Cruise Details

Name:	Grand European Cruise - Westbound
Reference:	TAUCKRXW202722072027
Operator:	Tauck
Cruise Type:	River
Cruise Rating:	Luxury
Ship:	MS Esprit
Regions:	Rhine
Departs On:	22 Jul 27
Departs From:	Constanta
Arrives On:	15 Aug 27
Arrives At:	Amsterdam
Cruise Nights:	24
Total Vacation Days:	25

Itinerary

Day 1: Constanta (Romania)

Tour begins: 6:00 PM, InterContinental Athénée Palace Bucharest. A transfer is included from Bucharest Henri Coanda International Airport to theInterContinental Athénée Palace Bucharest in the heart of the city. Join us this evening for a Tauck Exclusive at the Bragadiru Palace (a.k.a the Palace of Culture). Named after founder Dumitru Marinescu Bragadiru, one of Romania's most important industrialists, the palace was originally used as a brewery and a performance hall before being confiscated in the 1940's (later returning to the descendants of Bragadiru in the early 2000's). Attend a special welcome reception at the palace, complete with musical entertainment.

Arrives On: 22 Jul 27

Day 2: Bucharest (Romania)

A choice of sightseeing today echoes the legacy of 15th-century Romanian prince Vlad Tepes (a.k.a. "Vlad the Impaler"), thought to be the historical model for Bram Stoker's Dracula. You may

choose to take a full-day excursion to Transylvania's 14th-century Bran Castle, which Tepes once used as a fortress during his military campaigns; the excursion includes a visit to the castle and free time in Bran. Alternatively, you can travel on a full-day excursion into the Carpathian Mountains to the mountain resort town of Sinaia and visit a nearby castle. Or, drive to Targoviste to visit the formal royal court of Vlad the Tepes a.k.a. Dracula, and the military barracks museum where the trial and execution of Romania's Communist leader, Ceausescu, took place. Return to Bucharest for free time. If you wish, have dinner at the hotel tonight, or choose to enjoy a lunch or dinner at the hotel at another time during your stay.

Arrives On: 23 Jul 27

Day 3: Bucharest (Romania)

Discover more of Romania's capital on a morning sightseeing tour, and choose whether you wish to see the National Museum of Art of Romania or visit Ceausescu Villa. The rest of the day and evening are yours to spend pursuing what interests you most in this fascinating city.

Arrives On: 24 Jul 27

Day 4: Constanta (Romania)

Before embarking your riverboat today, drive to Romania's popular Black Sea coast – first to the popular resort of Mamaia for lunch and some "beach time," then on to the port city of Constanta. Here, in what was originally the ancient Greek colony of Tomis, you'll view numerous Greek and Roman antiquities, an Art-Nouveau casino, and a monument to the Roman poet Ovid, who spent years in exile here. Board your riverboat in Constanta to launch your unforgettable cruise across the ancient heart of Europe.

Arrives On: 25 Jul 27

Day 5: Ruse (Bulgaria)

Your lower Danube cruise continues in Bulgaria; largely off limits during four centuries of Ottoman rule and decades behind the Iron Curtain, the country's rich natural beauty and history is yours to discover today. Disembark in Ruse – often referred to as "Little Vienna" for its Art-Nouveau homes, Austro-Hungarian architecture and lively cafés – for a choice of sightseeing today. You may join us for a guided walking tour of the Basarabov rock church, and its easily-accessible chapel, or alternatively, embark on a vigorous hike to the celebrated rock churches in the village of Ivanovo, whose stony chambers carved into steep, cliffside caves reveal stunning medieval frescoes inside; a visit is richly rewarding. Afterwards, both groups will convene in Ruse before returning to the riverboat.

Arrives On: 26 Jul 27

Day 6: Vidin (Bulgaria)

There's something special about just "kicking back" during a leisurely morning cruising the Danube, enjoying picture-perfect views of the passing landscapes. Onboard activities throughout your cruise, such as special lectures and presentations, cooking demonstrations or music and dance performances, are an important part of the Tauck river cruising experience. Today, after the riverboat arrives in Vidin, Bulgaria, join us for a walking tour of Vidin's cobblestone streets, including a visit to Baba Vida fortress.

Arrives On: 27 Jul 27

Day 7: Iron Gates (Romania)

On another relaxing day aboard your grand European river cruise, sail along the Bulgarian / Romanian border, enjoying great views of the Transylvanian Alps. As you cruise, keep an eye out for a kingly face carved into the Danube's rocky bank on the Romanian side; it's a monument to the 2nd-century Dacian King Decebalus, who defended his kingdom from the invading Romans – and it's the tallest rock sculpture in Europe. Glide through Romania's Kazan Narrows and the Iron Gate of the Danube, a spectacular two-mile-long series of gorges between the Carpathian and Balkan Mountains, en route to Serbia.

Arrives On: 28 Jul 27

Day 8: Belgrade (Serbia)

Dock in Belgrade, Serbia's eclectic, cosmopolitan capital at the juncture of the Danube and Sava rivers. This morning you'll have a choice of exploring Belgrade on a tour of the city with visits to Tito's Memorial, the formidable Kalemegdan Fortress, views of busy Slavija Square (now one of the city's major squares, but once a large pool where residents hunted wild ducks!), Parliament, Republic Square and City Hall, or, tour New Belgrade by bicycle (guests who wish to participate in this choice must be comfortable on a bicycle in a city environment). Afterwards, you'll have a choice of spending time on your own in Belgrade or returning to the riverboat, where you'll enjoy some entertainment by Serbian performers. Depart the ship early evening for a special reception and dinner at the White Palace on the grounds of the beautiful Royal Palace of Dedinje in Belgrade, built in the 1920s for the Yugoslavian royal family – HRH Crown Prince Alexander II of Serbia and his family reside there today. Sail on to Croatia overnight.

Arrives On: 29 Jul 27

Day 9: Vukovar (Croatia)

Your Danube cruise crosses the border from Serbia to Croatia and arrives in historic Vukovar. Preceded by an onboard lecture on Croatia's turbulent history by a local expert, your tour of this venerable 10th-century city – once showcasing opulent 18th-century Baroque mansions, but now a

mix of old and new – poignantly symbolizes the effects of the 1990s war. Visit with a local family who have recently returned to resume their lives in the city after the conflict, as they share homemade refreshments with you in their private home. You'll have some time at leisure in Vukovar before the riverboat continues on to Hungary tonight.

Arrives On: 30 Jul 27

Day 10: Pécs (Hungary)

Arrive in Mohacs this morning for an excursion to Pécs and a tour of its 11th-century cathedral. Here you'll also explore the fascinating Christian Necropolis, a complex dating back to the 4th century that includes underground burial chambers and chapels adorned with early Christian art and frescoes, a UNESCO World Heritage site. In the 19th century, Pécs was famous worldwide for the exquisite Zsolnay porcelain manufactured here, and your visit includes a stop at the Zsolnay Museum for a look at its stunning examples of Art Nouveau stoneware, tiles and pottery. Visit a winery in Villány for lunch (this region is renowned for its red wines) then return to Mohacs. Tonight, enjoy a cocktail reception and dinner aboard ship as your riverboat sails toward Budapest.

Arrives On: 31 Jul 27

Day 11: Budapest (Hungary)

Budapest was once two separate cities, Buda and Pest, divided by the Danube River. Sightseeing in Budapest's Buda section today includes the Hungarian Parliament building, a 19th-century neo-Gothic masterpiece on the Danube (when open); Fisherman's Bastion, standing watch like a sentinel over the river; and Matthias Church. Your riverboat spends the evening docked in Budapest.

Arrives On: 01 Aug 27

Day 12: Budapest (Hungary)

Explore the Pest section of the city on a morning sightseeing tour today. Sites include Heroes' Square, bounded by some of the finest architectural works in Hungary; City Park; and the bustling, 19th-century-vintage Central Market Hall, where you can buy practically anything! Enjoy an onboard cocktail reception and a gala dinner in the Compass Rose tonight as your riverboat departs Budapest and cruises on to Bratislava, Slovakia overnight.

Arrives On: 02 Aug 27

Day 13: Bratislava (Slovakia)

An ancient city with a modern pulse, Slovakia's dynamic capital is home to an Old Town brimming with life – and devoid of cars. Our local expert shares insider anecdotes about Bratislava before

you join a walking tour of the cobblestoned city center, the perfect place for ambling. Seventeen centuries of Slovak history are eloquently chronicled in its 13th-century Old Town Hall, Baroque Habsburg-era palaces, the Opera House, Slovak Philharmonic Hall, and St. Martin's Cathedral, site of the coronation of many Hungarian royals. Cruise this afternoon to Vienna, enjoying the passing scenery and shipboard activities. Tonight, nothing quite compares to the royal treatment you'll experience at a Tauck Exclusive – our private evening in the Palais Pallavicini, a Baroque palace in the heart of the city. Welcome champagne and dinner precede a sumptuous dinner and a live musical performance (the evening of the event is subject to change).

Arrives On: 03 Aug 27

Day 14: Vienna (Austria)

Wake up in Vienna, evoking quintessential images of Old World Europe. Sightseeing today includes your choice of guided visits to the Habsburgs' illustrious Schönbrunn Palace, an architectural masterpiece and Austrian cultural treasure, or the Sisi Museum in the Hofburg, once the Habsburgs' royal palace and now Austria's official presidential residence. Spend the remainder of the day as you please in Vienna, returning to the ship for dinner and onboard entertainment.

Arrives On: 04 Aug 27

Day 15: Melk (Austria)

Go ashore in Dürnstein this morning for a choice of activities. You can either go for a walk through the village with your Tauck Director followed, if you like, by a hike to the hilltop ruins of Kuenringerburg – the castle where England's King Richard the Lionhearted was held for ransom during the Crusades – or take a bicycle ride* in the vineyard-covered Wachau Valley. Later, cruise to Melk for a guided visit to its 900-year-old Benedictine abbey; both its Baroque architecture and river views impress. Return to your riverboat late afternoon; onboard ship tonight, you'll be entertained by a talented musical group.

Arrives On: 05 Aug 27

Day 16: Passau (Germany)

After crossing the border from Austria to Germany, dock in the Bavarian town of Passau on the Danube and Inn rivers, whose history dates back to the days of the Roman empire. Today, you have the choice of a walking tour revealing the Baroque treasures of this lovely riverside town, known for its stained glass and its many churches – including St. Stephan's Cathedral, home to the largest pipe organ outside of the U.S., and the biggest cathedral organ in the world (inside cathedral visit may not be available on all departures); a cycling excursion around Passau, suitable for more experienced riders; or a full-day excursion to the lovely Austrian city of Salzburg, birthplace of W.A. Mozart (and setting of The Sound of Music). This evening, your riverboat departs Passau and

continues on to Regensburg.

Arrives On: 06 Aug 27

Day 17: Regensburg (Germany)

With its roots as a Roman encampment on the Danube, the quintessential Bavarian town of Regensburg is home to more than 1,400 original historic buildings. Walking here is a delight and is the only way to view the sights up-close. A local guide will lead the way as you see the town's 12th-century Steinerne Brücke (Germany's oldest surviving stone bridge), the 15th-century Altes Rathaus (Town Hall, once the seat of the Imperial Diet), towering Dom St. Peter, and the remains of the Roman wall. Visit the palatial house of Thurn and Taxis on a private visit, where 1,000 years of history in the complex of buildings include a palace, a Benedictine monastery and a well-preserved gothic cloister. The afternoon is yours to enjoy as you wish.

Arrives On: 07 Aug 27

Day 18: Nuremberg (Germany)

Today, your riverboat negotiates the Main-Danube Canal, which ultimately links the North Sea with the Black Sea; learn about the canal's history from a local expert during your transit. The idea goes back as far as Charlemagne, but wasn't realized until the canal's completion in the 1990s; pass through 16 locks as the waterway traverses the mountains. After lunch on the riverboat, arrive in historic Nürnberg. From the center of the German Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries to the site of National Socialist Germans Workers' Party conventions leading into World War II, Nuremberg has had a storied history since it was first documented in 1050. Today, Nuremberg is a hub for tourism and continues to be important industrial center. Your exploration of this historic city today offers two options; one brings you on a visit Nuremberg's Old Town, including an introductory walking tour through the Medieval fortification walls via Castle terrace to Old Town, passing by Albrecht Dürer House (guests may visit independently after the walking tour), continuing to St. Sebald Church (inside visit if available) and passing by the old City Hall before finishing at the Hauptmarkt; the other, offers a look into Nuremberg, both past and present, viewing sites such as the train terminal, the City Wall, the Opera House, The German National Museum, Courtroom 600, St. Johns Cemetary and the Imperial Castle, each option will finish with a walk through the main market square. Have dinner aboard the riverboat this evening.

Arrives On: 08 Aug 27

Day 19: Bamberg (Germany)

Perched atop seven hills, Bamberg is home to a magnificent, four-towered Romanesque cathedral from the 13th century; see it, along with more of this charming medieval city's unique architecture and colorful gardens, during a walking tour of Old Town... and take some time to explore as you

please. Alternatively, you have the option to partake in a cycling excursion around Bamberg (this option is only for fit and capable cyclists).

Arrives On: 09 Aug 27

Day 20: Würzburg (Germany)

Following brunch, dock late morning in charming Würzburg. Upon arrival, you'll have two choices of sightseeing: visit the town's 18th-century Residenz – a lavish Baroque palace where the town's prince bishops once lived, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site – followed by a short guided walk into the Old Town and free time. Alternatively, depart on an excursion to the nearby town of Rothenburg; nestled on Germany's "Romantic Road," it lives up to its reputation as Europe's "most perfect fairy-tale town." View its Gothic cathedral, towered walls and gabled houses on a walking tour, followed by time at leisure. Spend the evening aboard the riverboat following an early evening departure.

Arrives On: 10 Aug 27

Day 21: Miltenberg (Germany)

It is no wonder that river cruising was the favored pastime of royalty throughout the centuries... and you'll revel in the experience on a full day cruise along the picturesque Main. Fortified towns with towering cathedrals dot the lush landscapes along the riverbank... and you'll take pleasure in all that you'll see, learn and savor today. Perhaps you'll visit the spa... or the fitness center... practice your putting on the putting green... or savor a little quiet time...

Arrives On: 11 Aug 27

Day 22: Rüdesheim (Germany)

Relax and enjoy your riverboat's amenities as you cruise along the Main River, as it transforms into the Rhine River, to the wine-making town of Rüdesheim, part of the Rhine Gorge UNESCO World Heritage Site. Yoi have the option to ride a mini train or walk to today's sightseeing excursion, Siegfried's Mechanisches Musikkabinett, an eclectic museum displaying one of the world's largest collections of mechanical musical instruments in a centuries-old castle. Have lunch in an old-world restaurant, a perfect opportunity to enjoy a taste of regional cuisine, then return to your riverboat for an evening spent crusing. Your Rhine River cruise meanders through the scenic Lorelei Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, en route to Köln (Cologne).

Arrives On: 12 Aug 27

Day 23: Cologne (Germany)

First up today – a morning visit to Köln (Cologne). Originally founded by the Romans, it is one of the oldest settlements in Germany. Visit the great Gothic cathedral, Kölner Dom, with a local guide (may be unavailable some holidays) then spend some time exploring as you please; Köln is a blend of sophistication and tradition. Return to the riverboat to sail to Amsterdam; your day concludes with a Chef's Signature Dinner in the Compass Rose.

Arrives On: 13 Aug 27

Day 24: Amsterdam (Netherlands)

Amsterdam... the name itself conjures up images of the Dutch capital's myriad cultural treasures, from gabled houses, markets and cafés to awe-inspiring museums housing a treasure trove of world-famous art – and it's all yours to enjoy today. Your guided tour of the famed Rijksmuseum is really inspiring – a firsthand look at Rembrandt's masterpiece The Night Watch is like meeting the artist himself, and you'll love seeing acclaimed works by other well-known "Old Dutch Masters" including Vermeer and Hals. See the city's network of concentric, tree-lined 17th-century canals and view of Amsterdam's blend of architectural styles – they date all the way back to medieval times – on a private sightseeing cruise by canal boat; you'll get a unique taste of daily life in this easygoing city today. A farewell reception followed by dinner makes your last night on the riverboat memorable.

Arrives On: 14 Aug 27

Day 25: Amsterdam (Netherlands)

Tour ends: Amsterdam, Netherlands.Disembark in Amsterdam; a transfer is included from the riverboat to Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport or Central Station. Allow 3 hours for departure flight check-in. A transfer will also be provided to the airport for guests enjoying a stay at Tauck's selected Amsterdam hotel following their cruise.

Arrives On: 15 Aug 27

For more information on this cruise, please call +44 (0)1202 767926.

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