

Sailing on a stream of success: Europe's river cruise industry continues its expansion

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Europe's river cruise industry continues its growth path, with 1.36 million cruise passengers sailing on Europe's rivers in 2016, up 2.7 percent from the previous year. Almost 39 percent of last year's guests came from the US and Canada: "North America turns into an ever more important source market for Europe's river cruise operators, as does the UK with a spectacular eleven percent leap in terms of passengers last year", says Frederik Erdmann, European River Cruise Correspondent for Seatrade.

With the growth of overseas guests, Europe's rivers also see the arrival of new ships – and new concepts. Last year, 22 new riverships entered service in Europe (out of a global orderbook of 31), another 17 will follow this year. "We are seeing new visions, new ideas and new concepts arriving, with Crystal River Cruises' Crystal Bach and Crystal Mahler being inaugurated late this summer as two spectacular examples. Technologically, the successful return of paddle wheel propulsion has made new destinations available – particularly along rivers with a shallow or seasonally varying water level", Erdmann continues.

On the other hand, Europe's river cruise industry also faces a number of challenges: Rules and regulations continue being highly diversified from country to country, certain touristic hotspots are facing signs of congestion, recruiting good crew is getting increasingly difficult, and security is a critical issue in river cruising as much as in ocean cruising. "One of the most important among all is rescheduling the time and the place of docking. The reasons are mostly due to the low water level or overbooking for one of the terminals during the high summer season. Since there are five passenger terminals on river Danube and river Drava, at a distance of only 150 km, we have to reschedule cruise passengers to the nearest passenger terminal, so their shore excursions can continue without delay and our passengers stay satisfied", Alen Jakumetov?, Managing Director, Port Authority of Vukovar, comments on the issue of high capacity utilisation.

The safety and security of river cruise passengers has never been tighter, and Lucas Sandmeier, General Manager Operation, Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours, gives an insight on how to marry up the increase in demand with levels of security: "The challenge is to find ways to not compromising the very arguments that lead to the success of river cruise. Combine this with the ever increasing demands to provide security to its travellers, the equally increasing number of regulations and desires from authorities, regulators, governments and unions as well as the introduction of technology to deliver a guest experience, and the mix may produce a product that has little resemblance to the so successful river cruise of today".

Monic van der Heyden, Commercial Manager Cruise for Port of Amsterdam, also offers a statement on the topic of security for river cruise ports: "Security is a joint responsibility of the industry, port authorities, but also of crew and passengers. The topic is at the focus of all parties involved. Some river cruise companies are working individually on security guidelines and regulations".

Still, while challenges are lurking in different fields, Europe's river cruise industry is not at all short of optimism. Perspectives for the years ahead look altogether promising: "It's a great time to be in river cruising, with new ships, new destinations and new concepts keeping the industry fresh and innovative", comments Ben Wirz, Managing Director, GRC Global River Cruises GmbH, "here at Uniworld, we're particularly excited about the launch of a new concept in 2018 aimed at capturing the millennial market – U by Uniworld. As our guests become more independent, design innovations ensure we keep on exceeding their expectations, while advances in technology allow us to continue to reduce emissions and work towards a more sustainable future for the rivers we sail".

As river cruising in Europe is fluctuating, ocean-going cruise lines are now looking to expand into this market, including the prominent example of Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines who launched their new dedicated river cruise programme for 2018 onboard the 156-guest rivercruise ship Brabant. Justin Stanton, sales and marketing director for Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines, is excited to see the new offer taking off next year: "We are proud to be bringing our many decades of expertise and rich sailing heritage to the river cruise market for the very first time".

These opportunities and challenges of river cruising in Europe will be subject to debate at Seatrade Europe 2017, taking place in Hamburg from 6 – 8 September. There will be dedicated conference sessions focusing on two major river cruise topics: The "Identifying river innovation" session will concentrate specifically on new designs, new ships and innovative concepts, and it will also look at trend changes and the evolution of passenger requirements. The second session, "Shore activities and turnarounds - a security risk for Europe's rivership guests?" concentrates on another aspect of the business – the need to provide a secure environment for passengers exploring some of Europe's major capitals and cities during the course of their river cruise.

Daniel Buchmüller, Chief Services Officer, River Advice AG and President, IG RiverCruise, will be one of the executive panellists taking part in the conference. Says Buchmüller: "The transformation to modern, more comfortable river cruise ships consistently pursued over the last years. On the other hand, environmental and societal challenges will continue to grow. Innovation is a key to attract new passengers - and to surprise repeaters. Security is a key to maintain the passenger's confidence. Both River Cruise Sessions cover these topics that move the industry these days".

To find out more about the full programme, and for regular updates, please visit www.seatrade-europe.com/programme/conference

About Seatrade Europe

Seatrade Europe, the leading trade event of the European cruise and river cruise industry, organised by Hamburg Messe und Congress GmbH, in partnership with Seatrade (UBM EMEA), is held in Hamburg, Germany's famous seaport on the Elbe River. Industry decision-makers and professionals will meet to exchange ideas, set new trends and expand their business networks. Exhibitors include shipyards, ship chandlers, food and beverage suppliers, classification societies, cruise ports and shipbrokers, among others. From small-scale on-board hospitals to huge restaurant kitchens, from waste disposal to entertainment equipment, operations on board a cruise ship are highly complex, requiring perfect logistics. At the conference held in parallel with the exhibition, high-level experts will discuss current industry topics. Seatrade Europe will open doors from Wednesday 6 to Friday 8 September 2017.

For full details about Seatrade Europe, visit www.seatrade-europe.com

Find out more about Seatrade and UBM, visit [Seatrade](http://www.seatrade.com) and [UBM EMEA](http://www.ubm.com)

Cruise Week in September 2017

From 1 to 10 September 2017, the port of Hamburg will again be transformed into a giant stage for major cruise events. For the second time, Hamburg will be bundling its cruise events and welcoming both the public and industry experts for ten days. The highlights are: Seatrade Europe (6-8 September) – Europe's meeting point for the cruise industry, the Hamburg Cruise Days (8-10 September) – Europe's largest public cruise event as well as two events organised by CLIA (5–6 September), the world's largest cruise association. Throughout the events, the port will again be illuminated and transformed into Blue Port Hamburg by lighting artist Michael Batz (1-10 September).

More information at www.hamburgcruisedays.com/cruiseweek

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