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Inside Croisi's Marne River Cruise Through Champagne

CRUISE LINE & CRUISE SHIP | WILL MCGOUGH | JUNE 05, 2019



PHOTO: CroisiEurope's MS Raymonde. (Photo via CroisiEurope)

There are many companies to choose from when taking a river cruise around Europe. Recently, we had the chance to check out [CroisiEurope's Marne River itinerary](#). Here's everything you need to know about the ship, its route and what to expect during your journey.

The Ship and Route

The [MS Raymonde](#) is a small barge, long and thin like a cigar, with two interior floors. It has 11 rooms in total, ten of which sit below deck with their windows at the water line.



PHOTO: Guest room on board CroisiEurope's MS Raymonde. (Photo via CroisiEurope)

The main floor is a common area, split between a single-table dining area (more on this below) and a gathering area with comfortable couches, a bar and big windows. Extending outside from the main living area is an outdoor deck with lounge chairs, umbrellas and a hot tub (which, to be fair, was not functioning on our journey due to maintenance issues). From the exterior deck, you can access a third level platform for a better view of your surroundings.

The route begins in Epernay and cruises through the charming small towns and villages of the Champagne Region, where the famous bubbly is grown and bottled. In total, the journey goes through 113 miles and 18 water locks, ending in Paris with an evening cruise on the Seine River, past the famous landmarks of Paris like the [Notre Dame Cathedral](#). On the final night, the Raymonde docks on the Seine within sight of the [Eiffel Tower](#).

The crew size is small but more than sufficient with eight employees that include a chef, purser and captain. The near 1-to-3 ratio of crew to passengers ensures you will get to know each other over the course of the trip, a nice perk for those that like to travel deeper. The cabins are cozy, with two beds, a small desk, long rectangular windows and a private bathroom.

The Food and Drink

That “small ship” comradery is a theme throughout the Raymonde’s voyage. Meal times are shared on board, with one big dining room table bringing everyone together. While breakfast is buffet style, lunch and dinner are served collectively to the group at a single time. Those traveling on the Raymonde should be ready and willing to mingle with other passengers at meal times—which is pretty easy (and fun) to do once the cheese and [wine](#) start flowing.



PHOTO: Dining onboard CroisiEurope's MS Raymonde. (Photo via CroisiEurope)

Both lunch and dinner are wine-paired meals, featuring different French varietals from around the country and, of course, champagne to start. The last course of each lunch is a shared cheese plate, with never-repeating, always-rotating options, many from the local villages you are passing through on the cruise.

Each meal, the chef presents his three-to-four course creation, highlighting local ingredients (fish, game, vegetables) and specialties (sauces, spices, herbs). After dinner, drinks and conversation continue in the bar and living area.

Food and drink aboard the Raymonde are all-inclusive. The bar is always open for drinks and small snacks are served throughout the day between meals.

The Destinations and Tours

A big part of the experience on the Raymonde is passing through the Champagne region, watching the small villages, agricultural fields and rolling vineyards go by from the scenic perch of the slow-paced barge. The Raymonde travels only 5 miles per hour, meaning things will never pass by too quickly.

That sense of relaxation is complemented by a wealth of opportunity to explore your surroundings off-ship. Each day, there is an organized outing that brings the group into the local communities.

Excursions include a walking tour of Reims, the main hub of the Champagne region; an introduction to the Avenue de Champagne in

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Epernay, a street where many famous champagne producers, like Moët et Chandon, have their headquarters; a visit to the grave of Dom Pérignon in Hautvillers; an introduction to the champagne-making process and a tasting at a local vineyard; falconry in Château Thierry; and a cheese tasting in Meaux (the infamous Brie de Meaux).

These excursions on their own are all interesting and worthwhile; yet collectively, they serve a greater purpose—giving you an extensive introduction to the French countryside. It's a great way to gain inspiration for future trips, as you get to experience many different facets of the region.

When to Go

Itineraries take place in the fall, summer and spring. Each season has its perks. In spring, the land is fresh and green thanks to the winter rain, and the rapeseed fields glow bright yellow alongside the green agricultural fields—definitely a sight to see. Summer brings the best weather, and a chance to see the vineyards and vines in full bloom; the fall is the harvest season, when the grapes are picked and champagne production is in full swing.