

Grand Circle Cruise Line®

THE LEADER IN VALUE AND WORLDWIDE DISCOVERY SINCE 1958

Your Grand Circle Travel Planning Guide



The Great Rivers of Europe
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.

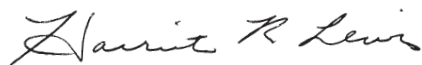
In addition, up to four **expert, local Program Directors** will accompany you from the beginning of your trip to the end. Assigned to a group of 38 travelers on average, these passionate leaders are ready and eager to share their homeland and insights as only a local can. Whether it is recommending 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

THE GREAT RIVERS OF EUROPE

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 **17**

Post-Trip Extensions **20**

Deck Plans **26**

ESSENTIAL TRAVEL INFORMATION

Travel Documents & Entry Requirements... **28**

Rigors, Vaccines & General Health **31**

Money Matters: Local Currency &
Tipping Guidelines. **34**

Air, Optional Tours & Staying in Touch **38**

Packing: What to Bring & Luggage Limits... **41**

Climate & Average Temperatures **47**

Aboard Your Ship: Cabin Features,
Dining & Services on Board **51**

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

Cultures Along the Rhine, Main,
and Danube Rivers..... **56**

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs,
Shipping & More **73**

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Austria **75**

Belgium **76**

Czech Republic..... **79**

Germany..... **81**

Netherlands..... **83**

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading **86**

Suggested Films & Videos **90**

Useful Websites **94**

Useful Apps **95**



M/S River Adagio, Kaub, Germany

The Great Rivers of Europe

The Netherlands: Amsterdam | **Germany:** Cologne, Koblenz, Rudesheim, Heidelberg, Wertheim, Wurzburg, Bamberg, Nuremberg, Regensburg, Passau | **Austria:** Melk, Vienna

16 days starting from \$5,795

including airfare

Single Supplement: **\$1,295**

For departure dates & prices, visit

www.gct.com/sge2026pricing

Venture through history along the scenic Rhine, Main, and Danube rivers, where medieval architecture beckons from every riverbank ... time-honored wine-making traditions abound at hillside vineyards ... and landscapes seem to spring from the canvases of centuries-old masterworks. Journey on our signature European River Cruise and spend **14 nights aboard the 162-passenger M/S River Aria or M/S River Adagio** exploring the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria. Along the way, uncover local cultures during excursions such as a Home-Hosted *Kaffeeklatsch* in Germany.

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

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 14 nights aboard a private river ship with wireless Internet access in all common areas and cabins
- **ALL meals:** 14 breakfasts, 13 lunches, 14 dinners—including 2 meals in local restaurants—plus all onboard house beer, wine, and soft drinks
- **12 included tours** with personal headsets and **5 Exclusive Discovery Series events**—Glassblowing demonstration • Home-Hosted *Kaffeeklatsch* • Rhine-Main-Danube Canal transit & conversation • Germany & Ukraine conversation • German education system conversation
- **Local Program Directors, a Grand Circle Cruise Line exclusive:** Our dedicated experts are with you and your group of 38-45 travelers from beginning to end to provide an insider's knowledge and perspective
- **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- **All port charges**
- **Baggage handling** for 1 piece of luggage per person, including tips
- **5% Frequent Traveler Credit** toward your next trip



ITINERARY SUMMARY

1 • Depart U.S.

2-3 • Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Embark ship

Port Amsterdam

4-5 • Germany by Rhine

Ports Dusseldorf • Koblenz • Rudesheim

6-10 • Germany by Main

Ports Frankfurt • Wertheim • Wurzburg

• Gerlachshausen • Schweinfurt •

Bamberg

11-13 • Germany by Danube

Ports Nuremberg • Regensburg • Passau

14-15 • Austria

Ports Melk • Vienna

16 • Vienna • 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 a local Program Director exclusive to Grand Circle

Pacing

- 15 days, with 14 nights aboard the 162-passenger M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*
- Return flights often require departing in early morning hours

Physical Requirements

- Walk 1-3 miles unassisted within a time period of 1-2 hours, and participate in 3-4 hours of physical activities each day, including stairs and cobblestones
- Optional activities and elective walks may be offered in addition to the above-mentioned activity levels
- Agility and balance needed for boarding small canal boats and navigating steep, 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 162-passenger river ship and 49-seat coach
- Changes in water-level depths may require adjustments to your itinerary

Climate

- Daytime temperatures range from 40-73°F during cruising season
- June-August are the warmest months

MAXIMIZE YOUR DISCOVERIES & VALUE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

all with FREE Single Supplements

Bruges, Belgium

PRE-TRIP: 3 nights from \$995

Prague, Czech Republic

POST-TRIP: 4 nights from \$1,095

Vienna, Austria

POST-TRIP: 3 nights from \$995

The Great Rivers of Europe

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

3 nights in *Bruges, Belgium*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Bruges

Day 3 Explore Bruges

Day 4 Bruges • Optional Flanders Field tour

Day 5 Bruges • Ghent • Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart today on your flight to Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Please refer to your individual air itinerary for exact departure and arrival times.

Day 2 Arrive Amsterdam, the Netherlands

• Embark ship

- Destination: Amsterdam
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The ship is docked outside of the city center. It will take around 30 minutes to reach the city by bus.

Morning: Arrive in Amsterdam, where you'll be met at the airport and transferred to the pier to board your river ship.

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

Afternoon: Enjoy time to relax after your flight or set off to explore on your own a city that has successfully blended its Old World traditions with a thoroughly modern vibe.

Marvel at Amsterdam's famous tall and skinny rowhouses during your walk, noting tidy window boxes and hand-scrubbed stoops along the way. Before dinner, gather onboard for your first Port Talk—a nightly feature of your River Cruise, designed as an opportunity for your Program Directors to prepare you for the following day's discoveries.

Dinner: Toast to the discoveries that await—and get better acquainted with your fellow travelers, including those who took our optional *Bruges, Belgium* pre-trip extension—over dinner onboard.

Evening: Relax onboard and enjoy the ship's amenities. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap in the lounge, or retire to your cabin.

Day 3 Explore Amsterdam • Captain's Welcome Dinner

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

Activity Note: The ship will be docked outside of the city center and it will take around 30 minutes to reach the city by bus. On some departures, the ship may dock at Lelystad, which is about an hour bus ride from the city.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: After breakfast this morning, gather for a Welcome Briefing. During this briefing, which will last around 45 minutes, you will introduce yourself and review your itinerary in more detail (including any changes that may need to occur). Your Program Director will also discuss logistics, safety and emergency procedures, and answer questions you may have.

Today's discoveries will begin, fittingly, with a morning canal boat tour—providing you an unmatched vantage point from which you can marvel at the city's remarkable architectural achievements.

Lunch: Return to your ship for lunch onboard.

Afternoon: During lunch, we'll set sail for Cologne. After your meal, you'll have free time onboard.

Dinner: You'll formally meet your ship crew this evening, during a Welcome Drink and introduction, followed by the Captain's Welcome 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 4 Explore Cologne, Germany

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

Activity Note: The ship is docked outside of the city center; it will take up to 30 minutes to reach the city by bus. Today's walking tour of Cologne will include cobblestones, stairs, steep inclines, narrow streets, and no options to sit down during the tour.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: As your ship continues to make its journey into Germany this morning, you'll have a chance to relax onboard.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: After lunch, join an included tour of Cologne. A former Roman settlement called Colonia Agrippina, Cologne came under Frankish control in the fifth century. Traces of this layered history can be seen throughout the city: Among multiple visible Roman ruins is the Roman Gate, a medieval archway that stands guard near Cologne Cathedral.

Your tour concludes outside the city's magnificent Gothic cathedral, just outside the Dom. This UNESCO World Heritage Site largely escaped the World War II damage that devastated the rest of the city (and Germany)—there's evidence that Allied forces were specifically ordered to preserve the beauty of this structure. The largest Gothic cathedral in northern Europe, the Dom boasts incredible stained-glass windows, an ornate gold altar shrine, and the intricate detail traditional for 14th-century Gothic churches.

Before returning to the ship, you'll have some time this afternoon to explore as you please. Perhaps you'll venture into the Dom to see the splendors contained therein. Or, consider

learning more about the city's ancient history with a visit to the Roman-Germanic Museum: The building was constructed on the site of a third-century Roman villa, and includes a stunning Dionysus mosaic floor.

Upon your arrival back at the ship, you'll enjoy a cocktail hour to discuss the day's discoveries with your fellow travelers before dinner.

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 5 Explore Koblenz • Afternoon sailing

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

Activity Note: The ship may be required to dock outside of the city center; if so, it will take up to 30 minutes to reach the city by bus. This morning's walking tour of Koblenz will be longer and include cobblestones, uneven surfaces, narrow streets, and no options to sit down during the to

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Disembark after breakfast this morning for an included tour of Koblenz. Located where the Rhine and Mosel rivers meet, Koblenz was originally established as an outpost of the Roman Empire in 9 BC, and named *Castellum apud Confluentes* (Castle at the Confluence of the Rivers). Benefiting significantly from its prime location, the settlement grew from a small town into a prosperous city by the 13th century. Explore the narrow winding streets lined by half-timbered buildings, medieval churches, and the *Weinstuben* (wine taverns) that

celebrate the region's local products. Then, set off for the Winningen wine region to visit a family-owned winery, where you'll sample a selection of local vintages—perhaps you'll try a refreshing Riesling white wine, which the area is known for.

Then, you'll have time here for your own discoveries. If you chose not to partake in this morning's wine adventures, then you can traverse the city via cable car using the pre-paid voucher provided by your Program Director.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Get your camera ready as you make your way to your ship's Sun Deck—or settle in for a window seat within the lounge—for an unforgettable stretch of scenic sailing. As your ship makes its way downstream, you'll be treated to a view of the Rhine River's castle corridor, a stretch of valley liberally sprinkled with turreted hilltop fortresses on both shores.

Your Program Directors will help you spot each structure—and learn about important local history—as they provide commentary from the ship's bridge. They'll also be sure to point out Lorelei, a large rock rising 440 feet above the river. Ancient Greek mythology is littered with tales of sirens who lure sailors to their deaths with sweet songs. The Germanic variation of this legend places one such golden-haired creature—Lorelei—here, and it is said she enticed sailors to destruction on the reef below the rock.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: Back onboard, 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 Frankfurt • Explore Heidelberg

- Destination: Heidelberg
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The Sun Deck will be closed today because of low-standing bridges on our sailing route. Today's walking tour of medieval Heidelberg will include cobblestones, uneven surfaces, and no options to sit down during the tour.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Disembark in Frankfurt and board your private motorcoach for a transfer to Heidelberg, a historical and vibrant German university town that allures visitors with enchanting architecture, a rich literary heritage, and striking riverside panoramas. Here, you'll take in the view of the city from the ruins of its namesake castle, a strong example of Renaissance architecture. A palace has stood on these grounds since the 13th century, despite multiple lightning strikes, fires, and explosions over the years—most notably damage inflicted by the French in 1689, during the Nine Years' War.

Discover more of Heidelberg during a walking tour, followed by some free time to explore independently. Perhaps you'll seek out a glimpse into 17th-century student life at a *Studentenkarzer*—a private jail cell intended for misbehaving undergrads.

Lunch: Settle in for a meal of traditional fare in a Heidelberg *Gasthaus* (a small inn with a restaurant and bar) that has been part of the Old Town for centuries.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries. Buses will be available to shuttle you back to your 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 Explore Wertheim • Glassblowing demonstration • Home-Hosted *Kaffeeklatsch*

- Destination: Wertheim
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The Sun Deck will be closed today because of low-standing bridges on our sailing route.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Enjoy a fitting introduction to your next port of call, Wertheim with an **Exclusive Discovery Series** glassblowing demonstration.

Then, step ashore for a walking tour of Wertheim—located at the meeting of the Main and Tauber rivers—and admire the imposing ruins of its castle, set on a hill overlooking the fairy-tale town below. The rest of the morning is yours to explore Wertheim on your own. Climb the stairs to the castle and follow the trail around the fortress walls, or visit its renowned Glass Museum, where exhibitions display the town's long and proud tradition of glass production.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Head to the home of a local family for a traditional *Kaffeeklatsch* to share coffee and cake, and experience what life is like for a typical German family during an **Exclusive Discovery Series** Home-Hosted Visit.

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 8 Explore Würzburg

- Destination: Würzburg
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The Sun Deck will be closed today because of low-standing bridges on our sailing route. On some departures, the ship will be docked outside of the city center. It will take around 15 minutes to reach the city by bus. Today's combined bus and walking tour of Würzburg will be approximately 5 hours long with stops along the way.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Dock in the Bavarian city of Würzburg, a marvelous display of Baroque and Rococo architecture and a hot spot for wine enthusiasts. You'll explore the city, founded in the tenth century, during an included walking tour. Along the way, you'll find remnants of history left behind by several powerful prince-bishops—the most obvious example being the exterior of the *Residenz*, an ornate complex commissioned by the prince-bishop von Schönborn brothers, Johann Philipp Franz and Friedrich Carl. Napoleon proclaimed this building the “nicest parsonage in Europe”—while the structure was heavily damaged during World War II, it has been painstakingly restored to its pre-war form.

Enjoy time here on your own before returning to the ship. Perhaps you'll head to the *Residenz* to see its renowned grand staircase, or get a glimpse of daily life from a comfy chair at a local cafe.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries.

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 9 Gerlachshausen • Optional Rothenburg tour • Schweinfurt

- Destination: Schweinfurt
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The Sun Deck will be closed today because of low-standing bridges on our sailing route.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning/Afternoon: Your ship will stop briefly in Gerlachshausen this morning. If you choose, you can spend the morning onboard enjoying a scenic cruise to Schweinfurt.

Or you can disembark and join our optional full-day excursion to Rothenburg, where you'll step back into medieval times. This lovely old town, nestled on the Tauber River, is home to undamaged 14th-century city walls and beautifully preserved fortifications. As you explore, you'll see stately towers, imposing burghers' houses, and the town's whimsical mechanical clock tower. Enjoy some free time to explore on your own before you travel to meet up with the ship in Schweinfurt.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room for those travelers who do not choose the optional tour. If you did choose the optional tour, lunch is included at a local restaurant.

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 Explore Bamberg • Rhine-Main-Danube Canal transit & discussion

- Destination: Bamberg
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: During the Rhine–Main–Danube Canal transit, it will be necessary for the Captain to close the Sun Deck because of low–standing bridges. The ship is docked outside of the city center; it will take around 15 minutes to reach the city by bus.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Set out on a morning walking tour of Bamberg, which was founded in AD 902, began to prosper in the twelfth century, and was the center of southern Germany's Enlightenment in the late 18th century. The great German philosopher Hegel lived here, and Bamberg was the second city (after Mainz) to introduce book–printing. The city has grown famous in beer–enthusiast circles as the home to *Rauchbier*, a beer known for its smoky notes and malty finish.

With more than 2,000 buildings listed as historical monuments, Bamberg's old city center is Europe's largest existing group of historic structures. This area not only earned UNESCO World Heritage Site status, but it was also designated as a "World Cultural and Natural Heritage of Mankind" site in 1993. Your tour will immerse you in this vibrant display of historical locations and culture.

Then, before heading back to the ship for lunch, you'll take part in one of Germany's most popular traditions—visiting a local *Biergarten* (beer garden) to sample local brews.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Begin cruising to Nuremberg this afternoon—a journey that will take you through the Rhine–Main–Danube Canal.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: After dinner, you'll enjoy an **Exclusive Discovery Series** discussion on the history and construction of the Rhine–Main–Danube Canal.

Day 11 Explore Nuremberg • Conversation about Germany & Ukraine

- Destination: Nuremberg
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The Sun Deck will be closed today because of low–standing bridges on our sailing route. Please also note that Courtroom 600 is still a working courtroom, and therefore is not always open to visitors. The ship is docked outside of the city center; it will take around 30 minutes to reach the city by bus.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: This morning's included tour introduces you to Nuremberg—a city with a long and storied history, but also forever linked to Hitler's rise to power. Bavaria's second–largest city, Nuremberg was once the unofficial capital of the Holy Roman Empire—and you can see traces of its exalted past with the imposing medieval castle that looks over the city from above. It grew to serve as the heart of the German Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The Nazi Party chose Nuremberg as the site of massive conventions between 1927 and 1938 because of its connection to the Holy Roman Empire. Your tour will take you to Zeppelin Field, where these rallies were held for up to 100,000 spectators, on grounds designed by Hitler's chief architect, Albert Speer. (Speer later went down in history as "the Nazi who said sorry" during the Nuremberg Trials.) While rally footage and photographs show this space as home to large, loud, boisterous activity, Zeppelin Field is quiet for visitors today—vast and almost overwhelming in its expansive magnitude. Our explorations will also include a visit to the infamous Courtroom 600 from the Nuremberg Trials.

Lunch: While Nuremberg is so closely associated with numerous events of the past, it is today a lively and vibrant city with a contemporary vibe, and you'll get a sense of daily life here during lunch in a local restaurant, where you'll sample regional specialties among those who call this city home.

Afternoon: The rest of the afternoon is yours to relax onboard or to take advantage of a shuttle bus into town. If you'd like to continue to trace World War II history, you can explore Nuremberg's Old Town, full of medieval charm, including the Church of Our Lady—complete with a 16th-century mechanical clock depicting the Holy Roman Emperor.

Later, return to the ship for an **Exclusive Discovery Series** discussion about Germany's role in the war between Ukraine and Russia. While Germany has formally joined the EU in supporting Ukraine's defense, some of its allies have accused the nation of delivering insufficient aid to Ukraine as Germany seeks to avoid unnecessary conflict with Russia. You'll hear about the controversy surrounding Germany's intervention policy, delving into the

arguments for and against increasing its role in the war, with an opportunity to ask questions of your own.

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 12 Conversation about German education • Explore Regensburg

- Destination: Regensburg
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The ship may be required to dock outside of the city center; if so, it will take up to 30 minutes to reach the city by bus. Today's combined bus and walking tour of Regensburg will be approximately 5 hours long in total and include cobblestones, uneven surfaces, narrow streets, and no options to sit down during the tour.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: As you sail toward Regensburg, head to the lounge to engage in an **Exclusive Discovery Series** conversation about the education system in Germany with a local expert.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Upon arrival at our destination, step ashore for a walking tour of Regensburg, one of Germany's largest and best preserved medieval cities. Experience its Old Town Hall and the famous Stone Bridge (Germany's oldest bridge), constructed during the twelfth century. You'll also see soaring St. Peter's Cathedral, Bavaria's most impressive Gothic wonder and home to a famous boys' choir. Admire

the winding medieval streets and the relics of Regensburg's Roman past at the ruins of Castra Regina fort—the Porta Praetoria—containing a stone inscribed in AD 179, when Marcus Aurelius was emperor. Along the way, keep your eyes peeled for a small red plaque affixed to a home on the *Watmarkt*: Oskar Schindler lived here for a time after the end of World War II.

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 13 Explore Passau

- Destination: Passau
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Explore Passau, situated at the confluence of the Danube, Ilz, and Inn rivers, during this morning's walking tour. Called the *Dreiflussesstadt* (City on Three Rivers), this elegant town has served as a German cultural and intellectual hub for centuries. Explore this kaleidoscopic assortment of pastel-colored buildings, cobblestone streets, and ornate sculptures during your tour.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Enjoy the afternoon to pursue your own interests in Passau, such as the town's lavish, 17th-century St. Stephen's Cathedral, known as the *Dom*. This structure is home to 17,774 pipes and 234 resounding stops, making it one of the world's largest pipe organs. While the cathedral underwent a 17th-century reconstruction in the grand Baroque style, its original Gothic plan is still evident. One of its most striking features is a gorgeous octagonal

dome hovering over the intersection of the nave (where the congregation sits) and the transept running perpendicular.

Later this afternoon, return to your ship and say *auf Wiedersehen* to Germany as we begin cruising to Austria—the last of three countries on your itinerary.

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 14 Explore Melk, Austria • Vienna • Optional *Musical Vienna* tour

- Destination: Vienna
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The ship will be docked outside of Vienna's city center; it will take around 20 minutes to reach the city by bus. Today's combined bus and walking tour of Melk will be approximately 3.5 hours long.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Awake to find yourself in Melk, where you can glimpse the formidable Melk Abbey from the ship, as it rises up from the surrounding countryside along the Danube. Disembark after breakfast for a guided tour of the magnificently ornate Baroque abbey. Strategically situated on a steep cliffside perch, Melk Abbey's earliest incarnation was as a Roman border post. Later, it served as a tenth-century Babenberg fortress. The abbey then became a Benedictine monastery in 1089 and earned a distinguished reputation for medieval scholarship.

Its library includes more than 70,000 books and 2,000 manuscripts, chiefly from the ninth through the 15th centuries. Ravaged by fires in 1297 and 1683, the stately Baroque edifice that stands today, with its twin towers and 208-foot-high dome, dates from its reconstruction in 1736. In addition to those thousands of volumes, the Abbey library houses a remarkable collection of cherubs, and 365 windows—one for every day of the year. The interior of the abbey’s church is a kaleidoscope of red, orange, and gold, with an intricately carved pulpit and shimmering ceiling frescoes, which you’ll observe up close during your tour.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship’s dining room.

Afternoon: Continue on to Vienna, cruising through the captivating landscape of the Wachau Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage Site—past terraced vineyards and lush flowering fields.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship’s dining room.

Evening: When you arrive in Austria’s capital this evening, you’ll have the night to relax or start exploring on your own. You may also choose to join our optional *Musical Vienna* excursion to one of the city’s famed concert halls. Celebrate this city’s incredible classical music heritage, and hear an enchanting performance of works by Austrian masters such as Mozart and Strauss.

Day 15 Explore Vienna • Captain’s Farewell Dinner

- Destination: Vienna
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The ship will be docked outside of the city center; it will take around 20 minutes to reach the city by bus. Today’s combined bus and walking tour of Vienna will be approximately 3.5 hours long.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship’s dining room.

Morning: Today, discover Vienna, Austria’s legendary capital and a city renowned for its elegance and culture. Your exploration begins with a tour along (and within) the *Ringstrasse*, one of Emperor Franz Joseph’s many achievements. In 1857, the emperor ordered the demolition of Vienna’s ancient city walls, which were impeding the city’s growth. In their place was constructed an elegant 2.5-mile long boulevard, encircling the *Inner Stadt* (Old Town).

The *Ringstrasse* showcases Neo-classical buildings that bring together a variety of architectural styles in an exuberant celebration of all that seemed possible during the Industrial Revolution. Your tour will also give you an opportunity to witness the well-known Imperial Palace, home to many generations of the Habsburg family, and the renowned Spanish Riding School.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship’s dining room.

Afternoon: The remainder of the day is yours in Vienna to spend as you please—ask your Program Director for recommendations. You may want to experience Vienna’s coffeehouse culture at one of the city’s many cafés.

Dinner: Reminisce with your fellow travelers during the Captain's Farewell Reception and Dinner 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 one last nightcap at the bar.

Day 16 Vienna • Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: After breakfast, disembark the ship and transfer to the airport for your flight home. Or, continue your discoveries in *Vienna, Austria* or *Prague, Czech Republic*, with a post-trip extension.

END YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

4 nights in *Prague, Czech Republic*

Day 1 Vienna, Austria • Bratislava, Slovakia • Prague, Czech Republic

Day 2 Explore Prague

Day 3 Prague • Optional Terezin tour

Day 4 Prague

Day 5 Prague • Return to U.S.

OR

3 nights in *Vienna, Austria*

Day 1 Vienna, Austria

Day 2 Vienna • Optional *Viennese Highlights* tour

Day 3 Vienna

Day 4 Vienna • Return to U.S.

OPTIONAL TOURS

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with us. We will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form and swiping your credit card at the ship's front desk. 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.*

Rothenburg

(Day 9 \$125 per person)

On this tour of Rothenburg, you'll visit this lovely old town that sits on the Tauber River and boasts undamaged 14th-century city walls and beautifully preserved fortifications. Set off on a walking tour to see stately towers and imposing burghers' houses. After an included lunch, the afternoon is yours to make your own discoveries before transferring to meet your ship.

Please note: *Today's optional combined bus and walking tour will be approximately 3.5 hours long and include cobblestones, uneven surfaces, and no options to sit down during the tour.*

Musical Vienna

(Day 14 \$110 per person)

Vienna without music wouldn't be Vienna. So, subject to availability of tickets, you may want to enjoy an unforgettable optional evening in one of Vienna's famed concert halls. You'll hear enchanting performances of some of the most wonderful melodies of classical Austrian music.

PRE-TRIP

Bruges, Belgium

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

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

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Originally a ninth-century fortress built to protect the Flemish coast from marauding Vikings, Bruges today retains its reputation as one of Europe's best-preserved Old-World cities. The city's centuries-old canal system, which was essential to its once thriving textile industry, has beckoned tourists to meander its narrow, winding streets in search of art, history, and fine chocolates for nearly two centuries.

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart on your flight to Brussels. Please refer to your individual air itinerary for exact departure and arrival times.

Day 2 Bruges

- Destination: Bruges
- Accommodations: Grand Hotel Casselbergh Bruges or similar

Morning: Arrive in Brussels, where you'll be met at the airport and transferred to your hotel in Bruges. Your Program Director will advise you of your check-in status and activity schedule for the day. Get acquainted with the area around your hotel on a brief vicinity walk.

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

Afternoon: The rest of day is yours to relax after your overseas flight or explore independently. You may also join your fellow travelers for a Welcome Drink before dinner.

Dinner: On your own—your Program Director will have suggestions to help you select a restaurant to enjoy dinner on your own this evening.

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

Day 3 Explore Bruges

- Destination: Bruges
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Grand Hotel Casselbergh Bruges or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After breakfast, you'll set off on a walking tour of this former capital of Flanders, a city still defined by its canals. Dating from the 13th century, Bruges is a living museum and a treasure trove of fine architecture. From the 13th to the 15th centuries, Bruges was the most important trading center of northern Europe, based largely on its thriving wool and textile industries. You'll see signs of this mercantile history in the beautiful houses built by wealthy textile dealers.

Your walking tour takes you past the Church of Our Lady and to Market Square, with its distinctive belfry tower and carillon of 47 bells. You also witness the intricate, white-washed facade of the Holy Blood Chapel. Then, experience Bruges from a different perspective—by boat. Enjoy a short cruise along its charming canals, followed by a delicious tasting of one of the country's well-known treats: Belgian waffles.

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

Afternoon: Enjoy some free time to explore independently.

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 Bruges • Optional Flanders Field tour

- Destination: Bruges
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Grand Hotel Casselbergh Bruges or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Continue your discoveries of Bruges on your own today.

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

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations. Or, you may choose to join us this afternoon and evening for an optional excursion to Flanders Field, a museum commemorating World War I.

Dinner: If you choose our optional Flanders Field visit, dinner is included in the cost of the tour. Otherwise, dinner is 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 5 Bruges • Ghent • Amsterdam, the Netherlands

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After breakfast, you'll depart for your transfer to the Netherlands' capital of Amsterdam. En route, you'll stop in one of Belgium's oldest cities, Ghent, known as "the jewel of Flanders" for an included walking tour of this historic city. Originally a settlement set at the confluence of the Scheldt and Lys rivers during the Middle Ages, Ghent became one of the biggest and wealthiest cities in northern Europe. Today, it's the country's fourth-largest urban center and a culinary hot spot. You'll also have free time to explore independently.

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

Afternoon: You'll return to Amsterdam in the late afternoon. Members of your group on *The Great Rivers of Europe* have arrived today,

and tonight, you join your fellow travelers, following the activities as described on Day 2 of the main itinerary.

OPTIONAL TOUR

Flanders Fields

(Day 4 \$165 per person)

Join us this afternoon and evening for an optional excursion to Flanders Fields, a museum commemorating World War I. You will travel to the city of Ypres, now known as the "City of Peace," and visit the interactive Flanders Fields Museum, where you'll learn about the Great War and then tour the battlefields. After dinner at a local restaurant, you'll visit the Menin Gate Memorial and listen to the buglers from the local fire brigade who play there every night in remembrance of those lost in the war. The cost of this optional excursion includes dinner.

POST-TRIP

Prague, Czech Republic

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » **Accommodations** for 4 nights
- » **6 meals:** 4 breakfasts, 1 lunch, and 1 dinner
- » **Included tours** with personal headsets:
Bratislava • Prague
- » Dedicated services of a local Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- » All transfers

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Discover Prague, the “City of 100 Spires” known for its many hilltop neighborhoods, where rows of steeples stand out against the horizon. Wander about the capital city’s twisting cobblestone streets and old neighborhoods, where ancient houses crowd each other along narrow lanes ... and experience the museums and cathedrals that make Prague stand out as one of Europe’s finest cities.

Day 1 Vienna, Austria • Bratislava, Slovakia • Prague, Czech Republic

- Destination: Prague
- Included Meals: Lunch
- Accommodations: Hermitage Hotel Prague or similar

Morning: As your journey along *The Great Rivers of Europe* comes to a close, you’ll transfer overland to Prague, Czech Republic. Along the way, you’ll stop off in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, for an included walking tour and free time to explore on our own.

Lunch: Enjoy a lunch in a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Continue your journey, arriving in Prague in the early evening.

Dinner: Your Program Director will be happy to suggest a restaurant where you can enjoy dinner on your own tonight.

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

Day 2 Explore Prague

- Destination: Prague
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Hermitage Hotel Prague or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: This morning’s tour will focus on two of Prague’s most memorable landmarks: its ancient castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. The Gothic cathedral and its enormous rose window sit entirely within Prague Castle, a centuries-old defensive structure that ranks as one of the largest castles in the world. Prague’s regal beauty spreads on both sides of the winding Vltava River, connected by 16 picturesque bridges. Like Rome and San

Francisco, the city is built over a series of hills, and its varied architecture spans many centuries.

Later this morning, you'll depart for Prague's Old Town where you'll embark on a guided walking tour. You'll head to Old Town Hall to witness the famous 15th-century astronomical clock. Every hour, crowds assemble below to watch Christ and the twelve Apostles appear at two little windows above the clock face, followed by the skeleton of Death tolling the bell. Then, you'll receive a subway ticket so you may explore the city and catch the rhythm of daily life in this cosmopolitan gem.

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

Afternoon: The remainder of the day is at leisure to make further discoveries.

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 Prague • Optional Terezin tour

- Destination: Prague
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Hermitage Hotel Prague or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Spend this morning exploring Prague on your own. As it was during the zenith of the Bohemian kingdom, Prague still ranks as the thriving center of the country, with an artistic community reminiscent of Paris in the 1920s. Here you'll find some of Europe's best jazz venues, excellent opera, and innovative theater groups. Dinner is on your own tonight.

Or, join an optional morning excursion to visit the town of Terezin. The first transport of Jews was sent to Terezin in November of 1941. Over the course of the war, the town was transformed into a "model" ghetto called Theresienstadt. In reality, it served as a transit point to the Nazi death camps, and 135,000 people were sent here.

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

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 4 Prague

- Destination: Prague
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hermitage Hotel Prague or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning/Afternoon: Continue exploring Prague at your own pace today.

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

Dinner: Tonight, gather with your fellow travelers for a Farewell Drink at the hotel, followed by dinner at a local restaurant.

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

Day 5 Prague • Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After an early breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight to the U.S.

OPTIONAL TOUR

Terezin

(Day 3 \$100 per person)

Visit the town of Terezin, site of the World War II concentration camp of Theresienstadt. This sobering visit will give you insight into the elaborate subterfuges and propaganda that the Nazi regime used to camouflage its “final solution” to the “Jewish problem.”

POST-TRIP

Vienna, Austria

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » **Accommodations** for 3 nights
- » **4 meals:** 3 breakfasts and 1 dinner
- » **Included tours** with personal headsets:
Schoenbrunn Palace • Spanish Riding School
- » Public transportation pass
- » Dedicated services of a local Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- » All transfers

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Explore Vienna, Austria—a magnificent, culture-rich hub that retains the grace and charm that has helped it stand out among great European cities for centuries. This is a city of museums and music, art and architecture, and famous figures from a storied past. Walk the streets where Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, and Freud strolled about on their daily business. Once the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Vienna came to symbolize the splendor of an age, one recaptured by wandering among the city's Baroque palaces and other stunning architecture.

Day 1 Vienna, Austria

- Destination: Vienna
- Accommodations: Regina Hotel Vienna or similar

Morning: When your journey along *The Great Rivers of Europe* comes to a close, you'll get the chance to spend more time exploring Vienna, Austria on this post-trip extension. This morning, you will receive a day pass for use on the city's public transportation, which you'll take to visit the Maria Theresa's Schoenbrunn Palace on an included audio-guided tour. Once your audio-guided tour ends, perhaps you'll enjoy a stroll through the well-manicured gardens.

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

Afternoon: The rest of the day is yours to do as you please. You may want to browse through one of the city's many museums.

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 2 Vienna • Optional Viennese Highlights tour

- Destination: Vienna
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Regina Hotel Vienna or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning/Afternoon: You have the day at leisure to relax, shop, or explore this unique city on your own. Vienna has served as home and inspiration to some of the world's greatest artists, thinkers, and musicians. Statues of Strauss, Mozart, Beethoven, and Mahler have been erected throughout the city, symbolizing classical music's integral role in Viennese life. The numerous performances of the Vienna State Opera House are the constant talk of the town, and its performers are treated like celebrities. The strains of waltz music emanate from the many cafes, and the entertainment moves outdoors to the sidewalks in good weather.

Or, you may join us for an optional tour that delves deeper into the highlights of Vienna. Begin by visiting the world-famous *Wiener Staatsoper* (Vienna State Opera), built by the Emperor Franz Joseph and inaugurated in 1869 with a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Then, enjoy a short rest with coffee and cake at a local cafe. Your optional tour ends with a visit to Vienna's famous Prater Park, an old-fashioned amusement park. You'll enjoy a thrilling ride on the *Riesenrad*, the park's giant Ferris wheel.

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

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 Vienna

- Destination: Vienna
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Regina Hotel Vienna or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The morning is yours to further sample the delights of Vienna. You might want to visit the Imperial Apartments at the Hofburg Palace. The former residence of the Habsburg rulers contains the 19-room state and residential apartments of Emperor Franz Joseph and Empress Elisabeth, which are open to the public. In an impressively staged exhibition, the Sissi Museum seeks to give visitors an understanding of the myths and reality surrounding the empress.

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

Afternoon: Hop onto public transportation with your Program Director and fellow travelers, stopping at the famous Spanish Riding School, known as much for its architecture as for the talented Lipizzaner horses.

Gather this evening to hear the details of your departure in the morning. Then share memories with your traveling companions during a Farewell Drink at your hotel.

Dinner: Toast to your discoveries over an included Farewell 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 Vienna • Return to U.S.

- Destination: Vienna
- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After breakfast, you are transferred to the airport for your flight home.

OPTIONAL TOUR

Viennese Highlights

(Day 2 \$125 per person)

Begin by visiting the world-famous *Wiener Staatsoper* (Vienna State Opera), built by the Emperor Franz Joseph and inaugurated in 1869 with a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The building was almost completely destroyed in the 1945 bombings, but was rebuilt and presented its second opening in 1955 with Beethoven's *Fidelio*. The new ornate Opera House follows the traditional neoclassicism of the original structure, and has been the showplace of choice for world-renowned performers, such as Maria Callas, Jose Carreras, Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo, and Jessie Norman. Then, enjoy a short rest with coffee and cake at a local cafe. Your optional tour ends with a visit to Vienna's famous Prater Park, an old-fashioned amusement park. You'll enjoy a thrilling ride on the *Riesenrad*, the park's giant Ferris wheel.

YOUR RHINE, MOSEL, MAIN, AND DANUBE RIVER SHIPS

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

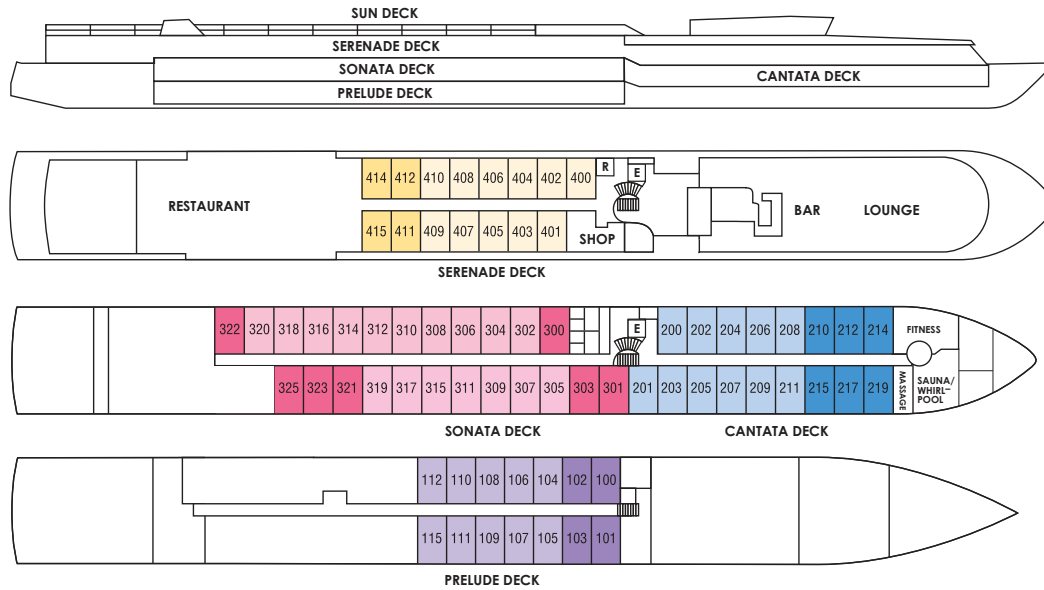
Grand Circle Cruise Line's Rhine, Mosel, Main, and Danube ships were designed specifically to create an unforgettable European river cruise experience for American travelers. Explore storybook landscapes with up to four groups of no more than 38-45 travelers, each with one of our dedicated, local Grand 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

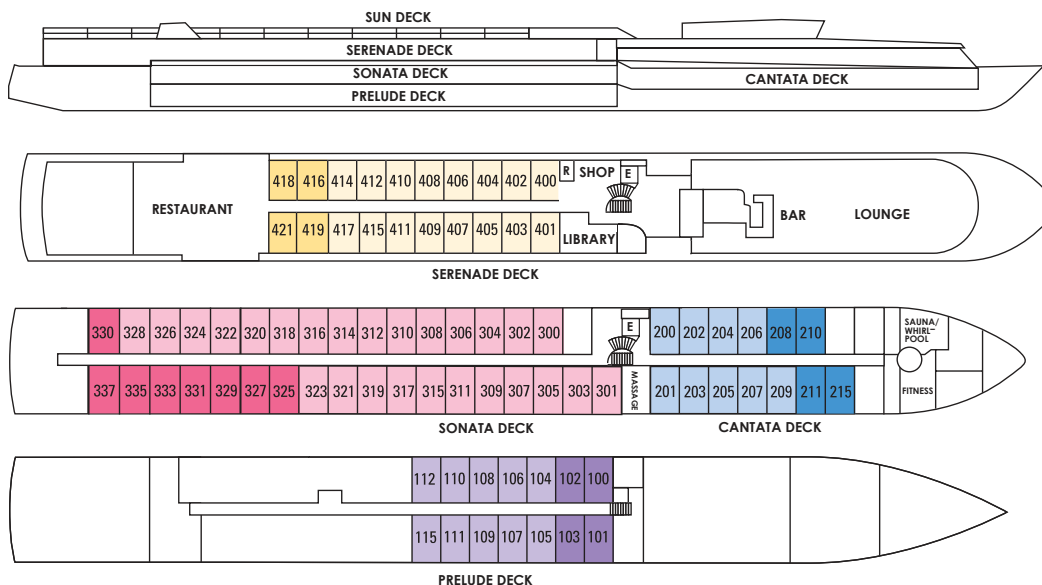
International crew: 34

Decks: 4

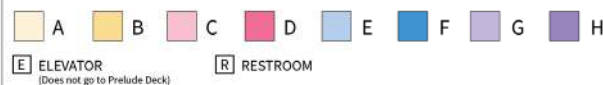
Number of cabins: 70—all outside

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 (Belgium, Austria, Germany, Czech Republic):** 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).

Requirements for the Czech Republic

You will need to bring additional documentation for the Czech Republic, so please read carefully.

According to the U.S. State Department and Czech Embassy, all foreign tourists must be able to provide proof of medical coverage, if asked. ***Not all travelers will be asked—in fact, most travelers won't—and even some local officials are unaware of this rule.*** But occasionally, travelers are asked at passport control or by medical personnel. And if that happens to you, we want you to be prepared.

Specifically, you must be able to show proof of coverage that meets these requirements:

- Be for a minimum of 30,000 Euros (about \$37,000 US dollars at the time of writing).
- Cover possible medical expenses and hospitalization charges while traveling.

- Be valid in Schengen countries like the Czech Republic. Schengen countries are the European Union countries that have signed the Schengen Agreement—for example, Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, etc.
- Include evacuation or repatriation coverage—it must cover the cost of getting you back home if you need to return for medical reasons.

The good news is that our Travel Protection Plan DOES meet these requirements. So what type of documentation you should bring depends on if you purchased Travel Protection with us or not.

If you purchased our Travel Protection Plan: All you'll need to bring is a copy of the coverage from our plan provider. You can download and print a copy of your coverage for this purpose. Go online to www.gct.com/tpp or oattravel.com/tpp, and follow the links to the plan provider's website. This will redirect you to where you can print a copy of your coverage. *TIP: In our experience, the page from Part B with the schedule of benefits is usually enough to satisfy local officials.*

If you did not purchase Travel Protection with us: You will need to bring some other form of proof of coverage. If your own health insurance meets the requirements above, contact your insurer for a letter stating that you are covered. A certificate of coverage or proof of purchase from a private insurer or another Travel Protection Plan will also suffice, as long as the requirements listed above are met. *However, **Medicare cards are not acceptable**, since Medicare does not cover medical expenses abroad.*

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 3–4 groups onboard) each with a local Program Director exclusive to Grand Circle

PACING

- 15 days, with 14 nights aboard the 162-passenger M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio* (two departures per year will be aboard the M/S *River Harmony*, featuring comparable amenities)
- 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 or colder conditions
- Optional activities and elective walks may be offered in addition to the ones mentioned in our day-to-day itinerary
- Agility and balance needed for boarding small canal boats and navigating steep, 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 162-passenger river ship and 49-seat coach
- Changes in water-level depths may require adjustments to your itinerary

- Docking for the following locations may be up to 30 minutes outside of the city center, with transportation to and from the ship by motorcoach: Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Nuremberg, Germany; Cologne, Germany; Koblenz, Germany; Regensburg, Germany; Bamberg, Germany; Vienna, Austria

CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures range from 40–73°F during cruising season
- June–August are the warmest months

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’ll visit is perfectly safe for drinking, although it may not taste the same as at home.
- If you prefer bottled water is usually for sale in hotels, food shops, and restaurants.
- Another alternative is to bring a reusable water bottle from home, which you can fill up on the ship or in your hotel before you set out for the day.

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 Czech crowns if you are taking the Prague 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 (€)

Czech Republic: Czech Koruna (CZK pr Kr.)

Some establishments will accept euros, but the exchange rates are usually not favorable, and any change will be in Czech crowns. If possible, use local currency or credit/debit cards.

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, large post offices, and money exchange 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 will only exchange money for their own customers. One exception is in the Czech Republic, where it is more economical to try a bank first. 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.

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

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

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.

Austria: Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in Austria. 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:** 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:** A service charge is usually included in restaurant and bar bills. If not, it is customary to leave a tip of around 10% of the bill for your waiter or bartender.
- **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 10 crowns in the Czech Republic or half a euro elsewhere—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. In this case, the fee is set and no tip is needed.

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.

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

Another option is to use a smartphone app like Skype or FaceTime. These services are usually less expensive than making a traditional call, but you’ll need a Wi-Fi connection 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.

Austria: +43

Germany: +49

Belgium: +32

Netherlands: +31

Czech Republic: +420

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	
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	

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.

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
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ☐ Sleepwear
- ☐ Socks and undergarments
- ☐ A jacket or sweater, depending on the time of year

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—see “Regional Electricity” section.
- ☐ 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 repellent
- ☐ 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 Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, and Austria 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, smartphones, 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 even though you'll only need the European plug adapter on this trip, 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:

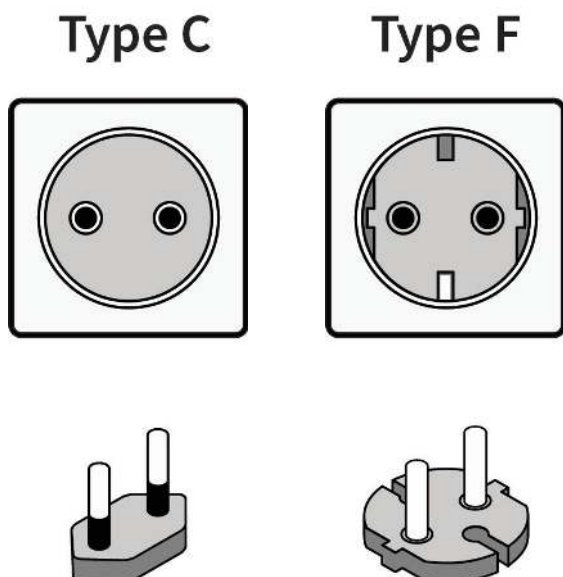
Austria: C and/or F

Belgium: C

Czech Republic: C

Germany: C and/or F

Netherlands: C



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.

Austria: Austria has a central European climate: variable weather reigns, and rain and drizzle are common occurrences year-round. Spring weather is moderate, with intermittent sun and showers; afternoons in early spring average about 60° F and about 70° later in the season. Summers are typically sunny and warm, though you should be prepared for a few cloudy and wet days. Evenings, too, can get quite chilly. Autumn weather with some drizzle comes early to this region of the world, so by November it can be on the brisk side, with daytime temperatures in the mid to high 40s, and evenings that dip into the 30s.

Czech Republic: In spring, variable weather reigns: some years it's warm, in others it's cool. Summer days are typically very warm, though there may still be some brisk days. Temperatures start to fall in early autumn, and winter weather begins settling in by early November. In general, you can expect average spring temperatures in the low 60s, summer in the 70s, and fall in the 50s. **However, if you're traveling in July or August,** be prepared for heat waves that can spike the temperatures up past the average and into the 90s.

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.

Traveling in Summer? Expect Heat Waves

We'd like to call out that the last few summers in this region have been extremely hot, with average temperatures in the mid-80s and prolonged heat waves in the 90-100 degree range. If you are traveling in the summer, know that we may need to adjust our daily activities to avoid the hottest parts of day and that many shops, restaurants, etc. do not have air conditioning.

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, we 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	NUREMBERG, GERMANY			VIENNA, AUSTRIA		
	Temp. High- Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	35 to 26	86	5	39 to 31	84 to 75	1
FEB	39 to 27	82	4	43 to 33	82 to 68	2
MAR	47 to 32	76	4	52 to 38	81 to 62	4
APR	56 to 38	69	5	63 to 46	76 to 54	2
MAY	65 to 46	67	6	73 to 55	76 to 54	7
JUN	71 to 52	67	7	79 to 59	76 to 57	4
JUL	74 to 55	68	8	84 to 63	76 to 54	7
AUG	72 to 54	71	8	88 to 64	78 to 54	5
SEP	66 to 48	77	6	75 to 57	84 to 61	5
OCT	55 to 41	82	6	63 to 48	86 to 65	2
NOV	44 to 34	85	6	50 to 39	86 to 75	3
DEC	37 to 29	87	6	40 to 33	85 to 78	2

MONTH	PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC			BRUGES, BELGIUM		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	37 to 29	91 to 84	15	39 to 35	87	18
FEB	41 to 30	92 to 76	12	39 to 34	88	16
MAR	50 to 36	89 to 63	16	45 to 38	86	17
APR	62 to 44	83 to 51	16	51 to 44	82	16
MAY	67 to 50	79 to 53	17	58 to 49	79	14
JUN	75 to 57	85 to 55	17	63 to 54	81	14
JUL	79 to 60	85 to 54	18	66 to 58	82	15
AUG	78 to 59	88 to 53	16	68 to 59	81	14
SEP	68 to 51	90 to 60	15	64 to 55	78	15
OCT	56 to 43	91 to 68	16	58 to 51	82	16
NOV	47 to 38	91 to 83	17	48 to 43	86	19
DEC	40 to 38	90 to 85	14	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.

Cultures Along the Rhine, Main, and Danube Rivers

Dutch Culture

There is a saying that “God created the earth, but the Dutch created the Netherlands.” It refers to the fact that more than half of the Netherlands's physical area are lowlands (called *polder*) that were literally reclaimed from the sea. The story of this amazing engineering feat begins in the 12th century, and it is a testament to the Dutch people's pragmatism, industriousness, ingenuity, and sheer determination. These are traits that the Dutch are still proud of today.

That pragmatic streak informs another trait the Dutch are known for: *verdraagzaamheid* or tolerance. Since the 16th century, the Netherlands has been a humanitarian haven for immigrants, asylum seekers, and religious refugees (such as the English Puritans who settled here before continuing on to America as Pilgrims). The Dutch have always been interested in new ideas, and today this open-mindedness has led to permissive policies on women's rights, free speech, drugs, sex, LGBTQ rights, and more. For example, prostitution, euthanasia, and recreational marijuana use (in coffeeshops) are legal here (albeit, with restrictions).

This does not mean that the Dutch are libertines. Many have very strong views on what constitutes “right” behavior. But even the pragmatists, the Dutch simply prioritize policies based on doing the least amount of harm, that is, minimizing the negative social and economic costs of various human behaviors, whether legal or not.

The most liberal enclaves here, as elsewhere, tend to be urban. And they tend to lie within a U-shaped region called the *Randstadt* which means “rim city” or “edge city.” The *Randstadt* is a densely-populated megalopolis that includes the country's four largest cities—Amsterdam, the Hague, Utrecht, and Rotterdam—plus all their associated suburbs. It is the country's economic powerhouse, and it dominates the national culture. The *Randstadt* covers the provinces of North

Holland, South Holland, and Utrecht, so its people are called “Hollanders.” Given the term’s geographic and social connotations, people *outside* the Randstadt resent being lumped into that group. That’s why it is proper to call the country “the Netherlands” and not “Holland.”

In the past, the more significant social distinction was a matter of *verzuiling* or “pillarization.” This was the *de facto* segregation of society based on religious, social and political affinities. People would self-identify among the various pillars which had their own schools, hospitals, newspapers, social clubs, and mutual aid systems. Since the 1960s, when the Dutch social welfare system became more comprehensive, people no longer need to rely on their pillar groups for support, as there is less of an economic imperative for belonging to one.

Today, pillarization has been replaced by a broader middle class that enjoys access to free or subsidized healthcare, education, retirement, housing, and unemployment benefits—and contributes to the hefty tax system that pays for them. This is available to Dutch people who are *autochtoon* (indigenous or native-born) and for the most part also to *allochtoon* (non-indigenous residents). That being said, the Netherlands’ famous tolerance has been tested over the past few decades by an increase in Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. There has been a concomitant rise in far-right populism that blames immigration for a rise in religious extremism and terrorism; and a perceived loss of prosperity and Dutch identity. So far, this is still a minority opinion.

Meanwhile, the majority of Dutch people you meet will be notable for their unpretentiousness and good humor. They like to poke fun at themselves and others—especially those who flaunt their wealth or are otherwise showoffs. Most Dutch people are quite fastidious, a trait reflected in the spotless streets and tidy homes. They are equally meticulous about time, so if you are late for something, you’d better have a good excuse. The Dutch are considered quite individualistic so it is difficult to generalize. But perhaps the most common Dutch trait is directness: they are honest, forthright, and even blunt in their speech—so don’t expect a Dutch person to mince words. They tend to eschew sarcasm, and prefer that you deliver your opinion straightforwardly. Don’t worry: they can take it, and do not hold grudges.

German Culture

You may be familiar with the persistent stereotypes about Germans being no-nonsense, workaholic, logic-driven rule-followers. But your preconceptions may be challenged when you encounter Germany’s modern multiculturalism; and its largely liberal, free-thinking, sexually open, and party-loving modern citizens. The fact is, the cultural aftermath of Germany’s role in two world wars has prompted the nation to re-assess its traditional attitudes. Along with this, the regionalism that has historically shaped lifestyles has been further enlarged since the reunification of East and West Germany, whose people had very different postwar experiences.

But a few of the generalizations have some basis. . . . For instance, Germans are typically very direct, and very honest. So when they deliver an opinion it will not be ambiguous or sugar coated. For this reason, some people may mistake them for being blunt. But to a German, speaking frankly is not considered rude, it is considered truthful, and the truth is helpful.

The opinion being delivered is likely to be well thought out, as Germans place a great value on logic and critical thinking. This is reflected by Germany's great accomplishments in science, engineering, and technology; and by its pantheon of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers, poets, and philosophers. How this manifests itself in daily life is evident in how efficient and punctual everything is—be it public trains, the national health service, or the vaunted trash recycling program. Even the German language is structurally logical.

Perhaps the capacity for honesty and critical thinking has helped Germany in its long process of "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*." It's a word that describes the nation's struggle to come to terms with its negative history—specifically, the Nazi era and the Holocaust. Germany has been notably forthright about this. Many cities boast monuments, museums, and centers dedicated to the study of anti-Semitism; while there are no monuments to war heroes of the Third Reich. All school curricula include frank sections on the Nazi era. Reparations have been paid to Holocaust survivors; and overall, Germany's institutions have been willing to engage in thoughtful, albeit painful conversations about past complicity and present responsibility.

Many have linked Germany's work to confront past guilt to its current welcome of refugees. Though the migrant crisis is not without controversy, most Germans support the government's liberal policies and the leadership role Germany has assumed here. Another impact of WWII has been the breakdown of class barriers. Most Germans had to rebuild everything from scratch, but because many basic necessities were covered by social welfare programs, today's Germans enjoy a comfortable, middle class existence. The biggest disparity exists between east and west: recovery has been slow for those in the former German Democratic Republic, which suffered more difficult and lasting material hardships in the Soviet era. West German states today pay a financial support tax to ease the gap.

Along with different accents, there are different attitudes, traditions, and religious affiliations from region to region. Metropolises like Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Munich are renowned for alternative lifestyles and tolerance, whereas people in smaller towns are more conservative.

Privacy is highly valued in Germany, so people tend not to divulge a lot of personal information about themselves at first. But Germans usually become very open and genuinely warm once they get better acquainted with you. Their sentimental streak comes out when they share *gemutlichkeit*, a feeling of warmth, affection, coziness, nostalgia and celebration. If you are invited to join in, please do—and enjoy. Resistance is futile.

Austrian Culture

Austria has much to be proud of when it comes to cultural milestones: the music of Mozart, Haydn, Strauss, and Mahler; the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Husserl; the psychoanalysis of Freud; the art of Klimt, Schiele, and Kokoschka; and much more. As the home of the Hapsburg dynasty, Austria exerted unprecedented influence over the course European history, from the Middle Ages up until the first World War. Today, Austria enjoys political stability and an enviable standard of living; it is home to many international agencies; and it has maintained its neutrality, even during the height of the Cold War, when it was a conduit between east and west.

Yet with all that, outsiders often confuse Austrian culture with that of Germany, which causes many Austrians to resent being cast in the shadow of their larger neighbor. Though the two nations share a language, the German that is spoken in Austria is closer to the Bavarian dialect than Standard (High) German. Austria shares a border with Germany, but also with seven other nations—Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Each of these countries have, in turn, influenced the traditional heritage, foods, architecture, and customs of the Austrian regions they border. Austrians are generally very proud of their regional identities.

Austrians tend to think of themselves as more easygoing than most Germans. This comes across in what is called *Schmäh*. This is a uniquely Austrian sense of humor that originated among Viennese cabaret performers, and is now prevalent all over Austria. Where Germans are said to be direct, proper, and literal, *Schmäh* relies on a subversive sense of irony, sly wit, and innuendo. It can be self-deprecating, and is all in good fun, so don't take offense if an Austrian seems to be teasing you.

Austrians love to socialize and place a high value on good conversation. Many of them belong to local clubs or interest groups called *Vereine*, where they can share their love of sports, music, charitable work, hobbies, or civic or political causes. It's very traditional for friends and family to gather at the local *Gasthaus* (pub), *Heuriger* (wine pub), or coffeehouse to relax and socialize for hours. This is an important aspect of *Gemütlichkeit*, which is a state of friendliness, warmth, nostalgia, and happiness. If food is being served, or if it just happens to be lunchtime, you will often hear people greeting each other with the word "*Malhzeit*," which literally means "mealtime" but is really an acknowledgement of the pleasure that is about to be shared.

One topic that is not so freely shared, especially among older people, is World War II. In 1938, the German army entered Austria unopposed, and Austrians voted in favor of the *Anschluss* (annexation) by Germany. Hitler, himself an Austrian, was enthusiastically welcomed, and Austrians served the Reich at all levels. But after the war, there was a deliberate effort push the myth that Austria was "the first victim" of the Nazis. This became the official narrative, and as a result there was no mass de-nazification program in Austria (as there was in Germany.) Nazi supporters resumed their place in society. And Austria used its "victimhood" to avoid having to pay war reparations.

This began to change in 1985–86, when former UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim ran for president. Questions about Waldheim's actions as an intelligence officer in the German Wehrmacht led to an international outcry—and an inward reckoning about Austrian guilt and responsibility. In 1988, Austria began making restitutions to Jews and other Nazi victims, to the tune of \$860 million. Today, the younger generation is more open to what is called the "endless discussion," but it is still a topic that should be broached with sensitivity.

Language

Nestled between France and the Netherlands, and frequently overrun by foreign invaders, **Belgium** has historically been a polyglot nation. Today there are three official languages here. About 59% of Belgians speak Flemish (the Belgian form of Dutch), especially in northern Flanders

which encompasses Antwerp, Bruges and Ghent. In southern Wallonia, French is the main language. Brussels and the surrounding 19 municipalities of the Capital Region have both French and Flemish as official languages. Overall, about 33% of Belgians speak French. Fewer than 1% speak German, and they are largely concentrated in the eastern province of Liege. Plus, there are the languages of Belgium's large immigrant community, which include Berber, Turkish, Greek, and Arabic speakers.

Most people speak at least two languages but which ones, and why, are matters of social and political significance. In the 19th century, French was the language of the elite and those who spoke it had the most social mobility. This created resentment among Flemish speakers, who became more militant about promoting their linguistic roots. It's a divide that persists today. The good news is that about 52% of Belgian people speak English. This is especially true in major cities and among young people. In fact, Belgians are more inclined to answer you in English than they are in Dutch if their preferred language is French, or vice versa. Your Program Director can advise you on what the *lingua franca* happens to be in the specific area you are visiting. Otherwise, remember that in Belgium as everywhere, everything is best said with a smile.

The official language of **Austria** is German, and it is spoken by 98% of the people. In some regions, minority languages include Slovene, Croatian, and Hungarian. The spoken form of German that most Austrians use is Bavarian, sometimes called "Austro-Bavarian." Nearly all Austrians know at least two languages. The most popular foreign tongue is English, which is spoken to some degree by about 73% of the population.

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.

In the **Czech Republic**, the majority of the population speaks the official language, Czech, as their first language. Among the other languages spoken by minorities in the Czech Republic are Romani, German, and Polish. Prior to 1989, learning Russian in school was mandatory. Today, especially among young people and in cities, English is the most popular foreign language and about a third of the people speak it (more in cities.)

The official language of **the Netherlands** is Dutch, whose roots (like those of English) are West Germanic. It was called *Duutsc* in the Middle Ages, which morphed into the English "Dutch." But 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 and around town you may find signs and advertisement in Dutch and English (and even in English only.)

Dutch Idiomatic Expressions

The Dutch sense of humor comes out in the many colorful idioms used in everyday speech. Even if they have no English equivalents, the literal translations can be funny in and of themselves. By the way, these are all safe to use in polite company:

For some reason, the Dutch have a slew of expressions where monkeys are a prime reference. For instance, there's "*nu komt de aap uit de mouw*" (now the monkey comes out of the sleeve.) It's the Dutch equivalent to "now the cat is out of the bag." When someone does something wonderful, you might say "*Ik ben apetrots op je*" (I am monkey proud on you). On the other hand, if something you say is met with the rejoinder "*een broodje aap verhaal*" (a monkey sandwich story), your tale sounds dubious, like an urban legend.

Not all expressions have a simian sensibility. If a Dutch person wants to tease you about your haircut, they'll ask "*ben je van de trap gevallen?*" (did you fall down the stairs?) It's shorthand for "*he fell down the stairs and broke his hair.*" The Dutch are well-known for being direct, but oddly, a favorite way to express this is obtuse, as in "*met de deur in huis vallen.*" It literally means to "fall into the house with the door," but it's not about barging in or making a clumsy entrance. It just means getting straight to the point.

If you are complimenting the chef on a delicious meal, you might say it tasted "*alsof er een engeltje over je tong piest*" (as if a small angel peed on the tongue.) Conversely, if you are offered something distasteful or risky-looking, you could say "*Ik ga liever gewoon dood*" (I'd rather die the regular way.)

Finally, when you are flabbergasted by something that really takes the cake, you might say "*nou breekt m'n klomp*" (now that breaks my clog.)

Religion and Religious Observances

The Netherlands is a 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.

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.

Austria is a predominantly Christian country, but as in most other western European nations, church attendance is on the wane, and about 22% of the people claim no religious affiliation whatsoever. About 57% of Austrians identify as Catholics; nearly 9% are Eastern Orthodox; almost 8% are Muslim; and 3.3% are Protestant. Interestingly, nearly half of Austria had converted to Protestantism during the Reformation, but in 1545, the Hapsburgs enacted a very strict counter-Reformation, and Catholicism has been the majority religion ever since. For many modern Austrians, Catholicism is a cultural identification and even if they do not hold religious beliefs, they still observe Catholic rituals around important life events such as baptism, confirmation, marriage and funerals.

There was a Jewish presence in Austria as far back as the 3rd century AD. On the eve of WWII, there were 181,882 Jews living in Austria, most of them in Vienna. Most were able to emigrate, but of those who remained, the vast majority, some 65,500, was murdered. Today, there are about 9,000 Jews living in Austria, but they are mostly immigrants from Georgia and Bukhara.

Walking through the Old Town of Prague, where every corner, bridge, and square are lined with saint's statues and religious icons, it's hard to believe that the **Czech Republic** has the distinction of being one of the least religious countries in Europe, if not the world: some 89.2% of Czechs say they are nonreligious. This includes atheists, but also those who are unaffiliated with any church but may have some spiritual belief. The remaining 10.3% identify as Roman Catholic, and 0.5% belong to Protestant or other denominations.

The Jews were once a vibrant community here, particularly in Prague. But most were killed or forced to flee during the Holocaust. Today, there are only about 2,000 people in Prague who identify as Jews, though many more ethnic Jews may live there who do not practice Judaism. Prague's Josefov Jewish quarter boasts many historic landmarks of this once thriving community, including the oldest continuously used synagogue in Europe, the Old New Synagogue. People of all faiths are welcome to visit and rediscover this rich heritage.

River and Canal Locks

Your ship will pass through over 60 locks on this cruise, so that begs the question—what is a lock? At its simplest a lock is like an elevator for a ship—a device that can safely raise or lower a ship between stretches of river that have different water levels. While there are many different types of locks, the most common works by sailing the ship into a large, well-like compartment that has a set of gates in front and behind the ship. Once the gates shut, it makes the compartment watertight and you can either pump water into it (raising the ship up) or drain water out the bottom (lowering the ship). Once the correct water level has been reached, the gates at the front open, and the ship can continue on its way. We mention them here because not only are locks

cool feats of engineering, but they can also be a bit of a surprise if you've never experienced one before. So should you feel the ship raising/lowering and see stone walls on either side—you're in a lock.

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.

Austrian Cuisine

Austria has quite a bit of culinary overlap with neighboring Germany. But you have only to consider the scope of the Hapsburg Empire to understand the many influences that have also shaped the national cuisine: the empire once ruled over Switzerland, Holland, Alsace, Burgundy, Spain, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and Italy, and happily appropriated many of their ingredients and cooking techniques. This is to say nothing of the Turkish influence that wafted westwards across the Austro-Hungarian empire.

- One constant on Austrian menus is the national dish, **wiener schnitzel**, the classic Viennese veal cutlet which is pounded till thin, breaded, fried and served with wedges of lemon and greens. It can also be made with chicken or pork.

- **Tafelspitz:** A filet of beef (or veal) that is gently simmered with vegetables, and served with applesauce and horseradish. Late spring brings spargel, or asparagus, which are particularly tender and flavorful here. It'll appear as a special on many menus, often served with a delicate hollandaise or just butter, lemon, and toasted bread crumbs.
- **Kasspätzln:** A Tyrolean casserole of chewy, hand-made egg noodles that are mixed with sauteed onions, covered with *bergkäse*, a strong local cheese, and baked till browned. Before serving, it is topped with crispy fried onions and parsley.
- **Speckknödeln:** A bacon dumpling that is often served as an appetizer or in stews or clear soups. It is just one of the dozens of different dumplings that grace the Austrian table.
- **Frittatensuppe:** Or “pancake soup” is a Styrian specialty that is popular all over Austria. It's a bowl of clear beef consommé with strips of cooked crepes or pancakes.
- **Würstelstande:** Or sausage booths. These street stalls are the go-tos for snackers on the go, and the sausage of choice will usually be a wiener sausage, which Austrians will only ever call a “Frankfurter.” You can also ask for a *bratwurst*, a *Käsekrainer* (which is studded with cheese), or a *Debreziner*, which is a lightly-smoked, reddish sausage spiced with paprika.
- **Sachertorte:** A classic chocolate sponge cake layered with apricot jam, and covered in chocolate ganache. It's available all over, but for the quintessential Viennese experience, try it where it originated, at the Sacher Hotel, or at the famed Demel bakery.
- **Mozartkugel:** Small, round candies are balls of pistachio marzipan and nougat, covered with dark chocolate.

One thing Austria can thank the Turks for is coffee. Legend has it that when Hapsburg troops chased the Turks out in 1683, the retreating invaders left behind bags of coffee beans. Within two years the first Viennese coffee house opened, and the rest is history. In 2011, UNESCO designated Viennese coffee house culture as part of humanity's intangible cultural heritage, saying that the coffee houses have a “very specific atmosphere” and are places “where time and space are consumed, but only the coffee is found on the bill.”

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!

Czech and Slovak Cuisine

Like their neighbors, the Czech Republic and Slovakia share a culinary heritage that emphasizes meat, potatoes, dumplings, and fermented vegetables (usually, sauerkraut). These are often served with heavy gravies or sauces, but the high-caloric impact is somewhat mitigated by the

fact that most Czechs and Slovaks eat their heaviest meal at lunch, and have a lighter supper of just cold cuts and condiments. You'll also find that in the major cities, young chefs are experimenting with lighter and healthier versions of the classic dishes they grew up with.

- **Vepro-knedlo-zelo:** Shorthand for *veprové s knedliky a kyselé zeli*, this dish consists of a succulent roast pork and dumplings concoction that is often seasoned with caraway, and served with sauerkraut. You will see it on just about every restaurant menu.
- **Houskové knedlíky:** Bread dumplings made with flour, yeast, egg yolks and milk, sometimes with bread cubes added to the mix. After the dough rises it gets boiled or steamed, then sliced.
- **Ovocné knedlíky:** Fruit-filled dumplings served with cottage cheese as a main course.
- **Bryndzové halušky:** Potato dumplings (similar to Italian *gnocchi*) topped with a creamy, soft, Slovakian sheep's milk cheese that has its own EU protected designation of origin status. It is then topped with crumbled bacon bits and a garnish like chopped chives, onions or dill. It is the national dish of Slovakia, but it's also popular in the Czech Republic, especially in Moravia.
- **Svicková na smetane:** A dish where beef is marinated in vinegar and herbs; then roasted with vegetables; then simmered till tender. The broth and vegetables are pureed with sour cream to make a sauce, and it all gets garnished with cranberries.
- **Párek v rohlíku:** The quick meal where a small *parek* sausage is completely enclosed within the bun, like pigs in a blanket.
- **Laskonky:** A dessert of two crispy meringues filled with caramel or chocolate buttercream.
- **Trdelník:** A dessert made by wrapping dough around a metal or wooden stick, then roasting it over an open flame. The tubular treat is then dusted with sugar, and topped with nuts and cinnamon.
- **Veterník:** A profiterole made of puff pastry filled with vanilla and caramel cream. The whole pastry is then dipped in a shiny caramel icing for a belt-busting grand finale.

Pubs are an integral part of Czech and Slovak life, and the region brews some of the best beer in the world. In the Czech town of Plzen, brewing dates as far back as the founding of the town, in 1295. Plzen is internationally known for its award-winning *Pilsener Urquell*, and there are numerous other local beers that perfectly accompany the region's hearty food.

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.”

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:

- **Stamppot:** 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 stamppot 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).

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.

Vienna in Brief

Vienna's “Ring,” once the location of the city walls and today a broad boulevard in the inner zone (the oldest part of the city), encircles most main sights. In the center is Stephansplatz, site of the city's famous St. Stephen's Cathedral. Just a short walk away is the Hofburg (the Habsburgs' official residence), the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Art History Museum), and the Staatsoper. The pedestrian thoroughfare, Kaernter Strasse, is the city's major shopping venue; it runs from Stephansplatz past the Staatsoper to Karlsplatz. The “Ring” itself is two and one half miles long and 187 feet wide. Constructed in the mid 19th century to protect Vienna from outside threats, the Ring encircles the Old City. All sites inside the Ring are part of the First Bezirk (or 1st precinct, designated by the #1010 in addresses). The remainder of the city is also sectioned into precincts.

Local Transportation

Vienna is divided into 23 numbered districts. Most sights are concentrated in the city center, the 1st District, which is largely a pedestrian zone and easily reached by public transportation. Many 1st District attractions are within walking distance of one another. You can walk from one end of the Old City to the other in about 30 minutes. Even the walk from the Ring to either train station is only a half hour or so. Beyond this central hub, districts proceed from the 2nd on up to the 23rd.

Vienna's transit network consists of five U-Bahn (subway) lines, trams, buses, and several rapid transit and commuter trains. Ask your Program Director or hotel concierge for more information about the best options available for obtaining tickets to your desired destination.

Note on Ticket Validation: You must validate all tickets yourself by inserting them into machines at the entryway of S-Bahn and U-Bahn platforms or on buses and trams. When entering streetcars, look for a blue box with a white “E,” which is for validating tickets.

Viennese Specialties

Like the rest of Austria, Viennese cuisine is the culmination of various ethnic influences, including Bohemian, Hungarian, Croatian, Slovenian, German, and Italian. But the city has a few local specialties you may wish to try:

- **Soups:** *Griessnockerlsuppe* (clear soup with semolina dumplings), *rindsuppe* (beef broth), and *gulaschsuppe* (Hungarian-style goulash soup).
- **Main courses:** Familiar dishes are *bauernschmaus* (a combination of many varied sausages and pork items with sauerkraut and dumplings), *tafelspitz* (boiled beef with vegetables), *wiener schnitzel* (breaded veal or pork cutlet), *schweinebraten* (roast pork), *backhendl* (fried and breaded chicken), and *gulasch* (stew). *Nockerl* are little dumplings, usually served with sauce.
- **Desserts:** Vienna's *apfelstrudel* (apple strudel) is probably the best in the world. *Palatschinken* are light, sugared pancakes; *klaisherschmarren* is a diced omelet, served with jam and sprinkled with sugar. And of course, don't miss the famous *sachertorte* (chocolate cake with layers of apricot jam)!
- **Coffee:** Austrian coffee, of which there are at least 20 varieties, is delicious and not to be missed. Introduced 300 years ago by the Turks during their unsuccessful attempt to conquer Vienna, coffee has become an art form, served in veritable institutions known as the Viennese coffeehouses. Among the many kinds of coffee are *kleiner schwarzer*, a small cup without milk; the *melange*, a large cup with foamy milk; *mokka*, strong black Viennese coffee; *kapuziner*, which is the same as *melange* but topped with whipped cream; and *tuerkischer*, Turkish coffee boiled in a small copper pot and served in tiny cups.

Prague in Brief

Prague, an ancient and historic city, is the capital of the Czech Republic (made up of Bohemia, Moravia, and part of Silesia). The city, located at the crossroads of Europe, is both ancient and modern and possesses a palpable energy. Getting around Prague can be a bit tricky—many of the streets are small, narrow cobblestone paths that seem to wind about endlessly. But the “city of 1,000 spires” is one of the most beautiful you will ever see.

Prague is really a series of five historic towns welded together to form one great city. The river Vltava slices through Prague, giving the city its distinctive bridges. Hradcany, the castle district, is on the river's west bank with Prague Castle and St. Vitus cathedral nearby. Below this section lies Mala Strana (the Lesser Quarter) with buildings dating back to the 13th century. Petrin Hill to the south offers wonderful views out over the city. On the east bank of the river is Stare Mesto (Old Town) with its large central square. Nearby is Josefov, the former Jewish ghetto. Nove Mesto (New Town, though parts of it go back to the 14th century) stretches around parts of Stare Mesto and historic Wenceslas Square. The Charles Bridge, a city landmark, stretches over the Vltava and links much of the city.

Ruzyne airport is in the western suburbs of the city. The Prague Information Service offers good information about Prague and is located in Old Town Square. The Tourist Office (Cedok) at Na Prikope is also a good place for information and maps.

Prague is a lovely city for walking so be sure to stroll the Royal Way, which takes you by some of the city's architectural treasures, including Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. In Hradcany stop to see the Strahov Monastery and the Summer Palace. If you are a fan of classical music you'll want to stop in at the Smetana Hall in Obecni Dum. The Museum of the City of Prague in northern Nove Mesto is an impressive and interesting stop. Wenceslas Square in Old Town and Josefov in Stare Mesto both offer excellent walking and sightseeing opportunities.

Local Transportation

Subway: Prague's modern subway system—the Metro—is easy to use and spotlessly clean. It provides the simplest and fastest means of transportation, and most new maps of Prague mark the routes. Subways run daily from 5 am to midnight with trains every two minutes during peak hours, slowing down to every ten to fifteen minutes by late in the evening. There are several lines, each a different color, which intersect at various points in the city center and the route plans are easy to follow. Once inside the Metro, acquaint yourself with these words: vystup means exit, and prestup means connection.

Tram/Bus: You'll probably stick to the Metro, but a bus ride can be a good way to see some of the city, especially if you want to venture farther out. You need to buy a new ticket every time you change vehicles.

Taxi: These are not recommended, as some drivers try to take advantage of tourists and inflate the price, possibly by driving miles out of the way. If you must take a taxi, it is best to use the hotel's taxi service—it is a little more expensive than taxis found at taxi stands but it is more reliable. Another choice is to ask the hotel to contact AAA Taxi for you (or call them at 233 113 311)—AAA Taxi is also dependable and they speak English. If you choose instead to use a taxi at a taxi stand or one you hail on the street, definitely agree on a price beforehand!

Punch your ticket on the Metro, trams, and buses: For the Metro, punch the ticket in the station before getting on the escalators; for buses and trams, punch the ticket inside the vehicle.

Bruges in Brief

City Layout and Details

The heart of Bruges is encircled by a broad circular canal that opens at its southern end to become the Lac d'Amour (Lake of Love). This lake served as the town's busy port in the Middle Ages, before the silting of the Zwinn. Today, a lovely green park lines its shores. Southwest of the lake is the railway station. Bruges's narrow streets fan out from Grote Market, the vast central square, and the network of canals weaves its way to every corner of this small town.

Local Transportation

On foot: The best way to see both Bruges and Ghent properly is to stroll through their charming little cobblestone streets at leisure. Just be sure to wear your sturdy walking shoes.

Bicycle: Biking is a favorite transport method of the locals, and it's a terrific way to see the towns at your own pace. Accommodating bikers are beautiful canal-side, tree-lined roads. Bikes can be rented at the Bruges train station. Discounts are given for rentals of three days or more.

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

Austria

Popular buys include glassware, crystal, porcelain, petit point, musical instruments and scores, fur hats, ski wear, and, of course, lederhosen (leather pants), loden-cloth coats, and sachertorte (chocolate cake). But be forewarned: the quality of Austrian wares is exceptionally high, and so are the prices!

Value Added Tax: In Austria, a Value Added Tax is levied on most articles, services, and meals, and ranges from 10% to 30%. Depending on how much you spend on certain goods in specially marked Tax Free Shopping stores, you may be eligible for a partial refund of this tax. Ask the shopkeeper or salesperson for details. Be sure to save all receipts and the special Global Tax Refund forms for Customs, as receipts alone are not enough.

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*.

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic many stores sell a wide range of crafts and tourist goods, such as Bohemian glass, porcelain, crystal, peasant pottery, wooden toys, jewelry, and folk carvings. Modern artwork and crafts are sold at private art galleries.

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.

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.

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

Austria

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 32,382 square miles
- **Capital:** Vienna
- **Languages:** German is the official language. English is also spoken, particularly in all tourist areas and major cities.
- **Location:** Austria is bordered by Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein.
- **Geography:** Landlocked in Central Europe, Austria features the mountainous Alps in the south and west, but also is home to flat plains and gentle slopes in the north and east.
- **Population:** 8,665,550 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 73.8%, Protestant 4.9%, Muslim 4.2%, Orthodox 2.2%, other 0.8%, none 12%, unspecified 2%
- **Time Zone:** Austria is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Vienna.

National Holidays: Austria

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

01/01 New Year's Day

01/06 Epiphany

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

08/15 Assumption of Mary

10/26 National Day

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/08 Feast of the Immaculate Conception

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 St. Stephen's Day

Austria: A Brief History

Austria has been populated since Neanderthal times, but its most significant early culture was the Hallstatt, which arose around 400 BC when Celtic people settled along the shores of the Hallstatter See. The Celts formed a confederation called Noricum, established a prosperous salt trade, and forged iron implements. When Romans arrived in 15 BC, they made the area a province. In exchange for their excellent Noric steel (which the Romans used for swords), the Celts received protection—and they needed it, as Germanic Teutons and other tribes invaded.

When Charlemagne arrived in the 8th century and created a zone in the Danube Valley called the East March. In 976, the Babenburg dynasty became the margraves of this “eastern realm” or Österreich, German for “Austria.” The Babenburgs extended the territory and made Vienna their capital. When they died, Rudolf I took over in 1278, ushering in the dynastic powerhouse that dominated Europe for 500 years. Consolidating power through strategic marriages, they built a network from Spain to the Netherlands to Germany. The Hapsburgs were all prince-electors of the Holy Roman Empire, and from 1452 they elected their kinsmen as its Emperors. But holding power was not easy. In 1618 Europe erupted into a Thirty Years War that caused nearly eight million deaths. It was largely a contest between Bourbon and Austro-Spanish Hapsburgs. Things further destabilized when the Turks advanced to Vienna. They remained a threat until 1699.

Austria bloomed during the Enlightenment reigns of Maria Theresa and her son, Joseph II. They instituted reforms, and were patrons of the arts (with Mozart as their court composer). Decades later, a result of the Napoleonic wars was that the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved in 1806. But the Hapsburgs survived, creating a German Alliance of hundreds of small states. In 1867, Austria and Hungary united as a dual monarchy—and reveled in the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s cultural flowering. Vienna, newly magnificent after a flurry of building, was its epicenter. The Empire prospered until Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in 1914, sparking World War I. The 1919 defeat of the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Turkey, and Bulgaria) ended the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which split into several nations per the Treaty of Versailles.

Austria became a republic, but suffered inflation, unemployment, and the loss of a national identity. Political tensions erupted into violent street fights, and in 1934, a Conservative government took legislative powers from the parliament, making Austria a fascist country. Though the Treaty of Versailles had expressly forbidden the reunification of Germany and Austria, Hitler (himself an Austrian) had other ideas about this Anschluss. When the Nazis goose-stepped into Austria in 1938, they were welcomed by cheering crowds. Austria’s military, economy, and political infrastructure were integrated into Germany’s war efforts; the execution of Jews and resistors stepped up; and many Austrians participated in the Nazi’s crimes.

Austria was liberated by Allied and Soviet troops in 1945, a second republic was established, and Austria remained under occupation. In 1955, Russia demanded that Austria declare its neutrality as a condition for ending Soviet occupation. This status enabled Austria to be a bridge between East and West during the Cold War. But the nation never came to terms with its war history. That started in 1986, when former U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim ran for president. He won and served until 1992, and investigations into his wartime activities were inconclusive.

Austria joined the EU in 1995, adopted the euro in 1999, and is one of Europe’s most prosperous nations. It is considered a liberal democracy, and consistently ranks high for its quality of life.

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.

Czech Republic

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 30,451 square miles
- **Capital:** Prague
- **Languages:** Czech is the official language.
- **Ethnicities:** Czech 64.3%, Moravian 5%, Slovak 1.4%, other 29.3%
- **Location:** The Czech Republic is bordered by Austria, Slovakia, Poland, and Germany.
- **Geography:** Landlocked in Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic comprises the ancient provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, with a mountainous rim on the German border to the west.
- **Population:** 10,644,842 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 10.4%, Protestant 1.1%, other or unspecified 54%, none 34.5%
- **Time Zone:** The Czech Republic on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Prague.

National Holidays: Czech Republic

In addition to the holidays listed below, the Czech Republic celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. 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

05/08 Victory in Europe Day

07/05 Saints Cyril and Methodius

07/06 Jan Hus Day

09/28 St. Wenceslas Day

10/28 Independent Czechoslovak State Day

11/17 Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 St. Stephen's Day

The Czech Republic: A Brief History

Though the Czech Republic is less than 50 years old, its culture dates to the 5th century BC, when groups of Celts calling themselves “Boii” settled in Bohemia, which means “home of the Boii.” By the 6th century, the Celts were replaced by Germanic and Slavic tribes. Around 631 AD, Samo, a Frankish merchant living in the area, formed a coalition of Slavic tribes, became their king, and won victories against the Avars and the Franks. His short-lived kingdom was the first Slavic state.

A unified Slavic state continued with the formation of Great Moravia, an empire that included the Duchy of Bohemia. The region soon fell under the influence of German dukes, and in 950 became part of the Holy Roman Empire. Fast-forward to the 14th century, the Czech golden age. Under the enlightened reign of Charles IV, who was elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1355, Bohemia was a center of power, culture and prestige.

By the 14th century, Jan Hus, a rector at Charles University in Prague, advocated for church reform and against corruption. He gained a huge Czech following two centuries before the Protestant Reformation. Hus was burned at the stake in 1415, and in 1419 his followers stormed Prague's Town Hall and tossed Catholic councilors out the window in what is called the “Defenestration of Prague.” Bohemia and Moravia remained Protestant strongholds, but as the Hapsburgs consolidated power, they confiscated Protestant lands. The Hapsburgs dominated for 300 years, leaving an ambiguous legacy. Though they suppressed dissent and imposed Austrian culture, they also provided stability. Under Empress Maria Theresa and her son Joseph, serfdom was abolished, public education was provided, and the region's Jews gained rights. An industrial middle class emerged. And there was a renewal of Czech language and culture.

World War I brought the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the establishment of the first independent Czechoslovakia—a joint state between ethnic Bohemians, Moravians, and Slovaks. Czechoslovakia thrived until Hitler annexed the country in 1939. Bohemia and Moravia became a protectorate of the Reich, and Slovakia became a puppet state. Prague was spared significant physical damage, but the resistance was destroyed and two-thirds of the nation's Jews were murdered. In 1945, the Nazis withdrew; Czechoslovakia was reconstituted; and in 1947 2.5 million resident ethnic Germans were expelled to Germany and Austria.

The Soviets took power in 1948, sending thousands of Czechs to prison. Resistance emerged in the 1960s with the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Alexander Dubcek, who espoused “socialism with a human face.” It smiled upon the world during the Prague Spring of 1968, when there was an outpouring of democratic sentiment. Dubcek loosened restrictions on the press, speech and travel. But in August, 1968, the Soviets invaded with Warsaw Pact troops, replaced Dubcek with a hardliner, and began reprisals against protest leaders (including activist-playwright, Václav Havel).

As Communism fell across Europe in 1989, the most striking revolt was in Czechoslovakia. When Prague police brutally attacked a peaceful student demonstration, dissidents led by Václav Havel negotiated the government’s resignation on December 3, and Havel was elected president. Forty years of Soviet domination were swept aside in what has been called “the Velvet Revolution.” Soon after independence, differences between the Czechs and Slovaks became irreconcilable. So on January 1, 1993, they agreed to a “Velvet Divorce” and split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999, and the EU in 2004. Today, the Czech Republic is a pluralist multi-party parliamentary democracy. The country has held numerous free elections without incident, and the economy has remained relatively robust.

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 of 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.

Merkal 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.

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 BCC 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.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

The Rhine and Mosel

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.

A Time of Gifts: On Foot to Constantinople: from the Hook of Holland to the Middle Danube by Leigh Patrick Fermor (2005, Travel Memoir) The author looks back on the first leg of a walking journey he made at age 18. He meets farmers and noblemen, describes dazzling architecture and home-spun meals, observes flora and fauna, and does so with all with curiosity and enthusiasm of youth. It is 1934, and Hitler has come to power. What lends the book such poignancy is that we know what the author could not have imagined then, that the world he celebrates will soon vanish forever. A classic of travel writing.

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.

The Pâtissier: Recipes and Conversations from Alsace, France by Susan Lundquist (Cooking/Travel) The author, an American expat, moved to Alsace in the middle of a strike that crippled the city. To the rescue came her chef-neighbor, who not only gave her helpful advice on all things Alsatian, but introduced her to the fabulous cuisine that is as heartwarming as the friendship that grew between them.

Austria

The Habsburgs: The History of a Dynasty by Benjamin Curtis (2013, History) Discover how this Austrian family gained power—and held it—for more than 500 years, shaping all the nations featured on this adventure.

When Nietzsche Wept: A Novel of Obsession by Irvin D. Yalom (2013, Fiction) Set in 19th-century Vienna, this novel is built upon a clever conceit: the psychoanalytic sessions between the impoverished and suicidal philosopher, Frederic Nietzsche; and distinguished physician Josef Breuer, who is undergoing his own existential crisis. The twist is that Nietzsche, too proud to seek help, does not know that he is Breuer's "patient." As the two meet in Vienna's salons and coffeehouses, we encounter the personalities of the day, including Sigmund Freud, and gain a sense of the healing power of connection.

The Age of Insight by Eric Kandel (2012, Art) This book takes us to Vienna in 1900, where leaders in science, medicine, and art began a revolution that changed forever how we think about the human mind—our conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions—and how mind and brain relate to art. Kandel traces the ideas and advances of Vienna, in rich and rewarding detail, and their enduring influence today.

The Painted Kiss by Elizabeth Hickey (2005, Historical Fiction) The author, an art historian, imagines the relationship between the artist Gustav Klimt, and his younger model-mistress, the couturier Emilie Flöge. She was the inspiration for his famous work, *The Kiss*, and it was her name that he uttered as his dying words.

The Austrians: A Thousand-Year Odyssey by Gordon Brook-Shepard (1996, History) A noted historian, draws upon his long-standing associations with Austrian leaders and his special access to the private Hapsburg family archives to trace the identity of Austria as it developed over a millennium.

Belgium

The Wisdom of the Beguines: The Forgotten Story of a Medieval Women's Movement by Laura Swan (2016, History) *Beguines* 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.

Czech Republic

Prague Winter: A Personal Story of Remembrance and War, 1937–1948 by Madeleine Albright (2012, Biography) Former Secretary of State Albright describes her early life in Czechoslovakia during the Nazi occupation and World War II. Albright spent much of her childhood in exile in London, and was too young to understand the forces at work in her birth country. For that, she relies here on historical research but also the letters, journals, and articles of her remarkable family and their friends. A stellar example of how the personal becomes the political.

Me, Myself & Prague: An Unreliable Guide to Bohemia by Rachael Weiss (2008, Travel Narrative) When the author uproots herself and moves from Australia to Prague she hopes to reinvent herself in a specific way—as a worldly and chic novelist—but ends up discovering more about who she was all along.

The Garden Party and Other Plays by Václav Havel (1994, Plays) Written by the famed playwright who went on to become the first president of post-communist Czechoslovakia. These absurdist plays blend politics with typical wry Czech humor to capture the mood of a country on the brink of great change.

Love and Garbage by Ivan Klíma (1986, Fiction) When Klíma wrote this book in 1986, it was banned by the Communist regime. Three years later, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, it became a sensation. It follows the ups and downs of a dissident artist forced to be a garbage man in Communist Prague. He collects far more than trash.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being by Milan Kundera (1984, Fiction) Passion, politics, and philosophy; loyalty and lies; these are just some of the themes explored in this novel, which follows a young woman in love with a philandering surgeon in Prague of the 1960s.

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.

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.

Suggested Films & Videos

Austria

The Woman in Gold (2015, Drama) Helen Mirren stars as Maria Altmann, an Austrian-Jewish Holocaust refugee who successfully sued the Austrian government for the return of a major artwork that was stolen from her family by the Nazis: Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bauer-Bloch*, who was her aunt. Based on a true story.

Museum Hours (2012, Drama) A lonely guard at Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Art Museum befriends an enigmatic American visitor, who has been called here due to a family emergency. Through conversations sparked by the art they both admire, the two begin sharing their lives, and the life of Vienna.

Before Sunrise (1995, Comedy/Drama) Two strangers meet on a rain and decide to get off in Vienna for just one evening. As they explore some of the city's most evocative landmarks, their conversations go from wryly philosophical to deeply personal, before they must decide to go their separate ways. Stars Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke collaborated on writing the sparkling dialogue.

Amadeus (1984, Drama) The pious Italian composer Antonio Salieri is obsessed with his rival, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, whom God has favored with divine talent and worldly success—despite Mozart's immaturity and vulgarity. The Oscar winner for Best Picture, this epic from director Milos Forman is gorgeously filmed, and lifted by its pitch-perfect performances by F. Murray Abraham (as Salieri) and Tom Hulce (as Mozart.)

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.

Middle Europe

The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014, Comedy/Mystery) This film was shot primarily in Saxony (Germany) and it takes place in the fictional Republic of Zubrowka, but it beautifully conjures a rich Mitteleuropa nostalgia and has an uproarious story-within-a-story format—plus a killer cast. Ralph Fiennes is the debonair concierge of a grand hotel who deftly contends with his quirky staff, wealthy guests, fascist agents, and the theft of a priceless artwork. Directed by Wes Anderson at his light-hearted (but always precise) best.

Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Czechoslovakia

Anthropoid (2017, Drama) Based on the true story of Operation Anthropoid, an attempt by World War II Czech and Slovak partisans to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich, architect of the Final Solution and the so-called “Butcher of Prague.”

Ice Mother (2017, Comedy/Drama) Hana, a recent widow, has her spirit nearly crushed by her dysfunctional family, with whom she gathers every Saturday for the traditional dinner. Things get disrupted when she meets Brona, who welcomes her into his quirky club of cold-water swimmers, but warms things up in other ways.

Kolya (1996, Comedy/Drama) An Oscar winner for Best foreign Language Film. Kolya is an aging ladies man and professional cellist, after being flippant with Russian officials, he loses his orchestra position. To make money, he marries a Russian woman for pay so she can get her papers. But when the cellist is left with 5-year old son, he changes his tune.

Kafka (1991, Drama) Directed by Steven Soderbergh and starring Jeremy Irons as the legendary Czech writer Franz Kafka, this unconventional biopic blends events of the author's life with fantasy scenes from his fiction. Segments of striking black-and-white cinematography add to the moody allure of 1920s Prague.

The Shop on Main Street (1965, Drama). The Oscar for Best Foreign Film of 1965 went to this story about a disillusioned carpenter, Tono, who is appointed the “Aryan controller” of a button shop owned by an old Jewish woman. By Nazi decree, Tono is the shop’s new owner, but the kind Mrs. Lautmann is so senile, she thinks he is just a nice helper. The two end up forging a delicate bond, but when a roundup of Jews begins, Tono must make a terrible moral choice.

Fireman’s Ball (1967, Comedy) Made just before the Prague Spring, this is the last film that the renowned Miloš Forman directed before going into exile in the US. A masterpiece of the Czech New Wave, this veiled critique of Soviet bureaucracy is wrapped in a comic tale about a retirement fete being hosted by some small town firemen. None of the actors were professionals— they were the actual firemen of Vrchlabí, a Czech village.

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.

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 Johanssen), 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.

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

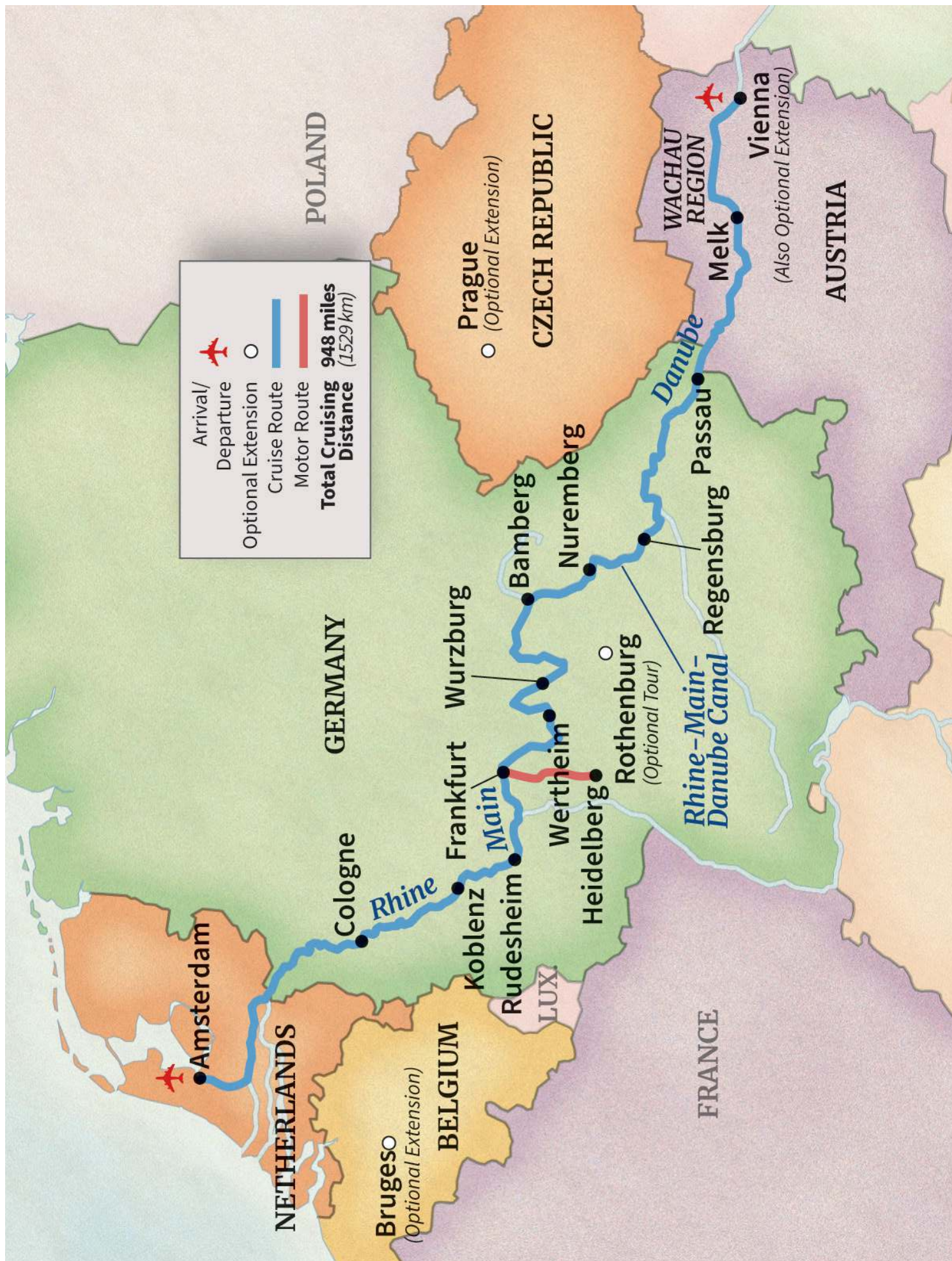
For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

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



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



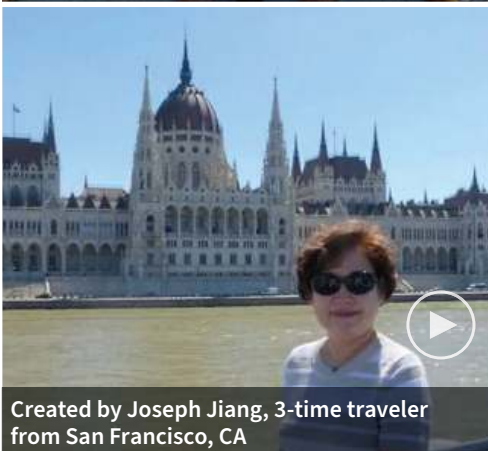
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Submitted by Elinor Graham, first-time
traveler from Ocala, FL



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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