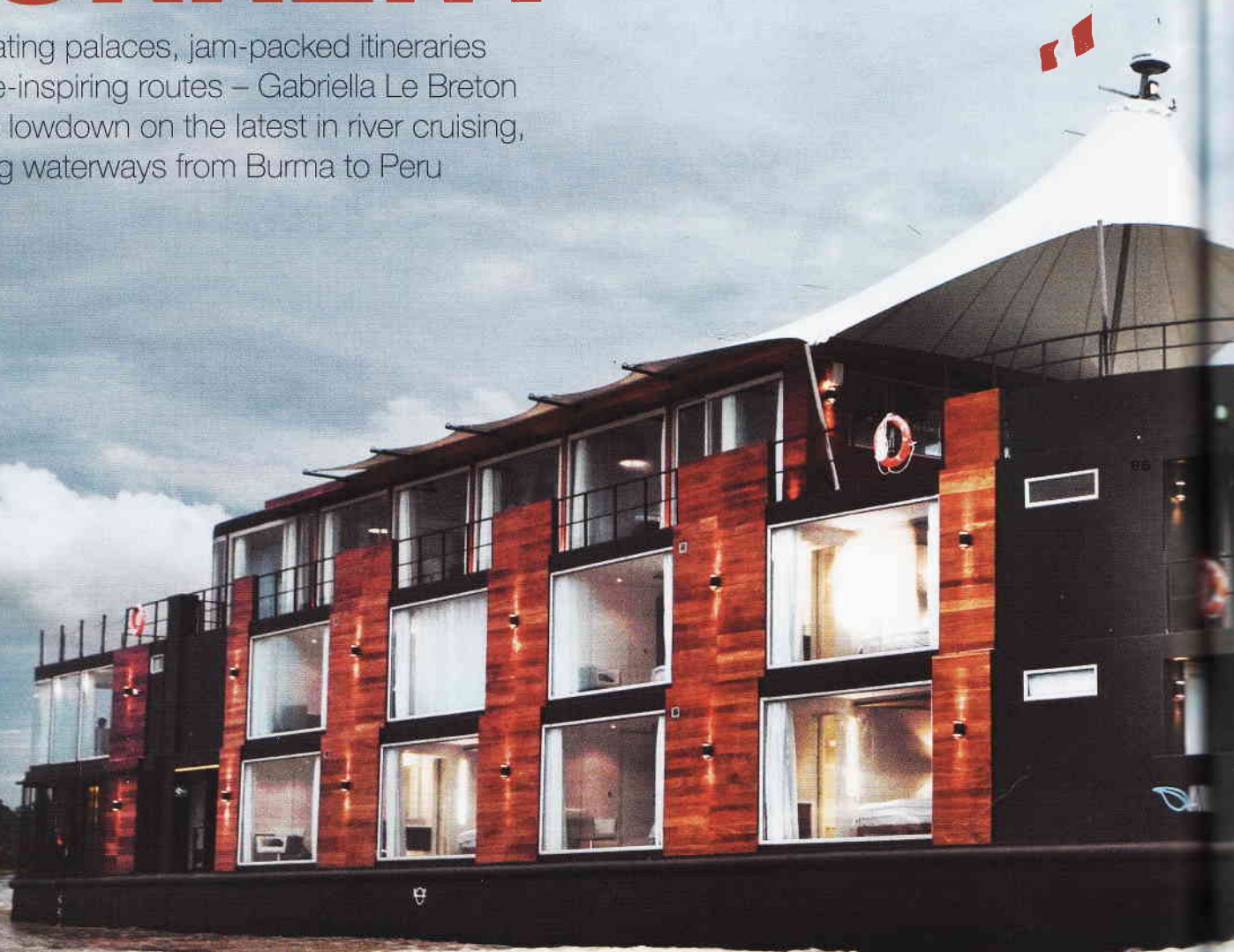


RIVER CRUISES

# Keeping CURRENT

New floating palaces, jam-packed itineraries and awe-inspiring routes – Gabriella Le Breton gets the lowdown on the latest in river cruising, spanning waterways from Burma to Peru

Below: the *Aria* will be your base for a spectacular Amazon adventure. Opposite, left to right: an *Aria* suite; Yagua Indian chief; *Queen Violeta*; G-Adventures takes you off exploring







## AMAZON, PERU

With its vast expanses of virgin rainforest, staggering array of wildlife and remote tribal communities, the Amazon is no ordinary river. This year, Avalon Waterways is expanding into the Amazon for the first time, via the splendid *Aria*, which can host 32 guests in 16 chic suites with floor-to-ceiling picture windows. It features a sun deck with Jacuzzi and cuisine from award-winning Peruvian chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino. Avalon's itinerary includes three nights onboard this sleek floating base, which will be your launchpad for exploring the tributaries and their flora and fauna – spotting creatures from pink dolphins to frogs and caiman. It's part of a trip that begins in Lima, from where you will fly to Cusco, to visit the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu, before heading north by plane to set off on the cruise itself.

G-Adventures is looking forward to the first year of operation of its 32-passenger Amazonian river ship *Queen Violeta*. Its trips are aimed at those who

want to experience something out of the ordinary, and here that means a chance to witness nature and ecology within one of the world's most complex river systems. A six-night voyage will offer you the opportunity to spend two whole days in the lush Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve, spotting sloths, toucans and turtles; take a canopy walk above dense rainforest, visit riverside villages and go piranha fishing. A qualified naturalist guide will lead you on daily excursions by skiff, returning to *Queen Violeta* for discussions about the area and its communities.

**THE DETAIL** Avalon Waterways' ([avalonwaterways.com](http://avalonwaterways.com)) 11-day From the Inca Empire to the Peruvian Amazon tour, from £3,375pp, including hotels, most meals, excursions and guides, but excluding external and internal flights. G-Adventures' ([gadventures.co.uk](http://gadventures.co.uk)) nine-day Amazon Riverboat Adventure, from £1,162pp, including hotels, internal flights, most meals, excursions, but excluding international flights. »







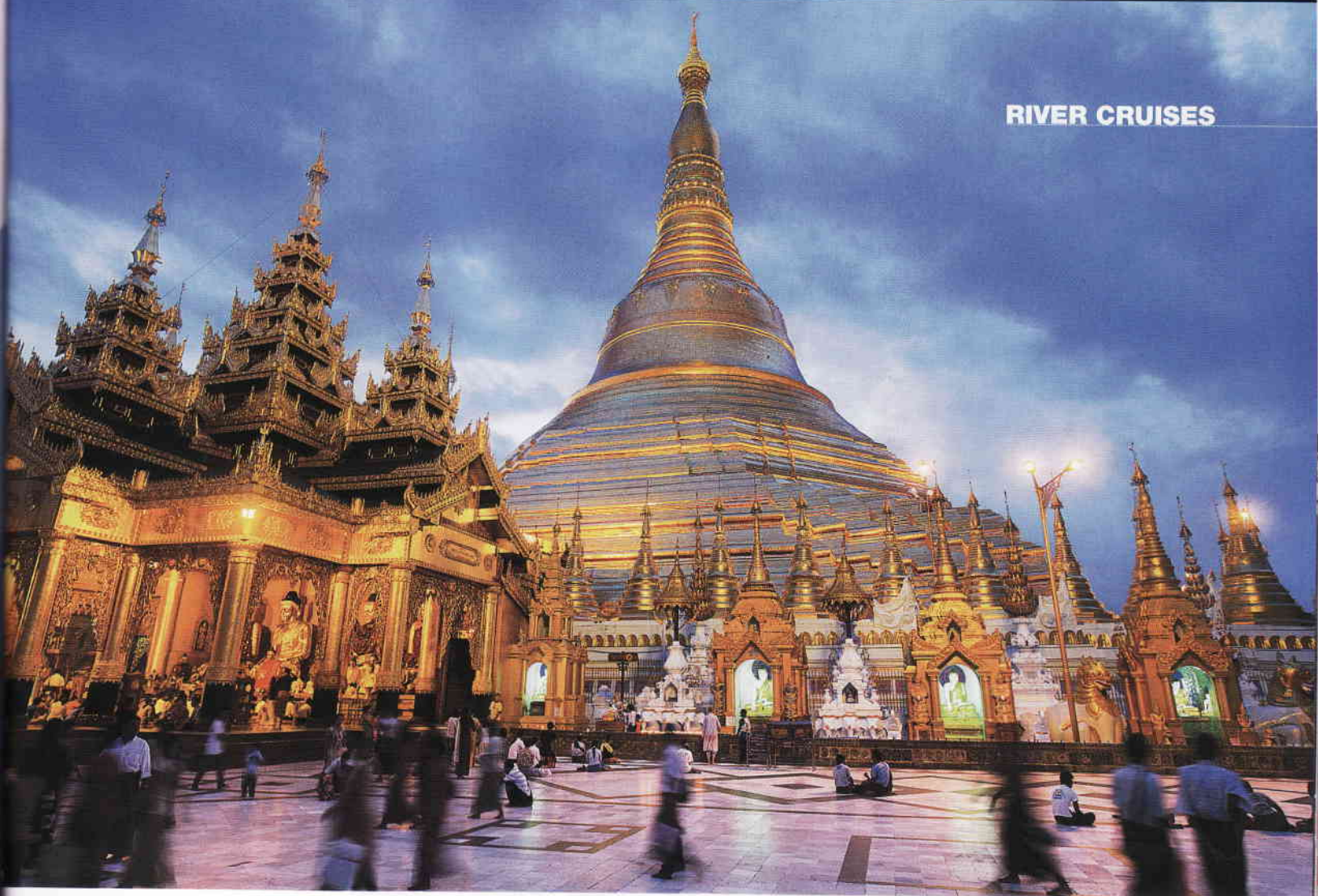
Below: the Yangtze includes stunning sights such as the Xiling Gorge. Left, top to bottom: a Tang Dynasty show in Xi'an; panda at Chongqing zoo; the mighty Yangtze; no visit to Xi'an would be complete without a show and rickshaw ride

**'A cruise down the Yangtze is like a voyage to a different world: its emerald banks shrouded in myth and legend, and landmarks such as the epic Three Gorges set to take your breath away'**

## YANGTZE, CHINA

A cruise down the Yangtze river is like a voyage to a different world: its emerald banks shrouded in myth and legend, and landmarks such as the epic Three Gorges set to take your breath away. The engineering feats are equally awe-inspiring. With so much to take in, you need a floating hotel that will be a proper sanctuary. Cue *Century Paragon*, a new five-star ship launching this year on the Yangtze. Titan Travel is offering a trip that includes this Uniworld cruise, as part of a voyage from Shanghai to Beijing. The 398-passenger *Century Paragon* is packed with facilities such as a cinema, library, spa, pool and boutique. It also offers cultural classes and events including Tai Chi, folk dancing and Chinese calligraphy, as well as two restaurants serving local and international cuisine. The perfect partner to the splendour of Shanghai, Xi'an's Terracotta Army and Beijing's Forbidden City. **THE DETAIL** Titan Travel's ([titantravel.co.uk](http://titantravel.co.uk)) 13-day Treasures of China and the Yangtze cruise and tour from £3,399pp, departing from April. Includes UK return flights, seven nights' hotel and four nights' onboard accommodation, most meals, home arrival/departure service, transfers and guided excursions.





Above: Yangon Shwedagon Pagoda in Burma. Below, left to right: *AmaPura* and suite; Yangon's Shwedagon Pagoda; *Irrawaddy Explorer* and suite



## IRRAWADDY, BURMA

Burma is one of the world's most mysterious and fascinating places, and has long been one of its most elusive. However, with tourism starting to grow – as the country transitions away from a military government – its architectural and cultural splendour now await your discovery. The best way to explore this land of temples, pagodas and colonial treasures is by river, meandering gently through its heart along the Irrawaddy. AmaWaterways is launching two voyages aboard the new *AmaPura* later this year. With just 28 contemporary suites, all featuring balconies, *AmaPura* boasts a stylish restaurant, lounge and bar, a spa, pool and large sun deck. The 16-and 14-day itineraries start in the colonial gem of Yangon, giving you time to delve into the temples, lush parks and markets of the Garden City of the East. Sailing from Yangon, *AmaPura* will call at the temple complex of Bagan and several ancient royal cities: Inwa, the Burmese capital for over 400 years; Amarapura, home to the world's longest teak bridge; and tranquil Sagaing. Guests will also visit the shrine of Mount Popa, home of spirit gods worshipped by Burmese buddhists, and Mandalay, the country's last royal capital.

Austrian-based L\"uftner Cruises, best known for its sophisticated *Amadeus* ships on Europe's rivers, is also launching a new ship in Burma: the 56-passenger, colonial-style *Irrawaddy Explorer*. On the Mysterious Myanmar cruise, the voyage will start in Prome, northwest of Yangon, and take in picturesque villages such as Yandabo and Mingun, with its eerie clusters of unfinished pagodas. Other highlights include Bagan, Mandalay and Amarapura. In addition to its Burma programme, L\"uftner will be launching voyages on the Mekong and Ganges this autumn aboard the *Mekong Navigator* and *Ganges Voyager*, revealing these relatively unexplored regions of Asia.

**THE DETAIL** AmaWaterways' ([amawaterways.co.uk](http://amawaterways.co.uk)) 14-day Golden Treasures of Myanmar cruise from £3,454pp departing December, including ten nights' onboard and three nights' hotel accommodation, most meals, tours and onboard entertainment, excluding domestic and international flights. L\"uftner Cruises' nine-night Mysterious Myanmar cruise from £2,504pp departing September, including all meals, shore excursions and onboard entertainment, excluding all flights. ————>>



## RIVER CRUISES

Below: *Queen of the Mississippi*.

Left to right: cooked oysters in the Big Easy; streetcar; crayfish cook and his food; a local brass band



'Sailing from New Orleans, you can follow the history of one of America's biggest rivers,



## MISSISSIPPI, USA

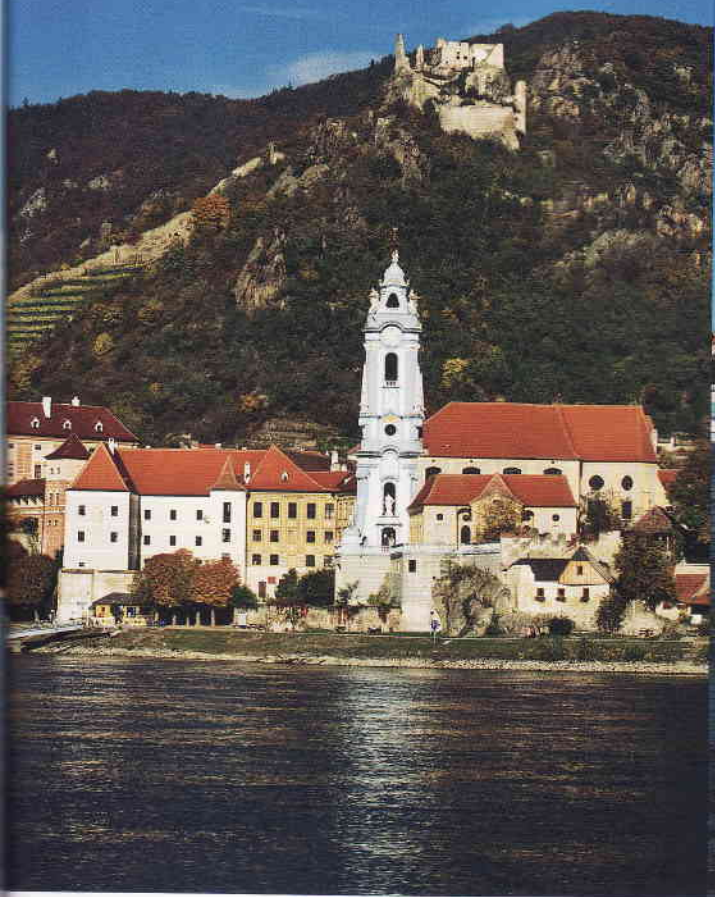
Sailing from New Orleans, you have the opportunity to follow the history of one of America's biggest rivers, the Mississippi; the route lined with gracious sugar cane plantations, quintessential Southern towns and historic battlefields. American Cruise Lines' *Queen of the Mississippi* has changed the face of cruising here, being the first new vessel built for the river in nearly 20 years. With her classic tiered decks and red paddlewheel, she blends 21st-century maritime technology and mod cons with the grandeur of classic American riverboats. On a round-trip, the

ship will be calling in at places such as Mississippi's first capital, Natchez, vibrant Baton Rouge and cotton fields before returning to the 'Capital of Jazz'. The *Queen of the Mississippi* evokes the luxury of grand antebellum mansions, offering passengers the largest staterooms on the river, a magnificent dining room, well-stocked library and chart room, six lounges and a putting green. **THE DETAIL** American Cruise Lines' ([americancruiselines.com](http://americancruiselines.com)) eight-day round-trip from New Orleans, from £2,525pp, full board; price excludes shore excursions and flights.

Photography by American Cruise Lines; Steve Orino



Clockwise from below:  
*Emerald Sky* brushes  
 past Hungary's epic  
 parliament; the Danube  
 in Austria's Wachau  
 Valley; floating down to  
 pretty Dürnstein



as you call at sugar plantations, quintessential Southern towns and historic battlefields'

## DANUBE, RHINE, MAIN AND MOSELLE, ACROSS EUROPE

Cruising on the stately Rhine you have time to take in Swiss gorges, German castles and Alsatian vineyards on your way to historic Amsterdam. While on the Danube, the river carves through the best of Central Europe – historic cities such as Linz and Vienna in Austria, as well as Budapest and Bratislava. This summer, a breath of fresh air will be blowing down the Danube, as Emerald Waterways – a new brand from upmarket Australian cruise line Scenic Tours – offers a four-star alternative to its big sister. It is launching with two shiny new 182-passenger ships, which will sail on the Danube, Rhine and Main. Pitched at a younger audience, *Emerald Star* and *Emerald Sky* benefit from features such as a heated pool with retractable roof, and a gelati station that morphs into a cinema each evening. Owner's Suites boast minimalist decor, walk-in wardrobes, Nespresso machines, iPads and complimentary laundry service. But the focus remains on value: inclusive cruise fares cover drinks, tips, wi-fi, daily shore excursions and EmeraldPlus activities, which dig below the surface of a selection of destinations.

Meanwhile, family-owned travel company Tauck is launching a new class of river cruise ship this year, with the *Savor* operating on the Danube and the *Inspire* on the Rhine and Moselle. The new vessels will raise the bar in terms of space per passenger on river ships, accommodating up to 130 guests, whereas current ships of a similar size host up to 190. The pair will each feature 67 cabins, of which eight will be 'loft' designs, which feature a raised platform seating area by virtually double-height picture windows.



Ships will also offer a cocktail lounge, fitness centre, spa, sun deck with Jacuzzi, two restaurants and a fleet of bicycles for pedalling off once you set foot on dry land. Sailing aboard *Inspire*, you are able to follow the Rhine as it winds from Basel all the way to Amsterdam – some of its calling points being Heidelberg Castle, Cologne and the 2,000-year-old town of Koblenz.

**THE DETAIL** Emerald Waterways' ([emeraldwaterways.co.uk](http://emeraldwaterways.co.uk)) eight-day Danube Delights voyages from £1,295pp full board, including flights, transfers and excursions. Tauck's ([tauck.co.uk](http://tauck.co.uk)) eight-day Romantic Rhine from £2,420pp, including most meals, shore excursions, and transfers; excludes flights. »

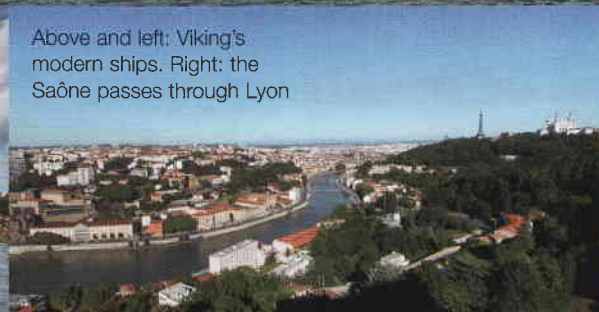


## RIVER CRUISES

'Breathe in the lavender fields of Provence, culture of Arles, vintages of Burgundy and cuisine of Lyon'



Above and left: Viking's modern ships. Right: the Saône passes through Lyon



## RHONE AND SAONE, FRANCE

Boutique river cruise line Uniworld is already celebrated for its six-star luxury fleet, the only cruise ships to have received a Zagat rating for dining, but it has set a new benchmark with the launch of its latest ship, *SS Catherine*. At 135m long, *SS Catherine* is one of Uniworld's largest ships yet she carries just 159 passengers – the additional space affords spacious staterooms, five suites of 28 sq m and, the pièce de résistance, the 38 sq m Royal Suite. Gracing the Rhône and Saône, *SS Catherine* will usher you from Avignon to Lyon, travelling through some of France's best countryside, taking in Burgundy and Provence. This trip boasts a choice of 14 excursions, so you'll be able to soak up the culture of Arles, synonymous with Van Gogh, see imposing Tarascon Fortress and pay a visit to the twin cities of Tournon and Tain-l'Hermitage, famed for its Côtes du Rhône wine.

Sample the cuisine of Lyon with Viking River Cruises, which lays claim to the world's largest river cruise fleet. By the end of the year, it will have launched a record 30 new ships within just

three years. Many of these are Viking Longships: 190-passenger ships with clean, Scandinavian-style interiors and hybrid diesel-electric engines, which reduce environmental impact, noise and vibration. Other innovative touches include an indoor/outdoor 'Aquavit Terrace', an organic herb garden and Explorer Suites – the largest river cruise suites in Europe. Two brand new Longships, *Viking Buri* and *Viking Hermod*, will launch on the Saône and Rhône this spring, sailing from Chalon-sur-Saône to Avignon over eight leisurely days.

**THE DETAIL** Titan Travel's ([titantravel.co.uk](http://titantravel.co.uk)) Uniworld eight-day Burgundy & Provence cruise departing April to November from £2,149pp full board, including return flights from the UK, private transfers with Titan's VIP Home Departure Service and shore excursions. Viking River Cruises' ([vikingrivercruises.co.uk](http://vikingrivercruises.co.uk)) eight-day Portraits of Southern France voyages from £1,845pp full board, including return flights from the UK, transfers and shore excursions. □