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## CRUISIN' ON THE RIVER

By Jan Ross, Blogger for The Travel Authority



*"River cruising has a number of advantages over the huge ocean liners which criss-cross the oceans of the world. Smaller in size, river cruise boats like the AmaLegro provide a much more intimate and comfortable atmosphere that is often lacking in the huge ocean liners. The AmaLegro had comfortable staterooms with French balconies that reached from floor to ceiling and provided excellent viewing of the villages, castles and vineyards that we cruised by every day. In the forward lounge, furnished with comfortable, overstuffed furniture and a spread of snacks and drinks, passengers relaxed and got to know each other much more so than on any ocean cruise I have ever taken.*

*Our time in Paris was over much too soon and, as we boarded our flight back to the United States, we vowed that this would not be our last river cruise with AmaWaterways. They offer cruises all over Europe and even in Vietnam and Cambodia – we could cruise for months and not go everywhere AmaWaterways travels. But we are willing to try!"*

We stepped out of the Lindt Chocolate Museum in Cologne, Germany in the early evening and looked around at the beautiful lights of the city, the light fog creating a gentle halo around each one. The Cologne Cathedral was especially gorgeous, silhouetted against the black night, the golden lights outlining this



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spectacular edifice. Surfeited with chocolate samples and lugging our bags of chocolate from the Lindt store, we headed along the edge of the Mosel River to our river cruise ship, the AmaLegro and our wine-tasting cruise.

We had been sailing on the AmaLegro for several days now and coming back to the small and lovely boat was like coming home. After boarding the boat and spending a day touring around the “Venice of the North” – Amsterdam – we had headed up the Rhine River and, later, the Mosel River for our first experience with a wine-tasting cruise. The AmaWaterways AmaLegro is an example of the new style of cruising which is becoming exceedingly popular, much more popular than ocean cruising.

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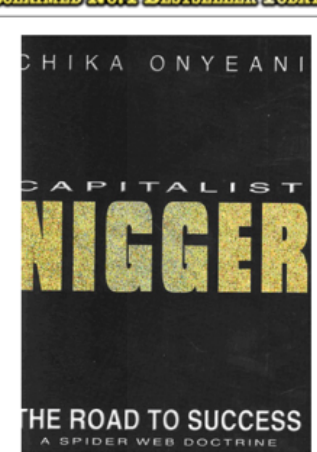
And the food! Since this was, uniquely, a wine-tasting cruise, we were offered a variety of incredible wines with lunch and dinner, treated to talks from world-renowned vintners and visited wineries and wine museums for special wine tasting. The lovely wines were complemented by the equally lovely food. AmaWaterways has a policy of taking on regional products at each of their ports and using these delicious cheeses, fresh produce and seafood to prepare regional specialties which rival the fanciest restaurants you have ever visited.



At each of the ports, we were treated to a shore excursion which might include a walking tour through cobblestone streets, a visit to a castle, a tour of a museum or a visit of a winery – with, of course, time to shop!

The nicest thing about all the wonderful food and the fabulous shore excursions is that they are all included in the price of the river cruise with AmaWaterways – this is truly an all-inclusive experience. On an ocean liner, add your shore excursions and that glass of wine with dinner and the price of your cruise becomes much larger than you planned. Not so with a river cruise.

There were so many highlights of this cruise, but one of the nicest things was the proximity to shore when we docked – you were literally steps away from the main street of each one! In fact, make sure you close your curtains at night or you may find yourself in downtown Koblenz when you wake up! After years of taking tenders to shore or waiting in line to embark from the ocean liners, it was truly refreshing to merely step out the door and be in town.



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As I said, we sailed up the Rhine River, passing villages, peaceful, pastoral scenes, castles and vineyards until we tied up in Cologne. Cologne was the site of our first walking tour and it was here that we were given our QuietVox audio system. We had previously been given our own sets of headphones for the trip and, as we left the boat, we were handed small digital boxes which hooked into the headphones and hung around our necks. When switched on, these devices allowed us to hear our tour guides no matter if we were half a block away or right beside them – what a refreshing change from missing half of what the tour guide has to say!

We were divided into four groups, since the Cologne Cathedral will only allow a small group in at a time and then we proceeded to tour this lovely city and the awe-inspiring cathedral. We visited many cathedrals on this trip and each one was more impressive than the last.

From Cologne, we cruised on to Rudesheim, Germany where we had some of the famous Rudesheim coffee. The presentation of this coffee is a spectacle in itself as brandy is lighted on fire, then coffee and whipped cream are added. It is quite an experience! As we cruised to Rudesheim, the day was dubbed “castles day” and this was the perfect appellation, as we cruised through the Rhine Gorge and passed castle after castle. We spent the morning perched on the top deck as my husband took photograph after photograph of the beautiful castles, some ruined and some restored. The beautiful green fields, cobblestone streets in the villages we passed and the ruined castles outlined against the gray November skies made quite an impression.

It was in Rudesheim that we visited Siegfried’s Musical Cabinet Museum, which to my surprise, was one of the most interesting museums I have ever visited. I thought it would just have a bunch of old music boxes, but it was much more than that. Situated in an old house in Rudesheim, a guided tour takes you through the various rooms, demonstrating all the mechanical music cabinets, boxes, pianos, etc. Some of these things are huge and include most of the instruments of the orchestra! It’s definitely worth a visit and would be especially interesting for families.



From Rudesheim, the cruised on to Koblenz, Germany in the night and awoke to find ourselves docked right in the city! As usual, a shore excursion was offered but we decided to bypass the group tour and saunter around the town by ourselves. This is one of the many nice things about cruising with AmaWaterways: the shore excursions are available, but if you want

to make your own way, that’s perfectly fine as well. They will help you and give you advice about what to see and do but then you can wander to your heart’s content and make your own way back to your home away from home on the boat.

Every night, dinner on the AmaLegro was a special event with appetizers, soup, salad and several entrée choices, which always included a seafood, meat and vegetarian choice. But the evening in Koblenz was especially nice as it was the Captain’s Gala Dinner. The captain on the AmaLegro was Captain Achim and he was the friendliest and most approachable captain I have ever met. We were even allowed to tour the wheelhouse and he explained exactly how he piloted

even allowed to tour the winchouse and he explained exactly how he piloted the boat. So dinner with the captain was especially nice – although every meal on this boat was wonderful in every way!

Our next port was especially exciting since it was in Cochem, Germany that we got to actually tour a castle! We had seen dozens of castles on our cruise but this one had been renovated until it was very similar to the way it looked hundreds of years ago. Our tour guide took us through each of the rooms, explaining the history of the castle and showing us the incredibly gorgeous furnishings – including, of course, some suits of armor! The castle was perched on top of a mountain overlooking the town of Cochem which makes sense when you consider how this made it easier to defend. The hundreds of years of history in these small German towns really come alive when you tour a castle!

One of the most fascinating things we experienced on this cruise was navigating the many locks on the Rhine and Mosel Rivers. We had never been through a lock so to see the way the captain had to move that boat into the lock with literally inches on each side was incredible! We were able to watch every move as the gate closed, the lock filled with water and then the boat cruised out on the river on the higher level. It was truly amazing.

Another thing we found amazing was the vineyards along the Mosel River. Not an inch of the rich, fertile land along this river is wasted, so the vineyards are nearly vertical. The workers pick the grapes and load them into conveyers, which move them up to the top of the mountain where they can be removed and taken to the wineries. Quite a job – and I would say you have to have pretty good balance too!

Bernkastle, Germany was our last stop before we disembarked in Trier, Germany and my husband decided to forgo this walking tour so this meant I got to shop! I can recommend beautiful, handmade scarves and lovely table linens if you are shopping in Germany along with delicious cheeses, chocolates, and of course wine!

The next day our emotions were a combination of sadness at leaving our lovely little AmaLegro and jubilation at the fact that we would be staying in Paris for a few days. AmaWaterways offers several pre- and post-cruise packages and these days in Paris were an optional add-on. But seriously – who could pass up a visit in Paris?

After an effortless embarkation in Trier, we headed to Luxemburg where we toured the city and saw the lovely castle where the last archduke in the world resides and then we headed to Paris. It was evening when we arrived and the lights of Paris beckoned us to the City of Lights and the last few days of our adventure.

In Paris, AmaWaterways had arranged our stay at the beautifully modern and conveniently located Le Meridien Etoile where there had a dark room in the





conveniently located Le Meriden Etoile where they had a desk set up in the lobby to answer any questions or help with any tour arrangements. In a strange city, it was truly a blessing to have representative from AmaWaterways there to provide the reassurance that someone was there if we needed them – the Cruise Director from our boat even followed us to Paris to help out.

We spent two full days in Paris and managed to see most of the highlights, even eating in a sidewalk café and strolling the Champs Elysees. It helped that AmaWaterways offered a tour which included a cruise along the Seine River and a visit to the Eiffel Tower because how can you go to Paris and not visit the Eiffel Tower?

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