established a university in Leuven, and sponsored Flemish artists. He is known as the Conditor Belgii (founder of Belgium.) The Hapsburgs eventually took all Burgundian holdings. Their heir, Charles V, was born in Ghent and set up court in Brussels. But he abdicated in favor of his son, the Spanish King Philip II. Philip was widely unpopular, a fanatical Catholic who imposed harsh anti-Protestant edicts, and sent Spanish mercenaries to enforce them. When Protestants reacted violently in the 1566 Iconoclastic Fury, Philip doubled down by sending 10,000 troops under the Duke of Alba.

War continued for eighty years and by the end, the Netherlands won independence from Spain. But present-day Belgium remained part of Philip's Spanish Netherlands, and Protestants were expelled. Later, during the Wars of the Spanish Succession, the Spanish Netherlands were handed over to the Austrian Hapsburgs. Their reign (1713-94) was comparatively enlightened, and the region was allowed a fair amount of autonomy. The revolutionary French invaded in 1794, but French rule ended in 1815 when Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, near Brussels.

After this, the Congress of Vienna declared Belgium and Luxembourg as part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. King Willem I (of Orange-Nassau) divided his time between Brussels and The Hague, but he made enemies on the Belgian side when he tried to impose Dutch as the national language. Ironically, this also infuriated Flemish speakers, who saw their language as distinct from Dutch. The Belgians revolted during an opera performance in 1830. By 1831 it was over, and an independent Belgium declared Léopold of Saxe-Coburg Gotha King Léopold I of Belgium. He proved to be a competent ruler and helped Belgium prosper through the Industrial Revolution.

Léopold's heir, Léopold II, was committed to expanding upon his father's legacy. Through a series of shifty treaties, he personally acquired a bloc of Central Africa that was 70 times larger than Belgium. The "Congo Free State" was anything but free. Though Leopold paid lip service to abolishing the slave trade, his subjects in Congo were forced to work under abysmal conditions in rubber plantations. Almost half of the Congolese population died, directly or indirectly, due to Léopold's rule. Embarrassed by the world's condemnation, Belgium stripped Léopold of his property in 1908. But Congo remained a Belgian colony until 1960.

Belgium was a major World War I battleground. Germany invaded in 1914, despite Belgium's declaration of neutrality, and the Belgians put up a valiant defense led by their beloved King Albert. But Allied troops were bogged down in Belgian trenches for four horrific years. Thousands died and Belgium was stripped bare of its industrial infrastructure. The Germans returned during WWII in 1940 with a brutal air blitz. This time, the king, Léopold III, quickly surrendered. But the Belgian government objected and fled to London to operate in exile. Belgium had a strong but fragmented resistance. There was also significant collaboration from Belgian fascists, and from both militant Flemish and Walloon groups. Belgium was liberated in September, 1944, but fighting continued until January 1945 with the Battle of the Ardennes.

After the war the country was wracked with angst about Léopold III's wartime actions. Many believed him to be a collaborator and he remained in exile in Switzerland until 1950. In 1951, under pressure from Walloon socialists, he abdicated in favor of his son Baudouin I. Belgium struggled with reconstruction but emerged as a key international political player. In 1958 Brussels became the seat of the European Commission, and in 1967, the headquarters of NATO.

In the latter part of the 20th century a huge public debt and high unemployment crippled the economy. Frustrated with 40 years of mismanagement, in 1999 the nation voted out the ruling Christian Democrat party and experimented with a new era of liberalism. Liberals, Socialists, and Green Party coalitions have led most governments since the turn of the century, but with increasing challenges from far right-wing groups (often with anti-immigrant platforms), Flemish separatists, and other nationalist parties.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

Christmas Traditions

German Christmas Traditions by Marion Kummerow (2020, Nonfiction) Based on her own German childhood, the author explains all the holiday customs you will encounter during your trip.

A Very German Christmas: The Greatest Austrian, Swiss and German Holiday Stories of All Time edited by New Vessel Press (2020, Anthology) A collection of holiday tales from the Brothers Grimm, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Heinrich Heine, Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke, Hermann Hesse, Heinrich Böll, and other literary masters.

Christmas in the Netherlands and ***Christmas in Switzerland*** edited by World Book (1994, Nonfiction) Though written for a young audience, this series offers a nice overview of holiday traditions.

A Very French Christmas: The Greatest French Holiday Stories of All Time edited by New Vessel Press (2017, Anthology) A compilation of short stories from classic writers like Alphonse Daudet and Guy de Maupassant, along with more modern contributions from Irène Némirov and contemporary authors such as Jean-Phillippe Blondel.

The Rhine

The Rhine: Following Europe's Greatest River from Amsterdam to the Alps by Ben Coates (2018, Travel/History) The Rhine has shaped European life for millennia, and author Coates takes us through some of its more fascinating twists and turns. Along with the stirring historical deeds and romantic castles we encounter Cold War bunkers, quirky farmers, unabashed nudists, and plenty of outlandish stories, all delivered in a witty and ironic style.

Wine Atlas of Germany by Dieter Bratz, Ullrich Sautter, and Ingo Swoboda (2014, Wine) A comprehensive reference to Germany's best vineyards and appellations, this reference pays special attention to the wines of the Mosel and Rhine regions.

Legends of the Rhine by H.A. Guerber (2017, Folklore) What did the Devil wager during the building of Cologne Cathedral? Why did the Germanic hero Siegfried bathe in a dragon's blood? What really happened between the Katz and Maus castles? Learn about these and other tales as you cruise along this mythic river.

All Along the Rhine: Recipes, Wine and Lore from Germany, France, Switzerland, Austria, Liechtenstein and Holland by Kay Shaw Nelson (2001, Cuisine) Filled with more than 130 Rhine recipes, this is not only a cookbook but a guide to Rhine culture, with each chapter covering the culinary history and winemaking tradition of a different Rhine region.

Netherlands

Lonely Graves by Britta Bolt (2012, Mystery) The first in a series, this mystery follows Pieter Posthumus of the “Lonely Funerals” team—the people who arrange funerals for the unknown—as he looks into the death of a Moroccan immigrant.

Tulipmania: Money, Honor, and Knowledge in the Dutch Golden Age by Anne Goldgar (2007, History) The 17th-century speculation that caused a bubble (and a bust) of the Dutch tulip market is often presented a cautionary tale of capitalism gone wild. The author here debunks the hyperbole around this phenomena and instead explores how tulipmania reflected deep anxieties about the transformation of Dutch society during the Golden Age.

Girl with a Pearl Earring by Tracy Chevalier (1999, Historical Fiction) This book—which was a worldwide best seller—imagines the story behind the famous Vermeer painting by the same name.

Amsterdam: A Brief Life of the City by Geert Mak (1994, History) A Dutch journalist and native of Amsterdam offers a delightful survey of Amsterdam’s past and present, incorporating elements of politics, economics, and art history.

The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank (1947, Memoir) Arguably the most famous Holocaust book, this real diary shares the musings of Anne, a young Jewish girl who is hiding from the Nazis in an Amsterdam attic during World War II. If you’d like an adult’s perspective on Anne and her family, look for *Anne Frank: The Biography* by Melissa Muller.

Germany

Tschick by Wolfgang Herrndorf (2014, Fiction) Two unpopular teenagers—one German and one Russian—“borrow” a car and go on a joyride across Germany. Although the protagonists are young, the story seems to delight adults too—it was recommended by the ambassador of Germany has one of the best modern stories from his country.

In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler’s Berlin by Erik Larson (2011, History) Acclaimed historian and author Larson follows the experiences of the American ambassador to Germany in 1933 as he and his family slowly come to realize the menace and danger that is Hitler’s Third Reich.

Martin Luther: A Life by Martin E. Marty (2004, Biography) A brief but engrossing biography of the fiery Protestant reformer who transformed western thinking, sending shock waves across Europe’s political as well as religious landscape.

Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s by Otto Friedrich (1995, History) A noted historian describes the raucous social, cultural and political scene in this most vibrant city, when Christopher Isherwood, Marlene Dietrich, Albert Einstein, Greta Garbo, Berthold Brecht Walter Gropius, Vassily Kandinsky and so many others made their home here.

The Silent Angel by Heinrich Boll (1992, Fiction) A German WWII deserter returns to his home town of Cologne after it has been carpet bombed, and encounters a city filled with shell-shocked people trying to survive both physically and spiritually. Nobel Prize winner Boll, a Cologne native, drew from his own postwar experiences to create this moving portrait.

France

The Seine: The River That Made Paris by Elaine Sciolino (2020, Nonfiction) Sciolino traces the history, route, and impact of the Seine River through the stories of its people—a riverbank bookseller, the Seine police, a houseboat owner, fishermen, and film directors, to name a few. She also includes a touching chapter on the 2019 Notre Dame fire, which was put out with water pumped from the river.

A Brief History of France by Cecil Jenkins (2017, History) Exactly what the title promises: A compact overview of the history of France. Look for the 2017 edition, which was updated to include more recent events.

The Miracle of Dunkirk: The True Story of Operation Dynamo by Walter Lord (2017, History) A well-written and comprehensive account of the British evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940 with the help of the French. The author has been praised for his ability to weave the personal stories of the survivors—who he interviewed in great depth—into the overall narrative of how events unfolded.

My Life in France by Julia Child with Alex Prud'homme (2007, Memoir) Memoir of the famous chef's first, formative stay in France in 1949. Child describes herself as a "rather loud and unserious Californian," without a word of French. She enrolled at the Cordon Bleu and toiled with increasing zeal and competence. With the bestselling *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, she revolutionized the American idea of cooking. This memoir recalls gorgeous meals in bygone Parisian restaurants, and reveals the personality and some of the secret arts of a culinary genius.

Paris to the Moon by Adam Gopnik (2001, Travel Essays) A self-described "comic-sentimental essayist," Gopnik spent the years from 1995 to 2000 in Paris writing the "Paris Journals" for the *New Yorker*. Collected here are his most charming, insightful, heartfelt, and humorous dispatches on the Parisian people, culture, food, economy, and lifestyle.

Switzerland

Slow Train to Switzerland: One Tour, Two Trips, 150 Years – and a World of Change Apart by Diccon Bewes (2013, Historical Fiction). Mass tourism started in 1863, when seven travelers departed London for a train ride through the Alps, to Switzerland. Follow as Bewes as he tells the story of Thomas Cook's first Conducted Tour of Switzerland, using the diary of Jemima Morell, one of the seven travelers.

The White Hotel by D. M. Thomas (1981, Fiction) This controversial novel mixes fantasy with historical accuracy as it tells the story of Lisa, a young opera singer, who is treated by Sigmund Freud for "severe sexual hysteria." Through erotic fantasies, poems, letters, and case study

notes, we learn about Lisa's chance encounter with a soldier, which leads to their affair at a white hotel in the Swiss countryside, to marriage and family life in Kiev, and to the barbaric Nazi atrocities at Babi Yar.

Why Switzerland by Jonathan Steinberg (1976, History) 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 ultimately rests on the community level. The author has been a lecturer at Cambridge and is married to a Swiss-German woman.

The Magic Mountain by Thomas Mann (1924, Fiction). Nobel Laureate Mann brings us to an exclusive sanatorium in the Swiss Alps, which is a microcosm for European society in the days before World War I.

Heidi by Johanna Spyri (1881, Fiction) One of the most popular works of Swiss literature, this best-selling book tells the story of a young girl's coming of age in the Swiss Alps, where she lives with her grandfather.

Belgium

The Wisdom of the Beguines: The Forgotten Story of a Medieval Women's Movement by Laura Swan (2016, History) *Beguinaages* were medieval residences set up to house unmarried women, called *beguines*, who dedicated themselves to a communal life and service to the poor. *Beguines* often earned their own living working in local industries, and though not part of any religious order, they were often guided by spirituality. This book explores the phenomenon, which was especially prevalent in the Low Countries.

War and Turpentine by Stefan Hertmans (2013, Biography/Memoir) An unusual hybrid book about an unusual life—one with a Dickensian childhood, service in World War I, a sad love story, and a passion for art. The author's grandfather left behind several notebooks with his memories, which Hertmans reworked and edited as if his grandfather is telling his life story to the reader.

The Lady and the Unicorn by Tracy Chevalier (2003, Historical Fiction) The author here does what she did for her novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring*: weaves together fact and fiction to reveal the lives behind a masterful work of art. In this case, it is the titular series of six allegorical and erotically charged tapestries that were created in Brussels, and now hang in the Musée de Cluny in Paris. Meticulously researched, it offers a vivid portrait of life in the Low Countries (and France) circa 1500.

The Factory of Facts by Luc Sante (1998, Memoir) Born in Belgium in 1954 and transplanted to New Jersey at age five, Sante reminisces about his upbringing in evocative passages about his national past and glimpses of his American experiences. The cumulative effect is a portrait not only of himself, but also of both his homelands.

The Abyss by Marguerite Yourcenar (1968, Fiction) The alchemist Zeno of Bruges is on a quest for knowledge, one that faces many physical and philosophical detours as he roams 16th-century Flanders, and far beyond. Zeno encounters the religious upheavals of the Reformation and counter-Reformation, the Black Death, the military might of Ottoman Turkey, and the brilliance and treachery of the 16th-century's greatest minds.

Suggested Films & Videos

Netherlands

Black Book (2006, Thriller) A young Jewish woman becomes a spy for the WWII resistance in German-occupied Holland, leading a dangerous double life. Paul Verhoeven's 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 (2003, Drama) Griet (Scarlett Johansson), a mysterious teenage girl, leaves her home to become a servant in the household of painter Johannes Vermeer (Colin Firth). Her thoughtful attention to detail catches Vermeer's notice. But she is also caught between the suspicions of Vermeer's wife, the predatory lust of Vermeer's greatest patron, and the cruel gossip of the town. Griet risks her reputation, but gains a place in history as the subject of one of the Northern Renaissance's most enduring portraits.

Rembrandt (1999, Docudrama) Klaus Maria Brandauer stars as the Dutch Master who changed the art world with his advances in painting, drafting, and printing.

Antonia's Line (1996, Comedy/Drama) This Oscar-winner is a delightful feminist fable about a widowed, prodigal daughter who returns to her small Dutch town after World War II. The townsfolk cannot understand why she wants to live independently. But Antonia takes several quirky souls under her wing, and brings warmth and joy over several generations through her growing and inclusive matriarchal community.

A Bridge Too Far (1977, Drama) This World War II epic is based on the book by Cornelius Ryan about Operation Market Garden, a daring but ultimately failed attempt to break through occupied Belgium and the Netherlands into Germany. Success depended on the capture of key bridges, but the mission was stopped at Arnhem. Whoever was your favorite 1970s male actor, he is likely in this all-star cast which includes Dirk Bogarde, Sean Connery, Michael Caine, Laurence Olivier, Robert Redford, Ryan O'Neal, James Caan, Anthony Hopkins, and more.

Germany

Look Who's Back (2015, Comedy) Can Germany escape the specter of Nazism? Not according to this biting satire, in which der Fuehrer magically reawakens in 2014 in the square where his bunker once stood. He is horrified to learn that the country is led by a woman, Poland is a free state, and the Fatherland is full of immigrants. An out of work filmmaker thinks this eccentric character is just a comic Hitler impersonator, and he builds a reality show about him. As Hitler becomes a media sensation, others are shown to share his ideas about the future of Germany. Filmed *Borat*-style, many scenes feature real people reacting to this putschy provocateur.

The Lives of Others (2006, Drama) A drama that marked 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, this film quietly depicts the secret world of German espionage. In German with subtitles.

Schindler's List (1993, Drama) Spielberg's masterpiece about a callow industrialist, Oskar Schindler, whose life is transformed as he gradually, then unceasingly works to save his Jewish workforce during World War II.

Cabaret (1972, Musical/Drama) Directed by Bob Fosse, this movie has it all: a killer Broadway score, a perfect cast, Fosse's sultry choreography, pointed social commentary, and an electrifying portrait of lost souls struggling to survive in Weimar-era Berlin on the cusp of Nazism. It did not win Best Picture, but took eight other major categories including Best Actress (Liza Minelli), Best Supporting Actor (Joel Grey), and Best Director (Fosse).

Immortal Beloved (1994, Drama) After the death of Ludwig van Beethoven (Gary Oldman), the life and loves of the great composer are revealed in flashbacks as his friend and executor tries to solve the mystery of an unmailed letter to a mysterious lover.

France

Loving Vincent (2017, Biography) Van Gogh's paintings come to life in this remarkable, animated film created by 125 artists, who hand-painted each of the film's 65,000 frames in the style of Vincent Van Gogh. The plot follows the efforts of a postmaster's son to solve the mystery of van Gogh's life and death in Auvers-sur-Oise.

Midnight in Paris (2011, Comedy) Screenwriter Gil Pender (Owen Wilson) escapes his romantic troubles by roaming the streets of Paris at night, where he is miraculously (and hilariously) transported back to 1920s Paris, where Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Salvador Dali, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the entire "Lost Generation" await him.

Amelie (2001, Romantic Comedy) This quirky 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 is a whimsical depiction of everyday life, sure to capture the hearts of its viewers time and time again.

Chocolat (2000, Drama/Comedy) In this warm and beautifully filmed romance, a lovely chocolatier (Juliet Binoche) falls in love with a handsome gypsy (Johnny Depp), disrupting life in a prim riverside village. Many scenes were filmed in the Dordogne region.

Saving Private Ryan (1998, Drama). Probably the best (and most riveting) depiction of the Normandy D-Day landings and their aftermath. It won Steven Spielberg an Oscar for Best Director.

Switzerland

The Clouds of Sils Maria (2015, Drama) The misty Engadine backdrop sets the moody tone for this story about a middle-aged actress (Juliette Binoche), and the young assistant (Kristen Stewart) who for whom she feels both attraction, and mistrust.

Journey of Hope (1990, Drama) Three members of a Kurdish family make a grueling journey on foot, in search of a better life in Switzerland. Though made in 1990, the struggles it depicts are still topical in modern Switzerland—and all the world.

Courage Mountain (1990, Adventure) This film is about a young Swiss girl named Heidi who is sent off to an Italian boarding school at the beginning of World War I. She's reluctant to leave until she learns that her sweetheart Peter has joined the army. This film version of the sequel to Johanna Spyri's novel *Heidi* tells the charming story of Heidi and her five classmates as they embark on a journey through the forest and mountains to cross over into Switzerland.

Downhill Racer (1969, Drama) For a satirical spin on the American Dream, *Downhill Racer* is a 1969 film centered on the efforts of a self-centered and ambitious Olympic-grade skier (Robert Redford) to reach the top—a goal that he believes can only be achieved by discarding any emotional attachments that might impede his progress. When he finally attains his goal, he learns that the thrill of this victory is indeed an empty one.

Belgium

The Brand New Testament (2015, Comedy) God is alive and living in a Brussels apartment, stomping around in his ratty bathrobe, tapping away at his outdated DOS computer, and gleefully inventing laws to frustrate humanity. (Dropped toast will always fall on the jam side. Whatever line you are in, the other will move faster.) His teenaged daughter Ea thinks Dad is doing a terrible job, so she hacks his computer, and leaks everyone's death date. People begin living their lives in unexpected and exhilarating ways. This religiously incorrect satire may offend some viewers, but others will appreciate its big-hearted message about freewill vs. determinism, and its uniquely Belgian irreverence.

The Monuments Men (2014, Drama) Based on the real-life Army platoon whose mission it was to find and rescue the vast cache of priceless art stolen by the Nazis. Here, George Clooney, Matt Damon, Jean DuJardin, Bill Murray, Cate Blanchett and friends are on the hunt for two Belgian masterpieces: *The Mystic Lamb* altar panels of Ghent by Jan Van Eyck, and Bruges' *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo.

In Bruges (2008, Comedy) In this dark comedy, Irish hit men Ken and Ray seek shelter in 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.

The Factory of Facts by Luc Sante (1999, Memoir) Born in Belgium in 1954 and transplanted to New Jersey at age five, Sante reminisces about his upbringing in evocative passages. The effect is a portrait of himself and also of his natal homeland.

Peace in the Fields (1970, Drama) 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.

Useful Websites

Grand Circle Forum (tips from previous travelers)

www.gct.com/forum

Grand Circle Frequently Asked Questions

www.gct.com/faq

**International Health Information/CDC
(Centers for Disease Control)**

www.cdc.gov/travel

Electricity & Plugs

[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/
plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

Foreign Exchange Rates

www.xe.com/currencyconverter
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM Locators

www.mastercard.com/atm
www.visa.com/atmlocator

World Weather

www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

www.travlang.com/languages

Packing Tips

www.travelite.org

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

www.cbp.gov/travel

Transportation Security

Administration (TSA)

www.tsa.gov

National Passport Information Center

www.travel.state.gov

Holidays Worldwide

www.timeanddate.com/holidays

Useful Apps

Flight Stats

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

LoungeBuddy

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

Timeshifter

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

GoogleMaps or Maps.me

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

Triposo

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

Rome2rio

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

Flush or Sit or Squat

Find a clean toilet anywhere

Uber or Bolt or Grab

Ride sharing around the world

Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus

ATM locations

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

TunnelBear

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

What's App or Skype or Signal

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

Duolingo, FLuentU, or Babbel

Learn dozens of foreign languages

Google Translate

Fast and simple translations

XE

Currency conversions

SizeGuide

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

Best Units Converter

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

Happy Cow

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

Eatwith

Dine with locals all over the world

Meetup

Connects you with locals who share your interests

Skyview

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

Travello

Find travel friends on the road

TripWhistle

Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Tourlina

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

ALIX for One

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

Chirpey

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



SHARE YOUR TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

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Most Popular Videos, Slideshows & Photos from our Grand Circle Vacations Created by our Travelers



Submitted by Fran Geisler, 8-time traveler
from Edisto Island, SC



Submitted by Milly Champeau, 6-time
traveler from Clinton, TN



Submitted by Elinor Graham, first-time
traveler from Ocala, FL



Created by Sarah Brown, first-time traveler
from Providence, RI



Created by Joseph Jiang, 3-time traveler
from San Francisco, CA



Created by Sheila Knox, 20-time traveler
from Modesto, CA



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