

GET ON BOARD

Take it from these six executives: The future of river cruising is bright.

INTERVIEWED BY KIMBERLEY LOVATO

A fairy-tale backdrop on the Rhine for Uniworld's *Antoinette*.



CRUISE THE WORLD'S RIVERS and you'll watch history drift by, from sparkling imperial cities and crenulated castles to cobblestoned villages and colorful fishing ports. While these waterways were once the domains of ancient traders, intrepid explorers, and the

occasional pirate, modern travelers have taken to them, appreciating this style of cruising's ease and new perspective on a destination. The cruise lines hosting this year's Virtuoso Symposium attendees lay out an alluring welcome mat, with refined accommodations, high-end

dining, and plenty of special amenities. They're proof that good things really do come in small, luxuriously appointed packages – and ships.

We asked six executives to share the current trends they've noticed in river cruising, plus what's in store for their ships in the future.



The *AmaKristina* on the Danube and (right) one of the ship's staterooms.



GARY MURPHY
Vice President of Sales
AmaWaterways

“Something that’s really exciting to see is more **multigenerational families** on our ships. Families are discovering that river cruising is a great way to get together and make new memories. We’re designing more of our ships to accommodate grandparents, parents, and adult children. Some of our new builds will have interconnecting cabins, and our itineraries cater to families by offering more choice. I’ve traveled with my mom (age 89), who

prefers to stay on board and relax or read; my daughters (21, 23) like to bike through the cities and villages we visit or spend time in onboard gyms with trainers; meanwhile, my wife and I may want to go on a winetasting tour through a local vineyard. What’s so great about this style of family travel – and we see it all the time – is that **everyone can do what they want** and meet up back on board and chat about what they saw. With family members of different ages, it’s hard to plan a trip that makes everyone happy. On our ships, there’s no pressure for anyone to take that on. We handle it all.”

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The *Avalon Impression's* Panorama Lounge and (top) Royal Suite.



PAM HOFFEE
Managing Director
Avalon Waterways

“Active has become a real buzzword in cruising. And people want to **really immerse themselves** in a destination. We launched our Active Discovery cruises on the Danube in 2017 to address these trends. Passengers choose from three types of included-daily shore excursions:

Active (hiking, biking, canoeing), Discovery (painting classes in Amsterdam, cooking lessons in Vienna), or Classic (seeing the iconic sites with great guides). We expanded the program to the Rhine in 2018, and in 2019 it debuts on the Rhône. We’re also adding an Adventure Host, who will be an expert resource on all things active, on every sailing next year. They’ll manage our new Adventure Center – the place to go for bikes, helmets, picnic blankets, and more. Even more big news for 2019: We’ll have an **entire fleet of Suite Ships**, and it will be our only class on the water. We’re excited to have travel advisors on board at Symposium to hear about more new products and technology we’re launching for our guests.”



KATHARINE BONNER
Senior Vice President –
River and Small Ship Cruising
Tauck

“People are discovering that **small is the new luxury**. We’ve just finished retrofitting our 387-foot ships: We reduced the number of cabins, made 20 of them 50 percent larger, and decreased the passenger count from 118 to 98. Our 443-foot ships accommodate only 130 passengers, which is 20 to 60 fewer than industry standards. Why is this good for travelers? Not only are we able to give guests the larger cabins they want, but **it creates a different atmosphere on board**. People can gather in the lounge or restaurant and easily meet each other. We didn’t reduce our staff and we have just as many tour directors who can deliver our signature service at an even more personal level. We spend a lot of time thinking about the destination experiences passengers have, and, more important, this new intimate size lets us create more exclusive, authentic experiences for them.”



The *Savor's* sundeck and (top) the ship cruises the Rhine.





A Viking longship on the Rhine and (below) its veranda suite bedroom.



MICHELE SAEGESSER

Vice President of Sales and National Accounts
Viking Cruises

“Our guests want more chances to **dive deeper into a destination**. While we deliver the expected shore excursions – museums, landmarks, cathedrals – we are now seeing passengers wanting to go beyond that. Our chairman, Torstein Hagen, says Viking is ‘the thinking person’s cruise,’ and consequently, we offer guests itineraries with excursions that feature the Local Life, the Working World, and Privileged Access. We create experiences passengers will never forget: soaking in Budapest’s thermal baths, exploring beer culture in Cologne, truffle hunting followed by a farmhouse dinner in Saint-Emilion, or a day of digging for oysters in Bordeaux. Our Privileged Access options are unbelievable. Passengers can go behind the scenes at Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre, go inside England’s Highclere Castle, visit Prague’s Lobkowitz Palace on a **tour designed for Viking by Prince William**, or see Cologne from the roof of the city’s cathedral, which is one of my favorites.”



ELLEN BETTRIDGE
President and CEO
Uniworld

“Our customers want to be active, but they still want **authentic experiences on board and onshore**. We want our activities to be as unique as we are, so there’s more choice on our menu of activities, from golfing in Normandy to hiking in vineyards along the Rhône or biking through Belgrade. In some places, it’s even possible to bike between ports. Active travelers love it because it makes them feel more connected to a location. The other great thing about

these itineraries is that **we’re attracting younger passengers** – by which I mean the 50- to 55-year-old crowd. In April, we’re introducing U by Uniworld, a fresh approach to river cruising aimed at an even younger audience [ages 21 to 45]. The ships are super sexy and cool, like trendy boutique hotels. Everything is designed for connecting: The main lounge features communal booths and tables, the top deck has a glass-enclosed Ice Bar and a silent disco, and the restaurants have top-shelf wine and lots of sharing plates. The quality of everything will still be top-notch.”



U by Uniworld’s *The B* and (below) a river-view suite on Uniworld’s *Antoinette*.





Crystal Bach's Vista Bar and (right) one of the ship's suites.



CARMEN ROIG

Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing
Crystal Cruises

"While guests are making it a priority to get out and explore a destination to the fullest, **onboard experience and customization** is also growing in importance. Affluent travelers have a standard they're accustomed to, and no matter where they go, that standard needs to be met or exceeded. Last year, Crystal launched the industry's first all-balcony, all-suite river ships with *Crystal Bach* and *Crystal Mahler*. Our goal is to deliver incomparable luxury through exceptional service and unique opportunities to

see destinations. **Culinary expectations continue to be in demand too.** In addition to farm-to-table cuisine, Crystal's menus are an extension of destinations on the itinerary, so passengers can expect locally sourced meat, fish, and other delicacies. This year, new curated destination excursions include Personal Connections, Tantalizing Gastronomy, Cultural Discoveries, Exhilarating Adventure, and a Design Your Time concierge service that gives guests an opportunity for customization. Each river itinerary will also feature inclusive signature events that offer rare access and musical performances in iconic landmarks."



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SHIP INTEL

A few fun facts and pro tips about the vessels you'll be cruising the Rhine on.

1

"Virtuoso Symposium attendees will be the first to see U by Uniworld's *The A*. The ship's maiden voyage isn't until April 14."
– Ellen Bettridge



2

"My favorite spot to spend the afternoon on *Crystal Bach* is the Palm Court. It's a beautiful oasis for relaxing and watching Europe pass by. Enjoying a cup of coffee, tea, or one of our vintage wines completes the afternoon." – Carmen Roig



3

"Our casual dining venue, Arthur's, was named after our chairman, Arthur Tauck. Go there on the *Savor* for a meal or a snack, or order a martini the way Arthur likes them – blended – and watch the river as you sip." – Katharine Bonner



4

"The *Viking Mimir* is named after the Norse god of wisdom. One of my favorite places on board is the Aquavit Terrace – I like having breakfast there."
– Michele Saegesser



5

"Even in winter, the heated pool on *AmaKristina*'s top deck is great; add a glass of wine or hot brandy, and it's certainly a 'return on life' moment."
– Gary Murphy

6

"The Club Lounge is a space at the back of every Avalon ship where you can go 24 hours a day for cappuccinos, lattes, cookies, and more. It's one of my favorite spots on board the *Impression* – I'll admit I have a little bit of a coffee addiction."
– Pam Hoffee ♦

1. The rooftop bar on U by Uniworld's *The B*, sister ship to *The A*. 2. *Crystal Bach*'s Palm Court. 3. Dinner at Arthur's on Tauck's *Savor*. 4. *Viking*'s Aquavit Terrace. 5. The heated pool on *AmaKristina*. 6. The *Avalon Impression* on the Danube.