

Top 10 River Cruise Lines

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF UNIWORLD RIVER CRUISES

There are several reasons why the world's great civilizations have sprung up along rivers — they give life, connect people, and, of course, they're pretty dang beautiful. It's small wonder that rivers seem to be the destination du jour for many cruisers.

Every year for our World's Best Awards survey, T+L asks readers to weigh in on travel experiences around the globe — to share their opinions on the top hotels, resorts, cities, islands, cruise ships, spas, airlines, and more. Readers rated individual cruise ships on their cabins/facilities, food, service, itineraries/destinations, excursions/activities, and value. Those assessments were combined to generate results for the cruise lines in five categories, including river cruising.

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Europe continues to be the main event for river cruise lines; this is where the industry really took off, and its popularity endures. Three of the top 10 river cruise lines on the list — Crystal, Tauck, and U River Cruises — focus all of their efforts on the rivers there. New markets are emerging across the continent. Next year, Tauck (our readers' No. 2 river cruise line this year) launches its first river itineraries in Portugal, with a ship designed specifically for the Douro. U

River Cruises is expanding on the Danube as travelers become more curious about Balkan countries like Serbia. Still, more classic itineraries also remain a draw. Wrote one respondent of a Christmas market cruise with Crystal (No. 3), "It's a great way to see non-coastal cities. The Rhine and Danube are quite grand, and there is much history to be indulged in. New Year's Eve in Vienna was spectacular."

But the river cruise sector is getting bigger. Half of these lines have offerings in Egypt — where tourism is bouncing back in a big way, and not just on the Nile — with one, Vantage Deluxe World Travel, debuting a new specialized ship in 2020. One respondent enthused about Grand Circle Cruises Line (No. 6): "It was my fourth trip to Egypt, and a river cruise is the best way I have ever found to explore the Nile." Many companies on the list also operate on major rivers in South Asia and Southeast Asia, and a few are also expanding into China with new ships. "If you want to see China, the Viking cruise is the way to go — great value, service, food, everything," wrote one respondent, of this year's fourth place cruise line.

The No. 1 River Cruise Line of 2019 has a presence in all of these regions and has topped this category before — including just last year. Read on for the full list.

10. Avalon Waterways

Score: 89.53

More information: avalonwaterways.com

9. U River Cruises

Score: 91.94

More information: ubyuniworld.com

8. Vantage Deluxe World Travel

Score: 91.98

More information: vantagetravel.com

7. Emerald Waterways

Score: 92.28

More information: emeraldwaterways.com

6. Grand Circle Cruise Line

Score: 93.22

More information: gct.com

5. Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours

Score: 93.29

More information: scenicusa.com

4. Viking River Cruises

Hall of Fame honoree. Score: 94.18

More information: vikingrivercruises.com

3. Crystal River Cruises

Score: 95.39

More information: crystalcruises.com

2. Tauck River Cruising

Hall of Fame honoree. Score: 95.42

More information: tauck.com

1. Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection

Hall of Fame honoree. Score: 95.54

More information: uniworld.com

This 43-year-old company offers cruises on the Danube, Ganges, Mekong, Nile, Po, Rhone, Volga, Yangtze, and more – and it's only growing its footprint. Following the launch of two new France-based ships (*Joie de Vivre*, in 2017, and the *Bon Voyage* this spring), Uniworld will add new ships next year in Egypt, Italy, Portugal, and Vietnam. Respondents noted Uniworld's "beautiful, one of a kind ships," "excellent food," and "impeccable service" (it claims the highest staff-to-guest ratio in its class). One reader simply commented, "Uniworld sets the standard."

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