

RHINE, STRASBOURG & HEIDELBERG

eight days from only £1,129pp

- » **Take a stroll through the winding streets of Koblenz**
- » **Relax at your leisure in Boppard with ample time to explore the stunning castle - a must**
- » **Cruise through the spectacular Rhine Gorge**
- » **Visit to Mainz - capital of the Rhineland and a centre of Germany's winelands**
- » **Guided tour of majestic Heidelberg - follow in the footsteps of philosophers and poets**
- » **Enjoy a guided tour of historic Strasbourg - capital of Alsace**
- » **Take a scenic drive through beautiful Alsatian countryside to the pretty town of Colmar**
- » **Visit Cologne and see its magnificent Gothic Cathedral**
- » **Price includes full-board from dinner on your day of arrival until breakfast on your final day**

DAY 1 You fly to Dusseldorf from where a coach will take you to the ship. Or you can take a late morning Eurostar from London St. Pancras International (exact times are indicated on the enclosed Departure Details sheet) arriving in Brussels approximately two hours later, where a coach will take you over the German border to your ship.

Moored in Cologne's picturesque historic centre, the dedicated crew will welcome you aboard your first-class floating hotel, ensuring you settle into your

comfortable and extremely well equipped cabin and familiarise yourself with the ship.

DAY 2 Take a peek out from your cabin this morning and you realise the ship has already slipped quietly away from Cologne. The gentle rippling water has begun casting its spell as the vine-covered valley sides, all aglow in the early sunlight, bid you a warm welcome to the charming Rhine. There's nothing quite like that feeling of anticipation when gliding

alongside the promenade of a river port, snatching tantalising glimpses of what lies ashore and Koblenz, beautifully located at the confluence of the rivers Rhine and Moselle, does not disappoint. Founded by the Romans, you soon immerse yourself in two millennia of history: the city was captured by the Franks, becoming a residence of the German prince electors, was conquered by the French and fortified by the Prussians!

We live in more peaceful times now and today Koblenz is a romantic's dream, forest-covered hillsides dominate the skyline, whilst the lower slopes are strewn with the pretty, half-timbered buildings so typical of the Rhineland. Tiny streets and alleyways lead to intimate squares lined by traditional shops and tiny cafés, and this morning you will have a walking tour followed by free time. During your first relaxing lunch on board, you continue upstream, arriving in Boppard, beautifully situated on one of the river's most impressive and sweeping bends. Simply relax on board or take a stroll through the narrow old streets. The cool early evening is an ideal time to wander along the beautiful riverside Rheinallee promenade before thoughts turn inevitably to tonight's menu.

DAY 3 This morning you cruise through the revered Rhine Gorge where the waters narrow to one fifth their normal width and flow much more swiftly. The sheer valley walls soar 400 metres from the river's edge and magnificent birds of prey glide on the thermals above. Teutonic Knights built numerous redoubtable castles which crown the adjacent hillsides, at one time thriving on the tolls extracted from passing ships, now standing as silent ruins through this passage of history. So find a comfortable spot on the sun deck or in the forward observation lounge and enjoy the experience of cruising this famous stretch of water: this really is the magical Rhine of our imagination.

Your next port of call is historic Mainz, boasting the largest wine market in Germany, but its most famous son is Gutenberg, father of modern printing. You can visit the excellent museum housing a working reconstruction of the earliest press and outstandingly, two original 1452 Gutenberg Bibles, the first books ever





printed in Europe! Enjoy dinner this evening as we pass by the lakes of the Kuhkopf nature reserve, one of the largest in the country and recognised for its vibrant bird life.

DAY 4 After breakfast, you take the short drive to nearby Heidelberg for a guided walking tour of this wonderful city. Its setting is second to none, nestling by the picturesque river Neckar, in a valley dominated by its imposing castle, high on a wooded hillside - a true fulfillment of the perfect medieval German landscape! The city is a maze of historic, baroque and gabled buildings lining the river with its romantic old-town behind. Its 14th century university, one of the most prestigious in Europe lends Heidelberg that gentle atmosphere rather similar to Cambridge, with which the city is fittingly 'twinned'. During the 19th century it was the centre of Germany's Romantic movement, on the route of 'The Grand Tour' and visited, amongst many others, by the artist Turner who captured its splendours for eternity. During your guided walk you see the principal sights and after some free time to explore as you wish you rejoin the ship.

DAY 5 By breakfast, you have arrived in France and the charming city of Strasbourg, capital of the fascinating Alsace region. The city is a complete delight: its centre largely unchanged since the 14th century, a mosaic of winding alleys and lanes lined with quirkily crooked, half-timbered houses.

During periods of its history Strasbourg has been both German and French, and you can see this influence in its language, cuisine and appearance, creating a truly individual city. This morning you have a guided walking tour of its enchanting old centre, including the Petit France quarter of picturesque canals lined with classic black and white buildings, the famous covered bridges and of course the stunning gothic cathedral. Victor Hugo described it as a "veritable tiara of stone," and it was once the tallest building in the world. Just south of Strasbourg lies a picturesque wine route, virtually an open-air museum of romantic medieval villages, cobbled streets and Renaissance châteaux strung like pearls on a necklace against a sweeping backdrop of rolling hills: it does not get much better than this.

You enjoy this most scenic drive, soon arriving in the lovely 16th century town of Colmar, the best-preserved city in eastern France. Bisected by canals, it is a maze of former merchants' houses, antique shops and a monastery. The former wine exchange and the cathedral quarter is surrounded by pastel coloured half-timbered houses, displaying the intricate wrought-iron hanging signs so typical of this area of Europe. Sit, enjoy a coffee, watch the world go by or just wander where your feet take you. We return to the ship in Strasbourg for dinner.

DAY 6 One of the benefits of life aboard a river cruiser is the sheer sense of relaxation it brings: time to catch up on some reading in the ship's library, perhaps enjoy a game of chess or improve your 'putting' on the Sun Deck. Why not enjoy a coffee with your like-minded travelling companions or simply watch the river traffic still using this artery so vital to the life of central Europe for the last 2,000 years.

In the late afternoon, you visit Rudesheim, one of the most visited and liveliest towns on the river, owing its fame to the fact that it looks exactly as a Rhine town should. With its narrow, crooked streets leading down to the sweeping river and surrounded by wooded and vine-covered slopes. This is the heart of Riesling, one of central Europe's finest wines and Rudesheim is crammed with places to try this fruity refreshing drink. Rudesheim is one of those places just to stroll around,



enjoy a glass of wine, take in the scenery and reflect on life's more pleasant moments.

This evening the 'Captain's Dinner' will take place on board, where delicious specialities of the countries and regions we visit during our cruise will be served, hosted of course by the Captain himself.

DAY 7 This morning, you can enjoy once again more marvels of the Rhine, as you pass through the gorge and the very confines of the river where the Rhine Maidens allegedly guard lost treasure, the "Rheingold". What better way to end your cruise than relaxing on the sun deck beneath dramatic, rocky, vineyard-topped valley sides, with impossibly perched castles at every turn, towering above the shimmering water below, feast your eyes on the magic around you that quite simply is the jewel of the Rhine.

The valley sides dissolve away and the hills begin to fade to the plain as the ship drifts gently onwards to Cologne whilst you enjoy your final delicious lunch. This afternoon you have a walking tour of the city during which you will learn all about its fascinating past plus the superb cathedral, the largest gothic structure on earth. It has Europe's most stunningly intricate stained glass, took 600 years to complete and when it was finally complete, was the largest building on earth, remaining so until eclipsed by the Eiffel Tower.

We also see the vibrant and attractive old town, beautifully restored and boasting a plethora of excellent shopping and cosy bars, some of which still traditionally brew their own beer. This evening you enjoy an excellent final dinner on board as you reflect on the spectacular sights seen and wonderful places visited whilst travelling with us on this magical tour.

DAY 8 This morning at the appropriate time we drive to Brussels connecting with the Eurostar service to London St. Pancras International. Or, should you be returning by air, you will be taken to the airport for your homeward flight.