

Luftner Famil Report for the Amadeus Silver Amsterdam to Basel Classical Rhine Cruise 15th to 23rd October 2015

Itinerary for the 8 days...

Day 1 Thursday 15th October board the ship overnight in Amsterdam (Embarkation Day)

Day 2 Friday 16th October Amsterdam to Volendam

Day 3 Saturday 17th October Cologne Germany

Day 4 Sunday 18th October Cochem (cruising on the Moselle) Germany

Day 5 Monday 19th October Koblenz – Rudesheim Germany

Day 6 Tuesday 20th October Mannheim (Heidelberg) – Germersheim (Speyer) Germany

Day 7 Wednesday 21st October Kehl Germany (going to Strasbourg)

Day 8 Thursday 22nd October Basel Switzerland (Disembarkation Day)

On leaving our Hotel in Amsterdam we headed by taxi to the pier to join our River Cruise, this was only around 30 Euro and 20-25 mins. The excitement for us all was building as we got closer to the pier. As we arrived what was before was a beautiful looking ship and I knew we were in for a treat. She looked so smart and spectacular from the pier given that the day was grey and overcast in Amsterdam.

On embarkation we were greeted by such pleasant staff with smiles I knew that this would on flow to the other staff which it did for the entire cruise. All the staff were efficient, informative, always wore a smile and loved to chat. Your room key is rather large so there is no way to misplace this as it has large numbers on it secured to a key ring. We all had various twin cabins on the ship...these were situated on the Strauss and Mozart Decks. I could tell already that there was going to be a variety of nationalities onboard which is exactly what you want on a European River Cruise. To experience being around many different cultures. English is the first spoken language aboard the cruise. The age range of passengers aboard would be between 50-75 approximately.

I was sharing a twin room on the Strauss Deck cabin 203 which was a French Balcony Window room. Only a few doors from the reception desk also. I was so pleasantly surprised when I opened the door. The decor was so modern and of great colour tones. The room had great air conditioning and plenty of room to move about.

The storage area was a single deep wardrobe and many drawers so we could unpack our suitcases which then fitted very nicely under our beds. The bathroom was a decent size with a great shower... very modern. The bathroom had lovely amenities product and also a hairdryer which was good. Very clean and white also.

The room also has a Flat Screen/LCDTV ...on checking the channels available I was disappointed as to be honest they were all news channels no movie channels...but after speaking with the hotel

manager this is something that they are working on to have for guests, as this has been requested many times.

The only thing I feel the room needed was a small fridge as it would have been nice to store water to have cold and drinks in there... however there were lounges at the forward and aft of the ship and the also the Amedeus lounge had a fridge. There were two very comfortable lounge seats and a table just by the French Balcony floor to ceiling window in our cabin. So I looked forward to viewing the rivers from there at times. Mind you - the bed and pillows were so comfortable and perfect for an afternoon lie down and evening sleep. Extra blankets in the cupboard.

To open the window there was switch just behind the curtain for the ceiling to floor window and it came to elbow level ...perfect. I knew it would be beautiful to have that open when relaxing in the cabin whilst cruising down the rivers throughout the seven days of the cruise. I highly recommend this cabin - I loved it.

We were required to choose our shore excursions the first night of the cruise and they had to be given to reception before retiring for the evening...a list of all the shore excursions was left on your bed to look over and choose from on arrival, along with the programme for that evening which involved a safety and life on board briefing with our cruise director Andrea.

List of the Excursion Programme for the Classical Rhine Cruise as follows below...this is what I really love about Luftner cruises is they give you the choice of what you want to do for your shore excursions. This allows you to enjoy what interests you without having to pay for excursions that you won't partake in.

Also they have walking grades on each tour...1 being nice, simple, easy and short to 5 being considerable walking with longer distances, perhaps some uneven surfaces and stairways.

City Tour of Amsterdam with Canal Boat, Volendam and Cheese Farm

City Walking Tour of Cologne with visit of the Cathedral.

City Tour of Cochem with entrance to the Reichsburg castle and wine tasting

City Walking Tour of Koblenz

City Walk Ruedesheim with Music Museum

City Tour of Heidelberg (starts and ends in Mannheim, where the ship is docked)

City Walk of Speyer (transfer from Mannheim to Speyer and from Speyer back to the ship in Gernersheim)

City Tour of Strasbourg (starts and ends in Kelhl/Germany where the ship is docked)

The Cruise Director always gave a port talk the day before we arrived at each new destination, this was held in the Panorama lounge. The excursion costs were anything from 15 Euros – 54 Euros depending on what you chose to do. What is important to note here is that all the guides are local so they know everything you need to know about where you are visiting.

On disembarking for your shore excursions you take with you the headphones which you are given when you board the ship, these are on your bed. Also you pick up the small audio visual unit that you will plug these ear phones into and select the channel which is advice to you by the local guide for English. Very simple, easy and straightforward.

Each night whilst you are at dinner the house keeping staff are in your room turning down your bed and leaving a chocolate and the following days programme so you can relax and read up on what was in store for the next day on board and ashore.

But what I will let you know is that you wake up to the most relaxing wakeup call of birds chirping and violins from Strauss/Mozart...just beautiful...I have recorded it so have listened to it a few times, very peaceful. Then Andrea says "Good Morning " and talks through timings of the first few things of the morning...

On the first walk around of the ship I got to know where everything was and situated. There are two main lounges...the forward lounge on the Mozart deck is the Panorama Lounge which is rather big and can hold many people...very modern decor and comfortable. This is where morning and afternoon tea is always held and for those that wanted a lighter lunch option not a three course lunch. There is also a bar in here which if people wanted a drink they could purchase one...there was always a "drink of the day" on the programme be it alcoholic or non alcoholic for those that preferred. This lounge was perfect for relaxing and reading...meeting other guests...it also hosted the evening entertainment.

All the windows were large and panoramic so you could easily see out if you were on the port or starboard side of the ship. Which, when river cruising down these beautiful rivers in Europe is vital. Outside of the Panorama Lounge was a large sundeck area so you could enjoy time out there which would be fantastic in the summer but given the weather it was a little cold.

On walking further on towards the aft of the ship you have a small panorama cafe just outside of the lounge with gorgeous European style furniture and decor. There you can order a special coffee...not far from this is the stair well at the forward part of the ship that connects all three levels together so very accessible...they also have stairs at the aft of the ship that do the same...

Towards the aft of the ship of the Mozart deck, when walking down the corridors you come to the Massage Therapy Suite and also a Hair Salon Suite...both rooms were very spacious and lovely to be in...I did treat myself to an hour massage which was 60Euro...and worth every dollar spent. Very relaxing with nice oils. Across the corridor from these 2 suites is the gym...it is small over two levels and has a treadmill, a rowing machine and a weights area...for those that wanted early exercise there was often yoga in there at 6:30am with an instructor. Otherwise what I liked to do was go to the top of the ship to large open deck area and walk around and around there for some morning exercise...you need it with all the beautiful food you can eat...there are also many loungers on the top deck are and this is where the bikes are kept if you take one ashore...in the height of summer it would be just lovely to lounge up there.

Next lounge area which is at the very aft of the ship is the Amadeus lounge...This is a lot smaller than the Panorama Lounge so more intimate...here there is a large TV, many couches, 24 hour Tea, Coffee and Chocolate Biscuits. Along with this there are two computers with internet access. I did purchase

a WIFI package for the week whilst on the ship. This was 35Euro...it wasn't super fast but to be expected...but still it was better WIFI access than at sea.

On the Mozart decks the cabins are mainly the French Balcony Windows and also the suites. The suites do have a small outdoor balcony and more room of course for leisure space. Upon inspection of the other cabins on the ship they are fixed windows cabins. These are all on the lower deck which was the Hayden Deck...the window is long and rectangular not at eye level but gives the room some natural light. The room is naturally a little darker but exactly the same layout as a French Balcony window cabin so no size difference whatsoever. So if guests are not one to lounge in their room and don't want a large floor to ceiling window for scenic views throughout the day, this is for them. They can choose to be in one of the two lounges to relax in and socialise with other guests but also the cabin is just as comfortable. The same layout as a French balcony like I had, no bigger or smaller just the different window type.

On the Strauss deck at the forward part of the ship is the reception area and also a small shop to purchase basic things. This is also where the main dining room/restaurant for a full service Breakfast/Lunch and Dinner is served. Once again a beautifully set area with modern decor, white table cloths and silver wear.

You are introduced to the waiter who will be looking after you throughout your entire cruise. We had Alin, who was just fantastic. This is a huge benefit to have the same waiter at all meal times... you can build up a personal rapport and they also get to know the things you like it...be it a certain beverage or food requirement.

When it came to the cuisine and culinary meals on board, I give this a 10/10...the food was absolutely divine and a taste sensation. It was plated all so beautifully and served to perfection. A very large range of choice for Lunch and Dinner - white meat/red meat or vegetarian. It would be a sin not to have one of the desserts...having a weakness for chocolate I indulged and enjoyed. Wine and Beer was complimentary and following at dinner...if you wanted an alcoholic beverage with lunch you would have to pay for it. I would recommend for those that are non drinkers to get a complimentary non alcoholic beverage with your dinner. The food is cooked and baked daily so all from fresh produce and ingredients. They have a pastry chef and baker on board to make all the delicious breads and cakes...the food was simply faultless and of a fine dining standard.

Breakfast was always a continental or fully cooked breakfast option which was self service and also certain menu items that your waiter would bring to you if you requested it.

On some days there were morning activities like "mixed trivia" or depending on where we were on the river a morning tea. Whilst cruising on the Moselle River we had a Fruhshoppen - a tasting of Bavarian Food, with live music in the lounge...

The afternoon tea which is at the same time everyday in the Panorama Lounge from 4:30pm – 5pm consists of coffee and delicious pastries.

When it comes to tipping aboard a Luftner cruise, at the end of the cruise this is discussed at the disembarkation briefing. Any tipping was voluntary and shows ones personal satisfaction with the services on board which to my standard was about average. The guideline for tipping that was given was 7 Euros per day...so a seven night cruise, 49 Euros per day.

This is in accordance with international practice. An envelope is left on your bed the evening before embarkation and an appropriately marked box is left at reception for your contribution.

I was so impressed at how informed and updated we were kept at all times throughout the cruise...so much information that you could read in the daily programme, a city map of where you could go to ashore if you decided to do your own walking excursion at your leisure.

One huge difference between an ocean cruise and a river cruise are the locks along the rivers. A "lock" is a place where boats that are travelling up or down the river or canal can be raised higher or lower. Locks are built in places where the level of water in the river or canal can suddenly change. There are several locks along the way and quite an experience when going through one...very safe but quite amazing how the crew take the ship through these with such accuracy and precision.

Disembarkation went extremely smoothly and you could order a taxi or transport the night before to ensure you could get to where you need to the day you left the ship, be it a train or to the airport, on time. If there were groups on board they were given a different coloured ribbon for each of the bags...this helped as you needed to leave your bag outside your cabin as the staff take these ashore for you...we had a blue ribbon so this made it nice and easy. The taxi ride to Basel train station cost around 35 Euro.

Overall I had the most wonderful experience on this River Cruise it was more than I had hoped for and such a beautiful and different way to see Europe... I can highly recommend the Classical Rhine Cruise with Luftner on an Amadeus Ship. Day to day the scenery got even more beautiful and took my breath away many many times...how often can you say that you spend a day cruising down the Moselle River seeing 24 historical and magnificent castles...once in a lifetime...

A River Cruise is very relaxing holiday and the type of individuals on board are looking for the same kind of experience...I have absolute confidence in this company and the River Cruise products and itineraries that they offer.

By Melissa Roberts

BDE Francis Travel Marketing