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LIFESTYLES

MAGAZINE



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SMALDONE**
FROM THE HEART

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DAY SPECIAL



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EMERALD WATERWAYS

ROLLING ON THE RHINE RIVER

BY RUTH J. KATZ

With Wave Season (see sidebar) in full swing, it's an ideal time to book a cruise for the coming year. One relative newcomer to the world of river cruising is Emerald Waterways. It's the perfect way to rest and relax and where I spent a blissful week plying the Rhine River from Basel to Amsterdam. On the first night out on the *Sun*, the crew sang birthday greetings to a guest, as they paraded in a long conga line and then presented a cake to the celebrant. The celebration was the perfect icebreaker for the 180 guests on board.

SCENIC WONDERS

My journey would take me from **Basel** to **Breisach** (think Black Forest cake when in the latter city); **Strasbourg** (known for its imposing cathedral and gastronomic treats at every turn, with hints of German flavor); **Mannheim/Heidelberg** (home to the eponymous university, founded in 1851); **Koblenz** (a 2,000-year-old town, at the confluence of the Rhine and the Moselle rivers); **Cologne** (the fourth most populous city in Germany and the birthplace of the celebrated 4711 fragrance); and, finally, **Amsterdam** (home to tulips, Anne Frank, the notorious red-light district, and herring, among many other bountiful offerings).

On the *Sun*, our group was catered to by an attentive staff of nearly 50, hailing from well over a dozen countries. Our cruise director, Gaenina Corendea, was easily the best cruise director I've ever experienced. Fluent in a half-dozen languages, she was conscientious, thorough, detailed, organized—and did I say charming and kind? As the *Sun* (some 440 feet long) waltzed on the snaking river for over 500 miles, we navigated through 12 locks. The guests hailed from mostly English-speaking home bases, including the UK (the largest group), the U.S. (second most numerous group), Australia, and Canada—with smatterings of folks from ports afar like Chile.



Strasbourg

EXHILARATING & EDUCATIONAL

If you wished to participate in activities on board, there were trivia games, a galley tour, daily briefings about ports, and the like, but mostly, given the glorious weather, in the afternoons, after a full morning of touring, people gravitated to the upper deck with its Astro-Turf cloak, and languorously settled into a *chaise longue*, watching the magnificent scenery glide by. Outside Koblenz, in the **Upper Middle Rhine Valley**, we sailed through about 40 miles of the **Rhine Gorge**, flanked by some several dozen castles, forts, and ruins—both exhilarating and educational. This area has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2002, so it presents a perfect backdrop for remaining topside with binoculars and a camera.

One of the joys of the *Sun*, which you will not find on many river-cruising ships, is the swimming pool! Measuring approximately 20 x 13 feet, and just under five feet deep, the pool was an oasis for the few teenagers on our ship and assorted guests like me, who needed a dip periodically to exercise weary legs. At night, the pool is covered over and the room becomes a movie theater! With comfy loungers and popcorn, this was a first for me on a river cruise.

I cannot ignore the wonders of the journey: I found Strasbourg every bit as charming as I'd expected. Shops boasted vitrines filled with macarons, colossal meringue cookies, paté, seafood, and even—wait for it—bagels! **Heidelberg University** surprised me in that there did not seem to be a central campus, but rather dozens and dozens of individual buildings, dotting the city, but it was the city's castle that drew me in, particularly the **German Pharmacy Museum** (*Deutsches Apotheken Museum*) on the fortress' grounds. It is intriguing, with more than 20,000 objects on display. (One aside: Bayer Aspirin was created in Germany.)

Emerald offers 20 diverse river-cruising adventures, and most likely, there is one that will suit your needs. And if you plan that journey around your birthday, expect to be serenaded by a group of the restaurant and kitchen staffs, as they sashay toward your table bearing a toothsome cake and birthday goodies!

For further information on Emerald Waterways, visit emeraldwaterways.com. •



A NEW SEASON

Wave Season, typically January to March each year, is like the Black Friday of the cruise industry. This is the time when cruise lines tend to make the most reservations for future bookings—and offer the best deals. Why? Well, for one reason, the mayhem and madness of the holidays are over and people are focusing on the future.

Hence, the cruise lines tend to roll out their best deals this time of year and most of these highly reduced offerings are good for anywhere from 30 to 90 days. You may find that with a Wave Season booking, you can snag free Wi-Fi, a beverage package, or onboard credit for the spa or shopping. It is in the cruise lines' best interest to fill as many cabins as possible for any cruise—the ship is sailing regardless, so why have an empty cabin?

So, now is the time to start hunting for that deal—a July sojourn in the Adriatic or an August get-away in the Baltic. Wave hello to a dream vacation!

—RJK