

# 2016 LEGENDARY DANUBE RIVER CRUISE

## Itinerary & Excursion Guide



### Day 1 & 2 – July 17 & 18 (for those who purchase our optional pre-cruise extension) Budapest, Hungary

Your RSVP Legendary Danube River Cruise starts off with nearly 2 full days in Budapest. You'll stay at the 5-star Corinthia Hotel Budapest. Your Avalon Cruise Director and teamRSVP will be on-hand to point the way to adventure! Transfers from Budapest' Ferenc Liszt International Airport to the Corinthia Hotel and from the Corinthia Hotel to the ship July 19 are included.

#### Included Excursion:

##### **Budapest Sightseeing**

Spanning the banks of the Danube, Budapest is one of Eastern Europe's liveliest cities. Whether you're seeing the sights, shopping for handcrafted embroidery or Herend porcelain, or basking in the coffeehouse culture over a rich cream cake in the renowned Gerbeaud Cafe, Budapest's unique energy is positively palatable. On your guided tour of the city, see Heroes' Square as well as the massive hilltop castle complex with its remarkable Fishermen's Bastion and 11th-century Matthias Church. Be sure to take note of the city's eight bridges—many famous sights in and of themselves—which connect ancient Buda on the right bank with Pest on the left. In your free time this afternoon you may want to walk across Chain Bridge, built in 1849 and a symbol of Budapest; visit St. Stephen's Basilica with marvelous views of the city from its viewing platform; or stroll along Vaci utca, the main shopping street.

#### Optional Excursions:

##### **Hungarian Countryside with Wine Tasting (Etyek)**

Enjoy a genuine countryside experience only 30 minutes away from the capital. Stroll among the stunning vineyards of Etyek, enjoy the fascinating landscape of the youngest and the fastest developing wine region of Hungary. Visit two small, family-run wineries; learn the secrets of wine making from the local winemakers. Sample three top quality wines in each cellar along with tasty Hungarian snacks. You will leave with a really intimate understanding of the traditions and people that make the wines here so special.

##### **Communist**

From 1947 to 1989, the Hungarian Communist Party held sway. Although the regime was not as deferential to the Soviet Union, the collective economy and fear of the secret police shaped the lives of Hungarian citizens. Our guided tour starts on Liberty Square making a photo stop at the Russian monument, which honors the soldiers of the Red Army who died during the liberation of Budapest from the Nazis. Ironically, it is located directly across from the US embassy and a statue of Ronald Reagan stands on the other side of it. Visit the area surrounding the Hungarian Parliament Building and hear stories about the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, when it was overrun by Russian tanks when Hungary stood up against Communism. Visit the former headquarters of the AVH (Hungarian version of KGB), the dreaded secret police, which is a museum today. This part-museum, part-multimedia experience records grim moments of the communist period and is one of the most interesting of its kind. Your local expert will provide you an interactive commentary on how to live and survive under communism.

##### **Night Lights**

The Hungarian capital is known for its splendid views accentuated by the romance of illumination. Let the unique atmosphere of this magnificent city enchant you, while our expert guide tells you the hidden secrets and stories behind the façades. Do not miss out on a visit to the must see viewpoint from the highest hill in Budapest, a view overlooking this splendid city with an illumination rivaling the one of Paris, a view which decorates numerous travel brochures and books. Unforgettable sights, wonderful memories, and the magic of lights guaranteed during this panoramic tour with photo opportunities. Discover why Europeans call it deservedly the Paris of the East! This excursion is by comfortable coach and includes three must-see photo stops.

##### **Puzsta with Lunch**

Do not miss this unique opportunity to visit the Hungarian countryside and its authentic ways, an experience out of the ordinary. A short coach ride takes us deep into the Hungarian countryside, where we can admire the unsurpassed qualities of the Hungarian Equestrian virtue at an active stud farm. Enjoy the sight of the proud horses as they lead the festive procession. Take a typical country wagon ride and learn about the life on the typical Hungarian farm. The Hungarians have been inseparable from their horses for more than a thousand years. Experience the well-known Hungarian hospitality in the most natural environment of the Puzsta Farm as we provide you with an authentic lunch. The excursion is fully hosted by one of our guides.



### Day 3 – July 19 Budapest, Hungary

Your RSVP adventure aboard the Avalon *Expression* begins! We'll board around 4pm, with our Compulsory Lifeboat Drill at 6pm. We set sail for Slovakia at 9:30pm sharp!



## Day 4 – July 20 Bratislava, Slovakia

Relax onboard this morning and marvel at the scenery on both banks of the Danube. As you cruise upriver, Hungary is on your left and Slovakia is on your right. At the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains is Bratislava, the dynamic capital of Slovakia.

### Included Excursion:

#### Bratislava Sightseeing

After lunch, arrive in Bratislava, situated at the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains and the dynamic capital of Slovakia. Join a local guide for a tour of the city, including a guided walk of its fascinating Old Town, where winding cobblestone streets and narrow alleyways twist and turn to reveal the Town Hall, one of the oldest stone buildings in the city. Also visit gothic St Martin's Cathedral, coronation church for the Kingdom of Hungary from the 16th to 19th centuries.



## Day 5 & 6 – July 21 & 22 Vienna, Austria

With two full days and evenings to explore this Austrian capital, you'll quickly discover why this city is an absolute favorite of river cruisers. Myriad included and optional tours will help you make the most of your time here. As you stroll through the pedestrian Kärntnerstrasse, be sure to enjoy a piece of decadent Sachertorte or Apfelstrudel in one of the classic Viennese coffee houses, historic institutions that helped shape Viennese culture. Café Central and the Café at Kunsthistorisches Museum are among our favorites!

### Included Excursion:

#### Vienna Sightseeing

Once the center of the mighty Habsburg Empire, Austria's magical capital on the blue Danube is a showcase of gilded architecture. This is home to the lavish Hofburg Imperial Palace complex with its Vienna Boys' Choir and dazzling Lipizzaner stallions; the neo-renaissance Vienna Opera House; and awe-inspiring St. Stephen's Cathedral.

### Optional Excursions:

#### Schönbrunn

Schönbrunn, the former summer residence of the Imperial family, is considered one of the most beautiful baroque palaces in Europe. The Habsburgs resided here for the better part of the year in numerous rooms to house the large Imperial family in addition to representational rooms. Emperor Franz Joseph, who later married the enchanting Sisi and reigned from 1848 to 1916, was born here in 1830. The monarch spent his last years entirely in the palace, which became the property of the new Republic of Austria only two years after his death. Today, the palace is part of UNESCO's cultural heritage due to its historic importance, its unique grounds, and its splendid furnishings. Follow our local expert and visit Empress Sisi's former summer residence, afterwards take your time to stroll through the park and enjoy the impressive gardens.

#### Vienna Biking

Vienna was once the center of the largest empire in the world. The power and glory of the Habsburg rule is mirrored in the boulevards and architecture of Vienna. The bike tour covers what it took the Habsburgs more than 600 years to build. It would take three days to walk what is shown during this bike tour. A must for those wanting to get the "feel" of this incredibly beautiful city!

#### Vienna Woods and Lunch

Along the Höhenstraße – Vienna's longest street with approx. 14km – we will drive up on the Kahlenberg, from which you will enjoy the beautiful view and, if the weather conditions are good, you can see until the Little Carpathians in Slovakia. We will make a photo stop there. Continuing to Klosterneuburg, we drive through the Vienna Woods and stop at the Abbey. Since the monastery's founding, the Augustinian Canons of Klosterneuburg have viewed it as their duty to foster scholarship and art. As a result of their 900 years of research and collecting activities, the monastery is home to a series of notable artworks, from the world famous Verdun Altar from the Middle Ages to magnificent Baroque works through to modern painting. After the visit to the Abbey, we will drive back to Vienna for lunch in a very famous and very small wine village. We will have lunch here at a typical Heuriger – a Viennese wine tavern. The word "heurige" does not just describe the tavern itself, but also the wine from the current vintage, which – in accordance with tradition – may be so-called until 11 November (St Martin's Day). Enjoy a typical Viennese lunch accompanied by Viennese Wine! After lunch we drive back to the ship.

#### Walzer and Operetta Concert

Don't miss a truly magical evening in Vienna, featuring the most famous opera arias by Mozart, Strauss Waltzes, polkas, and operetta excerpts from "Die Fledermaus" by Johann Strauss, "The Merry Widow" by Franz Léhar, the Blue Danube waltz, the Radetzky March, and many others, performed by a brilliant cast of top European singers, beautifully costumed dancers, and the Original Wiener Salon Orchestra. A true celebration of joy and optimism featuring familiar music, combined with dance and storytelling that recalls happy memories of a time when music helped shape the city of Vienna: a city of world-class artistry with a true flair for celebration.



## Day 7 – July 23 Dürnstein & Melk, Austria

Explore the picturesque town of Dürnstein on your own, join us for an included walking tour, or choose an optional wine tasting excursion. You may even want to hike up to the castle ruins for magnificent views of the town and river. In Melk, we'll visit their famed Abbey, which will leave you breathless.

### Included Excursions:

#### Dürnstein Walking Tour

Dürnstein, situated in the heart of the Wachau wine region, is known for the magnificent baroque, blue Stiftskirche built in the 1700s. The main street of this small town - with a population of less than 1,000 people - is lined with 16th century residences and charming cobblestone streets. A local guide will take you on a walking tour and tell you the tale of England's King Richard the Lionheart, who was imprisoned in the castle whose ruins still stand above the town.

#### Melk Abbey Tour

Guided visit of Melk's magnificent 11th-century Benedictine Abbey, one of Europe's largest monasteries. The abbey houses an ornate library with over 80,000 printed books and 2,000 manuscripts. Words cannot describe the splendor of the church with its frescoed ceilings, stunning high altar, marble statues, and 210-foot-high cupola.

### Optional Excursions:

#### Dürnstein Bike Tour

Biking along the Danube is becoming a popular pastime. So if you are fit and ready for some exercise, grab a bike, a helmet, and cycle between the waters of the mighty stream and the lovely vineyards and romantic villages of the Wachau Valley. This tour is weather dependent.

#### Wine Tasting

Wachau is one of Austria's most established and notable wine regions, specializing in dry wines made from Riesling and Grüner Veltliner. Located in Lower Austria along the Danube, west of Vienna and Kremsan-der-Donau, it is one of the western-most wine producing regions in Austria with only a few scattered plantings in Tyrol being further west. While most of Austria follows a wine classification system based on ripeness and harvest minimum weight that parallels the German wine classification system, Wachau wines have a unique classification system. The three classification levels for Wachau wine include Steinfeder for wines up to 11.5% alcohol level, Federspiel for wines between 11.5–12.5%, and Smaragd that must have a minimum of 12.5% alcohol level. Despite its popularity, the Wachau is a small wine region that usually accounts for only around 3% of Austria's wine production. A guided tour through a well-known Wachau wine cellar, including tasting of some of the better Wachau wines, awaits you on this excursion.



## Day 8 – July 24 Aschach, Austria & Vilshofen, Germany

These stops along the Danube are meant to serve as the gateway for three of the most extraordinary optional tour offerings available to you: 1.) A visit to *The Sound of Music's* famed Salzburg, Austria or 2.) An adventure to the Czech town of Český Krumlov, hands down one of the most beautiful places you'll ever visit or 3.) The Austrian Lake District, whose natural beauty is unrivaled in Europe. It's a tough choice between the three, but none will disappoint.

### Optional Excursions:

#### Salzburg

Picturesquely located at the foothills of the Alps, the city is known as the birthplace of Mozart. Salzburg is also the setting for the film *The Sound of Music*, which has shaped the city's perception in the minds of generations. But Salzburg is much more. It is a wealthy city with history based on the salt trade from the nearby Alpine Mountains. It is a city full of beautiful baroque buildings, and a city perched between the mountains and green waters of the Salzach River. In your free time, stroll through the small but busy lanes with their wrought iron signs, use a cable car to ride up to the castle on the hill for views, or just relax on one of the many terraces that make you feel part of the scenery. On our scenic ride by coach you will admire the beauty of the region. Our dedicated local experts will talk about and show you the city, and relive scenes from *The Sound of Music*. After free time, we will also visit the church at Mondsee where the "von Trapps" were married.

#### Český Krumlov

Take a scenic route across the rolling hills of Upper Austria and Bohemia to one of the most beautiful, charming and romantic little towns that is to be found in Europe. For centuries, this small town has enjoyed the reputation of being the "Pearl of the Bohemian Forest," an extraordinary fortified town built by princes and bishops on the most beautiful bend of the Vltava River. This hidden gem of European history remains as it was centuries ago, a colourful place with over 300 historic buildings, small lanes, art galleries, charming shops and medieval inns; a truly stunning experience. When after WW II the Iron Curtain fell, Český Krumlov found itself even more off the beaten track, with hardly a visitor finding his way there. Our local experts will guide you back in time. Pass by the Vltava (Moldau) River, which has been made immortal by Frederic Smetana's composition of the same name, before you return to your ship with happy memories from this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

## Romantic Austria

The picturesque mountain lakes, the luscious green of the hills and fields, the striking mountain cliffs, and the romantic villages – these are just a few reasons that attracted countless writers, composers, and creative artists for centuries to find inspiration in the magnificent landscape of Salzkammergut region, shared between the provinces of Salzburg, Upper Austria, and Styria - the famous Austrian Lake District. The literal translation of the Salzkammergut is “salt chamber estate” and refers to an area where salt was mined and which was formerly under the control of the Imperial Chamber in Vienna. Today, the term has developed into a brand name for one of the loveliest holiday regions of Central Europe with over 70 lakes, which are of drinking water quality and range in color from turquoise to emerald green. Let us reveal to you the unspoiled beauty of Gmunden and St. Wolfgang region and some of the most panoramic routes in Austria.



## Day 9 – July 25 Regensburg, Germany

Dating back to the time of the Celts around 500 BC, Regensburg is one of Germany’s best preserved medieval cities. The only German city not bombed during WWII, Regensburg has at least 1,300 buildings of “historic interest.” Be sure to grab a beer and enjoy a snack at the Historische Wurstküche (Old Sausage Kitchen).

### Included Excursion:

#### Regensburg Sightseeing

Architectural highlights of our guided walk include the Altes Rathaus (Old Town Hall), built in the 13th century, and Porta Pretoria, gates to an ancient Roman fort built in 179 AD. Walk across the 12th century Steinerne Brücke (Stone Bridge), the oldest of its kind in Germany.

### Optional Excursion:

#### Weltenburg

The Danube Gorge has both a gentle and a strange beauty. In a magnificent show of force, the Danube has carved its way through the Swabian Alb to create a stunning landscape - a wild, romantic stretch of river with sheer cliffs rising over 300 feet out of the water. At its upper end the Weltenburg Abbey is located on a peninsula directly beneath the cliffs of the Gorge. It was founded by Irish or Scottish monks in 620 and is one of the oldest abbeys in Bavaria. The present Benedictine abbey dates back to the 18th century when it was extensively rebuilt in baroque style. Their ceiling frescos of the Heavenly Jerusalem blend seamlessly with the abbey interior and are particularly noteworthy. Important is also that Weltenburg Abbey houses the oldest abbey brewery in the world, as the monks have been brewing beer since 1050. A beer and a pretzel are a welcome refreshment.



## Day 10 – July 26 Roth & Nuremberg, Germany

We arrive around 12:30pm and guests extending to Prague will disembark just after lunch and head to our host hotel, the 5-star Boscolo Carlo IV. For those continuing on to our European Splendor cruise from Nuremberg to Amsterdam, you’ll have a full afternoon to explore this historic German town – from the Old Town Hall (built on an island in the middle of the Regnitz River when the bishop refused to give the townspeople land for a town hall) to Adolf Hitler’s infamous rally grounds.

### Choice of Included Excursion for those not going on to Prague:

#### Nuremberg Sightseeing

Start the guided city tour with a visit of the castle grounds of the Kaiserburg, once home to emperors, today still dominating the skyline of Nuremberg. After a panoramic drive, the tour ends at the large market square, which is located at the heart of the city center, surrounded by a multitude of must-see sights. You are sure to be enchanted by the picturesque flair of the Old Town, take a look around and journey into times past.

#### Rally Ground Tour

To this day, in Nuremberg’s southern districts, the remains of the buildings on the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds with their immense proportions are a vivid testimony to the megalomania of the National Socialist regime. This area of eleven square kilometers (4.25 sq. miles) was intended as an impressive backdrop for the Nazi party rallies staged here to demonstrate their power. During our guided tour, we will visit the most important sights and the Documentation center, which offers all visitors the opportunity of an in-depth look at the Nazi Party Rallies on the spot where they occurred.



## Day 11 – July 27 (for those who purchase our optional post-cruise extension) Prague, Czech Republic

Prague is a 1,200-year-old city preserved in time. Unlike other Central European capitals, it was not bombed during the 20th-century wars.

## Included Excursion:

### Prague Sightseeing

A local guide will show you Prague's best-known treasures, such as the Old Town's Astronomical Clock, built in 1410 and once the envy of all of Europe; Hradčany Castle Grounds; St. Vitus Cathedral; and the Charles Bridge, the oldest bridge in Prague. Browse the shops for hand-cut crystal or art books. Mix with the locals in Wenceslaus Square, an important meeting point and where people demonstrated against the communist regime; watch performers and shop at the market stalls on Charles Bridge.

## Optional Excursions:

### Dinner and Folklore Show

The Czech have their way of fun where food, drinks, and traditions come together. On long rows of tables, you will be served the traditional hearty Czech cuisine where the drinks and the laughter flow. On the small stage, musicians will play on the hammer-dulcimer, the fujara (shepherd's flute), and the bag-pipe, all part of their musical heritage. The performers in their traditional costumes will treat you to local dances and their folk songs from Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, which will impress you. Experience excellent dancers, vibrant music and collect wonderful memories of your trip to Prague. Join in for an evening of food and fun in one of Prague's typical restaurants, a Czech traditional 3-course dinner with drinks. Guide services and transportation are all included.

### Grand Masters Concert in Old Prague

Enjoy a great classical concert in the beautiful setting of the baroque Mirror Chapel of Clementinum. The large complex of the Clementinum was founded by the Jesuits after their arrival in Bohemia in 1556. With more than 2 hectares, it is also one of the largest building complexes in Europe. The Mirror Chapel, built in 1725 and originally dedicated to the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, is a unique sanctuary and one of the churches of the former Jesuit college, Prague Clementinum. Classical concerts in Clementinum are among the most popular concert events. The impressive installations of Baroque mirrors on the ceiling make the chapel unparalleled worldwide. Together with gilded stuccos of Bernardo Spinetti, marble paneling and ceiling frescoes by Jan Hiebl, these mirrors create great artistic value of the interior. The chapel had been repeatedly desecrated and consecrated until it became a Prague classical concert hall in 1936. Join our local guides who will take you to this gem of downtown Prague for an unforgettable experience with the music of Bach, Vivaldi, Mozart, Dvorak, Puccini, and Verdi performed by leading soloists, members of Czech Opera Houses, and top orchestras. (Baroque organ, violin, flute, soprano and baritone soloists)

### Prague's Secrets Revealed

This tour will add to the included city tour as it is quite possible to escape the touristy side of Prague and just as before, it requires knowing just which street to turn down or even which unsigned walkway to pass. Knowing where to turn from the Old Town Square, you can leave all the crowds behind and find yourself shockingly alone on a twisting Medieval street, quiet as can be – with only the sound of your shoes clicking against the cobblestones or a tram swooshing by a few streets away. And in this street, it's also still possible to find the most interesting places when you least expect them. The houses and doors often look the same from the outside. To the naked eye, the street may even seem residential. There are no big flashing lights pointing out the history that lies behind these facades of Prague. You need a local expert, who can show you these secrets and tell you the stories of what happened here and there. Prague's Secrets tour leads us to the Charles Bridge and Mala Strana, which according to the locals is Prague's most romantic and picturesque part of the protected city center.

### Tasting Bohemian Wines

Venture into the beautiful Bohemian countryside this morning and discover Castle Melnik, a genuine Jewel of Bohemia. The Castle was the residence of the queen widows of Bohemia and Melnik. In 1542 the castle was transformed to a Renaissance Jewel. This is a unique opportunity to visit a medieval castle inside and see how the aristocracy lived in previous centuries. The surrounding vineyards of Melnik form part of the Czech wine region, one of the northern-most viticultural areas of Europe, and are the largest in Bohemia. The castle is still a partly lived-in property and you are invited for a special Bohemian wine tasting with local cheese. This tour gives you wonderful insight into the traditional values of the Bohemian upper class.



## Day 12 – July 28 (for those who purchase our optional post-cruise extension) Prague, Czech Republic

Today, we say farewell. Transfers to Prague's Václav Havel Airport are included.



Please Note: All tours are subject to change with or without advance notice and at any time.