

Living History

A new Rhine River cruise brings western Europe's rich Jewish heritage to life.

Gliding along the mighty Rhine, river cruisers get an intimate perspective on medieval castles, lush vineyards, and historic villages. But for those also hoping to trace the region's extensive Jewish roots, **Uniworld's** new-for-2018 Rhine itinerary features themed **Jewish-heritage excursions** at nearly every port. Don't-miss experiences include visits to Basel's Great Synagogue, Israel Park, and sites significant to the Zionist movement's inception; the **Museum Judengasse** in Frankfurt, featuring the foundations of five homes from Europe's first Jewish ghetto, Judengasse (Jew's Alley), and an adjacent Holocaust memorial; Amsterdam's former Jewish Quarter, where Rembrandt lived – the Dutch painter's works often depicted local Jewish citizens, and his house, now a museum, is one of the few originals still standing in the area; and **Strasbourg's Old Town** to tour the Alsatian Museum's Jewish collection and model prayer room.

Traveling through the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Switzerland,

cruisers have the opportunity to mix and match shore excursions as they please, and all ports offer plenty of non-Jewish heritage options as well. Just a few suggestions: Join a local guide for an **insider's tour of Speyer** to glimpse its UNESCO-designated Romanesque cathedral; hike to Bacharach's twelfth-century Stahleck Castle; head into Cologne for a **Kölsch beer tasting**; and bike along the Rhine in Basel before stopping at the Fondation Beyeler to view works by Cézanne, Klee, and other masters. The sailing also provides special access to art collections in multiple countries, along with a family program for travelers ages 4 to 17 designed to spark a desire for lifelong learning.

GO: All-inclusive, nine-day sailings from Basel to Amsterdam (or reverse) aboard the 130-passenger *River Empress* include transfers, onboard meals, guided shore excursions, and more. *Departures: Multiple dates, March 14 through November 5, 2018; from \$2,199.*



Uniworld's *River Empress* along Europe's Rhine River.

CULTURAL CRUISES

From art to ancient wonders, three more special-interest voyages for 2018.



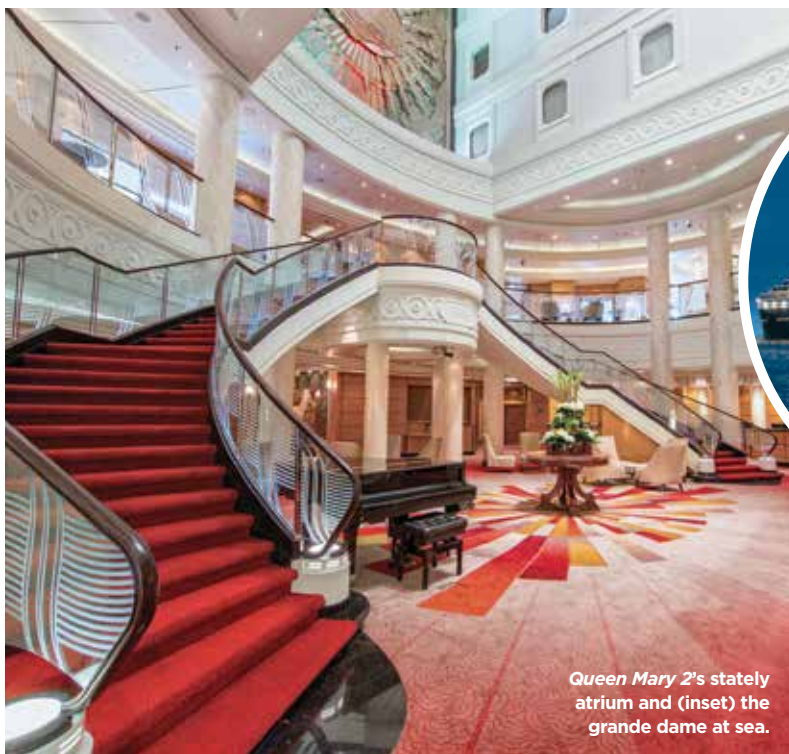
In northern France, an **art-focused** cruise along the Seine aboard **Avalon Waterways'** 128-passenger *Tapestry II* features a tour of Monet's garden in Giverny and visits to towns that inspired such icons as Van Gogh. *Eight days, round-trip from Paris. Departure: July 28, 2018; from \$2,499.*



Viking River Cruises' 52-passenger *Ra* takes guests on the Nile to experience **Egypt's pyramids**, temples, and spice markets. *Twelve days, round-trip from Cairo. Departures: Multiple dates, June 1 through December 21, 2018; from \$5,399.*



Guests of **Abercrombie & Kent's** China and Yangtze tour spend three nights on the 124-passenger *Sanctuary Yangzi Explorer* to cruise the "Long River" while learning about **traditional Chinese medicine** and boarding "pea pod" boats poled by Tujia boatmen. *Thirteen days, Beijing to Shanghai. Departures: Multiple dates, March 16 through October 26, 2018; from \$5,995.*



Queen Mary 2's stately atrium and (inset) the grande dame at sea.

SHIP REVIEW

Hail to the Queen

Some classics keep us coming back – and for good reason.

After a total redesign in 2016, Queen Mary 2 reclaimed her throne, looking fresher than ever. While there are plenty of new players at sea, Virtuoso travel advisor Fran Kramer of Rochester, New York, declares her devotion to Cunard's 2,961-passenger flagship, which she describes as "the epitome of gracious living," following her recent cruise. Here, a few features worth hailing.

GLAMOUR GIRL

After its makeover, QM2 exudes a **Hollywood-heyday allure**. Stepping foot in the redesigned public spaces "is almost like being on a movie set waiting for the stars and director," says Kramer, adding that the **sweeping staircases**, brilliant chandeliers, and exotic fabrics are

reminiscent of backdrops for *The Great Gatsby*. Despite the formal ambience, however, the ship never feels intimidating or stuffy. Besides, Kramer notes, "Don't we all have party clothes in the closet that we rarely get to show off?"

AT YOUR SERVICE

The glamour is even more enhanced in the **Grills accommodations**, with gorgeous decor and white-gloved butlers who unpack luggage, deliver canapés each evening, make dinner reservations – and even assist with pesky bow ties. Kramer lauds the Grills-exclusive dining room, where guests can linger for the entire evening and enjoy a number of tableside preparations. She finds the reserved area for **afternoon tea** more intimate,



as well: "It overlooks the water and has a relaxed atmosphere – no rush, no crowds."

A DAY IN THE LIFE

For Kramer, the ideal sea day aboard QM2 begins with a walk around the polished decks, fresh-made **cinnamon breakfast bread**, and an "always outstanding" lecture before a nap on her cabin's **private balcony**. After lunch, she recommends the fencing lessons ("as many laughs as *Saturday Night Live!*"), followed by a surf-and-turf dinner and a theater show, preferably in one of the private boxes.

PREMIER PURSUITS

"The quality of **Cunard's enrichment programs** is top notch," says Kramer. During her many sailings on the line's three ships, she's attended talks by everyone from a Royal Family butler to a former Concorde pilot to a U.S. diplomat involved in the Iraq War. Aboard QM2, guests can browse the well-stocked library and explore the skies in the **only planetarium at sea**.

ROYAL WAVE

Cunard's classic **transatlantic sailings** offer the perfect way to experience the great expanse and gentle lull of the ocean, Kramer observes. "We forget that before planes, trains, and automobiles, it was the seas and rivers that **connected us all**."