

Falling for cruise

Autumn river sailings are perfect for clients who want to beat the heat and explore without the crowds, writes **Clare Vooght**



Austria's Salzburg Castle, overlooking the Salzach River

PICTURE: Shutterstock/TIStudio

It may not be the peak time of year to book a holiday, but when could be better for a relaxing river cruise than autumn – when the leaves turn amber, summer crowds have waned, but it's still pleasant enough to sit on the sun deck and watch the world go by?

With operators reporting healthy sales for autumn cruises, now's the time to sell one for this year or next.

"Our autumn cruises have sold very well this year and are proving particularly popular with our older clientele, who prefer to travel without the heat and the crowds," says John Fair, CroisiEurope's UK sales director.

Uniworld Boutique River Cruises managing director Chris Townson agrees. He says: "Autumn is a fabulous time to river cruise. The cities are less busy, temperatures pleasant, the trees full of colour and harvests are in full swing, so fresh fruit and veg are delicious and in abundance – a visit to the local

market with the chef is always full of treasures. My tip would be to book early to secure the sailing and cabin that your clients want. Many of our guests prefer to travel outside school holidays, so September and October can be very popular."

Plus, with lines offering ever-more interesting themed and special-interest trips alongside their classic itineraries, there's a shoulder-season sailing for every customer. Here, we take a look at some of the most enticing autumn journeys with availability this year and into 2025.

BEST FOR...GARDENS

The cruise: Gardens & Natural Beauty of the Rhône with Charlie Dimmock, Riviera Travel

The details: In Lyon, green-fingered guests will visit the botanical garden at Parc de la Tête d'Or – home to, for starters, 30,000 rose bushes and more than 1,000 orchid species. They'll also take in the ➤

DESTINATIONS

CRUISE | RIVERS IN AUTUMN



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: See tigers in India with Pandaw; take dance lessons with A-Rosa; visit Parc de la Tête d'Or in Lyon with Riviera Travel; stop at Dürnstein, Austria, with Scenic **PICTURES:** Unsplash/Donnie Roy Crisp; Shutterstock/ricochet64

Roman ruins and pristine lawns at Vienne's Jardin de Ville, and L'Espace Van Gogh, a garden dedicated to the artist, in Arles. Plus, for this special autumn sailing, guests will be joined by gardening expert Charlie Dimmock. She'll be offering tips in three onboard talks as well as attending some of the excursions, including a visit to the Maison de la Lavande lavender museum in Ardèche.

Book it: The eight-day sailing, departing on October 17, costs from £2,149, including meals, drinks package, flights or Eurostar travel and transfers.
rivieratravel.co.uk

BEST FOR...MUSIC

The cruise: Gems of the Danube, Scenic

The details: This sailing will be music to clients' ears, with a private performance at Vienna's baroque Palais Liechtenstein by an orchestra playing pieces by Strauss and Mozart, exclusively for Scenic guests. A visit to Salzburg will bring them to the picturesque home of *The Sound of Music*, at the foot of Alpine peaks, along with a baroque Old Town where Mozart was born. Other stops on this well-rounded itinerary include Regensburg, one of Germany's best-preserved medieval towns, while excursions span everything from

cooking Hungarian goulash to e-biking past pretty vineyards from the village of Dürnstein to Melk.

Book it: A six-day sailing, departing October 20, costs from £1,999, including flights, transfers, meals and premium drinks.
scenic.co.uk

BEST FOR...WILDLIFE

The cruise: The Full Brahmaputra, Pandaw

The details: New for October, this wildlife-focused cruise travels India's less-visited Brahmaputra River on low-draft vessels that can chart shallower waters. This allows them to travel farther into the Assam Valley past the state's second-largest city, Dibrugarh. The route takes in Dibru Saikhowa National Park – home to leopards, elephants and wild horses – and Kaziranga National Park, where clients might be lucky enough to glimpse a greater one-horned rhino or a Bengal tiger. Expect a birdwatcher's heaven in Dibru Saikhowa park, a designated biosphere reserve. There's also a chance to explore the region's culture: when in Assam, clients can visit a tea-growing estate and see the Mishing people hand-weave traditional dress on Majuli, the world's largest river island. ➤



Vicky Billing
head of trade and
partnerships,
Riviera Travel

"Themed cruises are growing in popularity and provide a great way to offer something new to repeat guests and appeal to a wider audience. I'd advise agents to focus on the one-of-a-kind nature of these itineraries. They truly offer something different, fusing the classic river cruise experience with curated programmes on board and ashore, designed to enrich guests' lives."



Nick Hughes
sales, strategy and
partnership director,
Scenic

"Exclusive access to musical, dining or art events is a huge draw for many travellers. Tapping into your customers' interests and providing them with behind-the-scenes exclusive access is a big opportunity that we encourage our trusted agent and tour operator partners to highlight."

Best
OF THE
REST

SEE EUROPE'S
ARCHITECTURAL
JEWELS

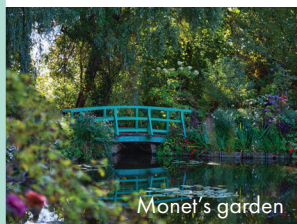
Uniworld's 16-day European Jewels itinerary takes in architecture through the ages, from the neo-Renaissance promenades of Budapest to Amsterdam's historic canal houses, via medieval Rothenburg and much more. The cruise costs from £5,699, departing on October 19. The line has also added extra departures on its Paris & Normandy (*Joie de Vivre*, November 10) and Enchanting Danube (*Maria Theresa*, November 10) itineraries. uniworld.com



Budapest

FEEL INSPIRED IN
MONET'S GARDEN

Passengers on a Tauck cruise along the Seine can revel in an exclusive visit outside regular opening hours to Claude Monet's house and garden in Giverny. Other highlights on the 10-day sailing include visits to the Château de Versailles, D-Day Landing beaches and a farm on Normandy's Cider Route. Rendezvous on the Seine costs from £5,750, departing October 11, 2025. tauck.co.uk



Monet's garden



ABOVE: Historic Williamsburg features on an American Cruise Lines sailing PICTURES: Shutterstock/Sven Hansche, Chris WM Willemsen

Book it: An 11-day sailing costs from £5,995, departing on October 14, including flights, all meals and tips. fredholidays.co.uk

BEST FOR...HISTORY

The cruise: American Revolution, American Cruise Lines
The details: This round-trip cruise from Washington DC, sailing mere weeks ahead of the US election, is the only one to sail the Potomac River – which flows right through the centre of the city, putting clients in prime position for guided tours of the Capitol and visits to the prestigious Smithsonian museums. They will explore the cities of the Historic Triangle – Williamsburg, Yorktown and Jamestown – which paint a picture from the early days of colonial settlement up to the American Revolution. There's also the chance to visit the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad experience in Cambridge, Maryland, before tasting the region's famous blue crab.
Book it: The 11-day cruise costs from £5,999 for departures on October 8 and 18, including flights, overseas transfers, pre-cruise hotel stay in Washington DC, daily excursions, all meals, drinks and tips. americancruiselines.com

BEST FOR...DANCING

The cruise: Rhythms of the Rhine, A-Rosa
The details: New this year is A-Rosa's dance-themed cruise led by a professional instructor. Clients can throw shapes in a disco session or step to it in a line-dancing class – and there'll be ample opportunity to show off those new moves at themed evenings. They can also

learn about the history of dance at an insightful onboard talk and get their feet moving around the fascinating stops on this round-trip sailing from Cologne. Highlights include Rotterdam, home to the Witte Huis, Europe's first 'skyscraper', plus Amsterdam's eye-catching canals, bustling markets and jam-packed museums.
Book it: The six-day cruise, departing on November 27, costs from £1,599 on a premium all-inclusive basis, including flights and transfers. arosa-cruises.co.uk

BEST FOR...CULTURE

The cruise: Vietnam and Cambodia Highlights, APT
The details: With a Vietnamese cooking class, a visit to acclaimed Ho Chi Minh City restaurant Vietnam House for upscale modern dining, plus a traditional Buddhist blessing ceremony in a monastery in Oudong, Cambodia – this itinerary is big on cultural immersion, giving guests opportunities to sample everything the Mekong has to offer (both old and new). In Cai Be, there's a ride on a traditional sampan boat and a chance to explore rural Mekong life on Evergreen Island before crossing into Cambodia and heading for Koh Oknha Tey, where clients will learn about centuries-old silk-manufacturing traditions and have the memorable experience of seeing the sun rise over Angkor Wat.
Book it: The 15-day sailing, departing on September 6, costs from £3,995, including flights, transfers, hotel accommodation on land, meals and drinks. aptouring.co.uk **TW**