



RIVER CRUISE TODAY



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Eventful City In 2013

While 2013 will be a big year for the Dutch capital, there are a number of annual events clients visiting pre- or post cruise may be interested in attending.

National Tulip Day is celebrated 19 Jan, the Keukenhof Flower Garden in Lisse opens in late Mar until late May, Tulip Days is in late-Apr, and the Holland Festival of theatre, music, art, dance and film is held in Jun.

In the second half of the year there's the summer festival in Jul, Amsterdam Gay Pride in Aug, the Amsterdam City Swim in Sep and the Amsterdam Light Festival (the first annual event is this year).

Of course there's also Queen's Day celebrations on and around 30 Apr, this year's a big one with the abdication and succession of a new king Willem-Alexander and queen Maxima at the Royal Palace.

Hallo Amsterdam



Amsterdam is many things to many people—and one of the most culturally diverse cities in Europe.

Many Europe river cruises begin or end in the Dutch capital, and it's definitely worth staying on for a few

days to take in some of the city's highlights—and seek out some hidden parts of the city away from the hotspots.

It's a compact city with 800,000 inhabitants focused on its ring of canals and striking architecture. The canal ring was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list three years ago, and it turns 400 this year. Along the canals are apartments, shops, cafes and some of the city's most famous attractions, from the red light district to the sobering Anne Frank Huis—the office building that became the secret annex the Frank family hid in during the Nazi's occupation of Holland.

... Amsterdam 2013

This year sees Amsterdam celebrates a number of milestones: 400 years of the canals, 225 years of the Felix Meritis 'Temple of Enlightenment', 175 years of the Artis Royal Zoo, 125 years of the Concertgebouw and its Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, 150 years since the abolition of slavery and the reopening of two key art galleries following extensive renovations. The canals will come alive with a number of events and activities, plus different areas of the city will be showcased for 24 hours with an initiative called 24H Amsterdam. For more, see iamsterdam.com

River Cruise Expansion

The strong growth in river cruising is being highlighted this year with a number of ship christenings—including that of 10 new Viking River Cruise long ships this week in Amsterdam. *Travel Today's* Jess Harkins is in the Dutch capital this week covering the developments. The official launch is 20 Mar (European time). See the coming issues of *Travel Today* for details.

Amsterdam On Trend

Lonely Planet has named Amsterdam the second best European destination to visit in 2013, given its jam-packed events calendar. Visitors to the city are 'extremely satisfied' with their experience—particularly the atmosphere, the compact layout of the city and its architecture, shows Amsterdam Tourism & Convention Board research.

I Amsterdam City Card



Clients pre- or post-cruising in Amsterdam should be encouraged to get an I Amsterdam City Card. Available in 24/48/72 hour durations (EUR42/52/62 for adults), the card offers free admission to many key attractions, discounted entry to the Rijksmuseum, free canal cruises, bike hire, free unlimited public transport for the duration of the pass. It also offers discounts at many f&b venues and a 25% discount for performances at venues including Boom Chicago, Het Concertgebouw, and De LaMar Theatre. There are kids' prices, limited time on-line additions every month as well as discounts on day trips to Zaanse Schans and Haarlem. See iamsterdamcitycard.com



Bicycle, Bicycle. . . And It's All Flat!

It's somewhat telling that there are more bicycles in Amsterdam than people—riding is definitely a preferred mode of transport for the Dutch, and they have the skills to prove it.

Amsterdammers can do everything the rest of us can do while walking, on a bike, including talking on the phone, carrying crates of goods and escorting a classroom of kids on an excursion. It follows then, that there are many bike hire options for tourists, from the distinct red MacBikes to slightly more subtle rides from various other outlets. The bikes themselves are sturdy and upright (no lycra, cleats or awkward drop bars in sight), so clients needn't be wary about getting around on one. No-one seems to wear a helmet either, and Amsterdam is thankfully very flat—it's an easy ride for most fitness levels.



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Ship Launch: Global Demand Accelerates Growth

'Today' in Amsterdam, Viking River Cruises inaugurated 10 new Long Ships to operate the line's Europe river cruises.

Dignitaries and guests, who are staying onboard the ships in Amsterdam this week, gathered at the cruise passenger terminal to witness the ship christenings, be entertained by local musicians and the traditional smashing of Champagne bottles on the bow of each vessel.

Viking River Cruises Australia and New Zealand managing director Teresia Fors says the events are a fitting tribute to the growth of the river cruising segment.

"They are truly a testament to the growth we are seeing in the market," she says. "River cruising is the fastest growing travel segment globally, these 10 ships are already sold out for 2013. They were built to meet the demand of the market, and we anticipate that to continue next year, when we will inaugurate 14 new ships."



The festivities kick off at the cruise passenger terminal in Amsterdam today. Four of Viking's new Long Ships are docked (the two furthest away are escorts, says Viking) at the terminal, with the other six in the shipyards of Rostock, Germany accompanied by shipmaker Neptune Werft's dock workers and engineers

The latest CLIA cruise industry statistics show that river cruising grew 12% in the New Zealand market in 2011, to 2651.

"And it's not just traditional cruis-

ers who are interested in this style of travel—it truly is attractive to a wide market, and agents can take advantage of this when they are selling Europe," says Fors.



Kiwi Agents Go Canalside: Deb Natoli from Harvey World Miramar, Teresia Fors from Viking River Cruises and Sandra Toland of United Travel Tower Junction brave the biting wind to take in the christening of 10 new Viking Long Ships 'today' in Amsterdam.



A Lil Red Light Jenever?

Sandra Toland (left) and Melissa Landrebe from United Travel and Deb Natoli from Harvey World Travel Miramar try a shot (or two) of Dutch gin, Jenever, at a cafe in Amsterdam's Red Light District after a brisk walk through the notorious part of town. The area is distinctive from other red light districts around the world due to the working girls parading themselves in red-lit windows, and is far more than a place of debauchery. Its architecture is distinctly Dutch, and the canals are picturesque by day or night. The alleys are also dotted with another of Amsterdam's tourist drawcards—the coffee shops. Dutch law recently changed to ban tourists from buying marijuana but it's still readily in the coffee shops, as the law is said to be difficult to enforce.

Tips for photography in the Red Light District: Taking pictures of the window girls is frowned upon, and will most likely lead to a stream of abuse from the ladies of the night (or even a trip to the canal for your clients' camera)—warn them not to try!

Sky High In Amsterdam

The Sky Lounge restaurant at Amsterdam's Doubletree Hilton offers a view of the city that's a little different to the canals and alleyways, from on high—and they don't even have to visit a coffee shop to get there. The lounge overlooks the old city and serves a range of gourmet snack dishes.

Viking \$1279 Air Deal

Viking River Cruises is offering a \$1279 return Europe airfare deal ex Auckland, in conjunction with its 2014 Europe and Russia cruises, advises GO Holiday.

Clients can choose their European city of arrival and departure from a range of Euro gateways and are not restricted to the cruise/tour start or finish point, adds the wholesaler. The flight offer is valid for travel 11 Jan-20 Nov, included airport taxes, and once agents have selected their cruise dates, the cruise company will select a carrier from a pool of eight (including EK and SQ). In addition, clients can break up their journey with a stop-over en-route at no extra cost. Contact GO Cruise for more details.



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River Cruising: All About The Destination



Viking longship Odin sails from Hoorn back to Amsterdam as the celebrations for the launch of Viking's 10 new longships wrap up in the Dutch Capital. More than 500 guests travelled from around the world for the festivities, to experience Viking's river cruise product and some of the highlights of Amsterdam.

River cruising is all about the destination, says Viking River Cruises chairman Torstein Hagen, and the cruise company's accelerated growth is testament to its successful approach to cruising on Europe's rivers.

"We feel that many of the ocean cruise lines have totally forgotten about the destination," Hagen says. "When I was young and ran [an ocean] cruise line, we said it was the destination that matters. Through river cruising we have brought the destination back into cruising." Viking's Australia and New Zealand managing director Teresia Fors adds

Amsterdam App

United Travel's Melissa Landrebe recommends the free Amsterdam Top 10 app, available on iPhone through the App Store. The app gives directions and information on what it says are the city's top 10, including the Rijkmuseum, Van Gogh Museum and Anne Frank's House.

From Queen To King

This year Queen Beatrix will be replaced on the throne by her son Willem Alexander, meaning from next year national holiday Queen's Day will become King's Day (27 Apr). The day is marked with various festivals and concerts around the Netherlands.

that the advantage of river cruising, in addition to its intimate style, is the ship's proximity to each destination's centre and main attractions. "At the end of the day [the ship] is a boutique hotel in the centre of town," she says.

Agent's Amsterdam Tips

Kiwi agents in the Dutch capital for the launch of Viking's new Long Ships have found some hidden gems for clients to seek out on their pre-river cruise stay in Amsterdam.

In the Magna Centre west of Dam Square there's a cheese shop on the first floor that will happily offer tastings of its many cheese varieties. Urge clients to make use of their in-room or suite fridge and try out some of the best Dutch cheeses, such as Edam and Gouda. Manneken Pis reportedly serves the best frites in Holland. Located on Damrak 41, one of the store's specialities is frites with satay sauce. Also on Damrak is Jasmin, a famous sweetshop offering a range of biscuits, licorice, and chocolates.

For a basic local culinary experience there's always the supermarket. In the central city the local Albert Heijn offers popular Dutch foods from stroopwafels (waffle biscuits sandwiched with caramel or toffee and great with icecream) to pastries, licorice, meats and baked goods. It's great for clients on a budget or self-catering.

Getting there

Amsterdam is now easily accessible for passengers travelling ex New Zealand. Emirates operates a daily A380 flights from Dubai. The north-bound service ex Auckland to Dubai connects within three hours to the seven hour DXB-AMS flight. Singapore Airlines also serves Amsterdam from Singapore with a direct A380 flight. And, of course, KLM offers a range of fares and routes to AMS. The carrier says its most popular routing option for Kiwis is via KUL with Malaysia Airlines, with a two hour, 40min transit.

Portugal With Viking

GO Holidays has a new Viking River Cruises itinerary taking in the delights of Portugal, including Lisbon, Porto, Bitetos, Pinhao, Barca d'Alva, Salamanca and Vega de Terron. The Portugal's Rivers of Gold package includes an eight-day cruise on Viking Hemming, a two-night stay in a deluxe hotel in Lisbon, eight guided tours and most meals, and costs from \$4625 (including savings of up to \$1280pp) based on select departures Mar-Dec 2014. Clients also receive a bonus on-board beverage package including unlimited wine, beer and premium cocktails.



Viking Sets World Record With New Ships

Viking River Cruises set a world record yesterday when it christened its 10 new Viking Longships, the Viking Aegir, Viking Atla, Viking Bragi, Viking Embla, Viking Forseti, Viking Jarl, Viking Rinda, Viking Skadi, Viking Tor and Viking Var.

Viking now holds the record for the 'Most Ships Inaugurated in One Day by One Company' following the event, which was attended by the 10 new god-mothers of the ships who Viking says represent the 'key Viking brand pillars of history, art, education, exploration and discovery'.

"Today is a proud day for Viking and for river cruising. We are honoured to showcase 10 of our revolutionary new longships and to have had such a celebrated group of women helping us christen them," says Viking chairman Torstein Hagen. "Our guests are explorers, just like the ancient Vikings of our Norse heritage, which is why we deliver authentic and enriching travel experiences like no other cruise line."

In 2014, Viking plans to break its own record with the launch of 12 new longships.



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Long Ships Add Sophistication



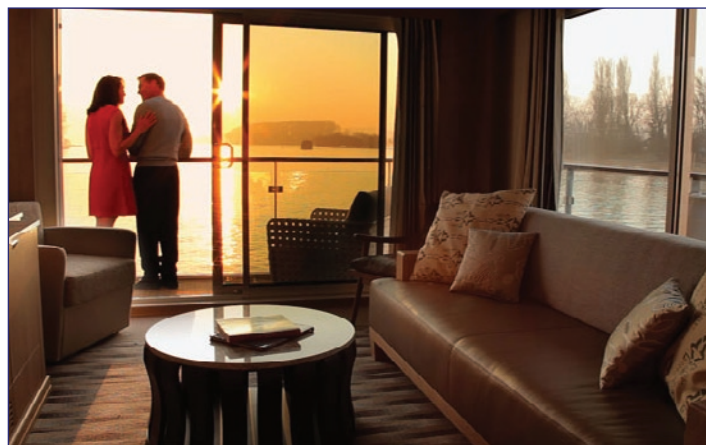
Viking River Cruises' new Long Ships, christened in Amsterdam last week, offer Europe-bound clients a number of innovations, with sophisticated modern décor, relaxed entertainment options and attentive service.

The Long Ships make up the majority of Viking's fleet, and offer a series of unique features that set them apart from competitors, says the cruise company. Viking has patented a corridor configuration that allows the second and third deck's corridor to sit slightly to the portside—which means its cabins can feature verandahs without compromising on stateroom size. The staterooms on the narrower side are either standard F category staterooms, or verandah suites AA, turned on their side, so the cabin itself is no smaller than its starboard counterparts. Each Long Ship is structurally the same, says Viking, however the décor varies between each one, from modern metallic touches, to blonde wooden slat screens and leather-bound touches.

... Aquavit Terrace

Another distinctive feature of the Long Ships is the Aquavit Terrace. Located at the bow forward from the main lounge and bar area, the terrace

is a lounge area enclosed by window panels. Clients can enjoy the light-filled area and sip on a namesake Aquavit—a Scandinavian distilled drink that is said to aid the digestion of rich foods, fitting given the nature of cruising! During fine weather the windows can be slid open to allow access to the outer terrace, but during cooler times the natural light creates an airy place to relax onboard.



Explore Europe's Rivers In Style

Each of Viking's Long Ships boast two Explorer suites—offering clients a larger two-room cabin and a wrap around verandah. Located aft, the verandahs offer 270° views and a French balcony from the bedroom, and the cruise line says they are the largest suites on any European river cruise ship. Additional features include heated flooring and mirror in the bathroom and double sinks.

Downton Experience

Viking River Cruises is a sponsor of PBS series Masterpiece and its wildly popular television series *Downton Abbey*. Viking offers clients a land extension package that includes a privileged access tour of Highclere Castle in Hampshire, England which the cruise company says is the 'real Downton Abbey'.

Left Or Right Bank?

The terms left and right bank are determined by looking in the direction of the water flow—from the source of the river to its mouth into the sea. Clients that take a journey along the Rhine from its source in Basel to the mouth in Amsterdam, for example, will in fact be looking at towns and cities of the 'left bank' on the right hand side of the river.

Green Cruising

Clients will notice that often table centre-pieces are also useful herbs, including basil. Viking's Long Ships also have a number of features that allow them to be somewhat self-sufficient, including an organic herb garden, solar panels and hybrid engines.

Teresia's Top Five Tips

Viking River Cruises Australia and New Zealand managing director Teresia Fors offers her top tips for agents to pass on to clients, and to help them sell a Europe river cruise.



- Urge clients to pack good walking shoes. They'll spend lots of time walking around the cities and villages they visit. "As soon as you get into port you're walking. It's very important to be comfortable to enjoy the atmosphere of the destination."
- Look beyond the obvious landmarks and traditional season. Clients that sail during the winter will often have key destinations to themselves, and Christmas cruising is a wonderful experience.
- Book early, book early, book early. Clients need to book early to make sure they get the stateroom they want. Each river cruise ship has 70-90 rooms and the inventory is taken for up to three weeks—if clients want to sail at a specific time they need to get in fast.
- Don't be too hung up about the cabin—the time spent in the room is minimal as clients want to make the most of the days in port. "You don't go to Paris for a hotel room. If booking a lower category means clients can spend another two weeks in Europe, then do it—very few Kiwis will go to Europe for just two weeks," she says.
- Don't be afraid to recommend river cruising to a traveller that doesn't see themselves as a cruise traveller. As soon as you have a client that wants a Europe experience—include river cruising as an option. "At the end of the day, the cruise ship is a boutique hotel at the centre of a different city or town every night."



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Viking: Trade Key In Competitive Market

Viking River Cruises Australia and New Zealand managing director Teresia Fors says the trade distribution is key to Viking's success in the Australasian market—it makes up 95% of sales.

"We are completely dedicated to servicing all channels of distribution, whether that's business to business or business to consumer—we have established fabulous support from the trade. Agents earn good money selling our product, and so they should due to

the work they put in," she says.

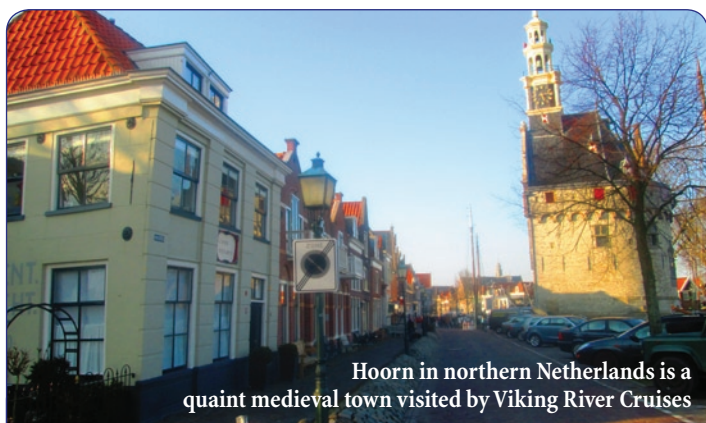
Fors acknowledges that Viking has strong competition from the likes of APT and Scenic, Uniworld and Avalon in this part of the world—but notes that in the US and Europe, it is the 'Goliath' of the river cruise market.

"Here we are more like the David," she quips. "We will have a bigger brand presence in the market the longer we are here and selling through all channels."

Fors adds that only a small fraction of Viking's total product is outlined in its brochure. "We will continue to develop our product," she says about the suggestion Viking will offer an increased portfolio of pre- and post-cruise add-ons.

For more photos, see
our Facebook page

[>>CLICK HERE<<](#)



Hoorn in northern Netherlands is a quaint medieval town visited by Viking River Cruises

River Cruising Bonuses

Kiwi agents onboard the Viking Aegir in Europe last week say their experience highlighted the advantage of river cruising in its ability to visit small port towns and villages—giving clients the chance to have authentic experiences on their own as well as with guided groups. "You can meet someone at a cafe in Hoorn, for example, and they're quite happy to sit and have a chat...it's all about that personal experience. They can relax and experience the atmosphere of a place after exploring on their own," says United Travel Ferrymead managing director Melissa Landrebe. The agents also noted the casual onboard atmosphere, open dining, the chance to meet and get to know fellow travellers onboard the smaller ships, and last, but not least, the top quality L'Occitane bath products—"the space you save when you don't have to pack your own is worth its weight in shopping gold".

Entire Class Awarded

Cruise Critic took the unprecedented move of naming the entire Long Ship fleet its Best New River Cruise Ship in its 2012 Editors' Picks awards. "The six new Viking Longships launched this year are identical, so all win for their sleek lines, stunning atrium, balcony cabins with full-sized verandahs, and hotel-style suites," says the cruise review site.

A Taste Of Europe

Many of Viking River Cruises' itineraries are eight days long, giving clients a taste of central Europe as part of a longer holiday in the region. The cruise line's Long Ships ply the waters of the Main, Rhine, Danube, France's Saone, Rhone, Dordogne, Garonne and Gironde Rivers, with itineraries focusing on the cultural highlights of each country, or its cuisine and wines. Trips include the eight-day Romantic Danube, from Budapest to Nuremburg visiting grand cities and quaint towns along the Danube river, the Chateaux, Rivers and Wine return journey from Bordeaux to Saint-Emilion and taking in key wine-making regions and their charms.

Cuisine In Focus



While onboard a Viking River Cruises European voyage, your clients will not only have the chance to enjoy local cuisine in the towns, villages and cities they sail to, but onboard each day and night as regional specialties and produce are served by Viking's expert chefs.



Grand European

Viking's most popular itinerary by far is the 15-day Grand European Tour from Amsterdam to Budapest, which covers five countries along the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers. Highlights include trying Sachertorte in Vienna, visiting the vineyards of Austria's Wachau Valley, learning local myths and legends and discovering the music of Mozart in his home country of Austria. The voyage includes 13 guided tours and can be taken in reverse from Budapest.

Seasonal Highlights

De Kas restaurant in Amsterdam is the perfect entree for clients about to embark on one of Viking's culinary inspired journeys. One of Amsterdam's well known culinary landmarks, De Kas is housed within one of the city's old municipal glasshouses. It is famous for its set menus designed around the produce grown within its glass walls, or locally. Dishes are paired with wines from an international list—but the Dutch sparkling wines stand out particularly. It's an open and airy venue ideal for special interest groups and clients looking for a relaxed but high-quality dining experience before they embark on a river cruise from Amsterdam.



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