

R IS FOR... RIVERS

River cruising is on the rise. The first Celebrity River Cruises launch in Europe next year, TUI will have 10 cruisers by 2028, *GH* Reader Recommended Avalon Waterways has a fleet of 15 'Suite Ships' in Europe and Viking will have 112 ships sailing on 21 rivers by 2028. Angelina Villa-Clarke tried AmaWaterways, which offers more than 100 river cruises in 32 countries.

A river cruise along the Rhine is the closest you'll get to stepping inside a real-life fairy tale. The early morning fog lifts to reveal the white turrets of Stolzenfels Castle, close to the German town of Koblenz, and the romantic scenery makes every guest sigh.

I'm a new convert to river cruising, having been seduced by the slow, scenic way in which you can tick off a variety of destinations in one hassle-free voyage. AmaWaterways Rhine Castles and Swiss Alps itinerary takes you through four countries – the Netherlands, Germany, France and Switzerland – in just eight days.

I board the luxury brand's newest river ship – the 443ft AmaSofia – in Amsterdam, before which we explore the city's atmospheric canals, passing by its 17th-century 'dancing houses' (so called because of their narrow, crooked appearance), Anne Frank's house and the Rijksmuseum. AmaSofia, which takes up to 152 guests in 76 staterooms, is decorated with a serene cream-on-cream palette lifted with flashes of rust, terracotta and amber. The suites and staterooms on the top Violin Deck are the most spacious (up to 350sq ft), each with a balcony, white marble bathroom and bed placed to make the most of the views.

While we sail through the Netherlands' flat countryside, windmill sails piercing the horizon, I start to explore. On the sun deck, there's a small pool with a swim-up bar, a walking track and seating areas to take in the passing landscape. Excursions are helpfully graded in fitness levels, whether you want a slow meander around Cologne or a hike across French vineyards. The ship also has its own fleet of bikes.

As the sun dips below the horizon, we sip cocktails – from spicy margaritas to hibiscus sangrias – while learning about the next stop. Dinner is served in Journeys, the ship's main restaurant,

where we enjoy locally inspired cuisine such as traditional German lentil soup and käsespätzle (homemade egg noodles) in Cologne.

AmaWaterways was the first river cruise line to be invited into La Chaîne des Rôtisseurs – a society dedicated to world-class cuisine – and at the speciality Chef's Table guests get to experience that, with locally sourced wine pairings.

My week on board seems to pass as quickly as the scenery and as we sail through the Rhine Gorge, past some 40 castles, I grab a blanket and watch from the ship's bow. At every turn, another palace appears, even more elaborate than the last. Impossibly romantic, it's a real Cinderella moment. ➡

SAIL AWAY: AmaWaterways (amawaterways.com) offers a seven-night Rhine Castles and Swiss Alps cruise on AmaSofia from £3,859pp, including full-board accommodation with a choice of soft and alcoholic drinks to accompany meals, all excursions and flights, outbound to Amsterdam and returning from Basel.



Right: roll through the countryside and into the heart of European cities such as Cologne (inset) on specially designed AmaSofia

ADDITIONAL WORDS: EMMA JUSTICE. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY, VRX STUDIOS