



## History & Art on the Danube

Highlights of the Habsburg Empire by river cruise

**6–13 July 2026 (MM 110)**

from £3,480 • 8 days

Speaker: Gavin Plumley

Cruise in comfort along the Danube, Europe's most captivating river.

Central Europe's most glorious capitals:  
Vienna, Budapest & Bratislava.

Exclusive charter of a small ship, with time to savour the riverine scenery and historic towns.

Special arrangements are a feature, including a private after-hours visit to the Upper Belvedere.

Daily talks by a cultural historian – specialist in Central Europe and the Habsburg Empire.

To travel the course of the Danube is to experience Europe in microcosm. Unlike any other great river between the Urals and the Bay of Biscay, this majestic stream has never belonged to a single state or empire. A wonderful diversity of landscapes mirrors the ethnic, linguistic and national variety that has always defined this region. Nowhere is this more vivid than between Budapest and Passau, where our Danube river cruise threads together some of the most beautiful riparian scenery in the world with historic towns and cities that once formed the spine of the Habsburg Empire – a vast, polyglot mosaic of peoples and cultures.

We begin in Budapest; on the western bank Buda's ancient citadel rises dramatically on a rocky outcrop; to the east, Pest's grand boulevards unfold across the flatlands. A powerful kingdom in the Middle Ages, Hungary embraced the Renaissance early, but centuries of Ottoman occupation left few visible traces. Much of what defines the city today dates from the 18th and 19th centuries – built to rival Vienna and to express growing Magyar demands for national self-determination.

Our cruise then follows the river northward, through the Pannonian Basin, as we trace the Hungary–Slovakia border to Bratislava. From 1536 to 1784, Bratislava was the capital of the Habsburg rump of Hungary while Ottomans occupied most of the country. Now Slovakia's capital, recent restoration has charmingly transformed its compact historic centre.

Overnight we reach Vienna – the principal Habsburg seat and centre of the Holy Roman Empire. Its grandeur is unmistakable: palaces, churches and museums reflect centuries of dynastic ambition. Yet beneath the veil of



*Budapest, Parliament House, early 20th-century watercolour.*

imperial order, Vienna was also a ferment of radical thought and artistic revolution. There emerged a brilliant array of artists and intellectuals who were determined to break with the past. Today, Vienna's collections – ranging from Old Masters to modernist masterpieces – rank among the world's finest.

As the Danube winds west into the Wachau Valley, the landscape shifts to rolling vineyards, wooded hills, and picturesque riverside towns. Among the loveliest is Dürnstein, nestled amid Austria's finest wine-producing region. Further upstream, as we approach the final stop in our Danube river cruise – the handsome city of Linz – the hills rise to reveal splendid monasteries of the Baroque era. Chief among them is Melk Abbey, its domes and spires soar from a rocky outcrop to crown the mighty river below.

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Budapest.** Fly from London Heathrow to Budapest (British Airways), or make your way independently. See *Practicalities* for travel options.

**Day 2: Budapest.** The result of the triumphant amalgamation of Buda and Pest in 1873, today Budapest is the principal metropolis of East-Central Europe, a city of vitality, splendour and controversy. Morning tour of the Parliament building, an elaborate Gothic construction modelled on London's – housed here is the

precious Coronation regalia including the 10th-century crown of St Stephen. In the afternoon cross the Danube to the hill-top Castle District of Buda. The National Gallery housed here has a marvellous collection of Hungarian art from the Middle Ages to the present day. We conclude with an exclusive visit to the Gothic Matthias Church (*Mátyás-templom*), the key Hungarian national shrine.

**Day 3: Bratislava, Schloss Hof.** Bratislava's old centre contains an abundance of highly attractive streets and historic buildings of all sorts. Visits include the Coronation Cathedral of St Martin's, the neoclassical Primacial Palace, and the collection of 20th-century art at the Nedbalka Gallery. Alternatively, hop across the border into Austria to visit the palace and gardens of Schloss Hof. Enlarged by Lukas von Hildebrandt, the great architect of the early 18th century, as a hunting lodge for Prince Eugene of Savoy, the most distinguished soldier ever to have served the Habsburgs.

**Day 4: Vienna.** The ship is moored all day at Nussdorf, 30 minutes by coach from the centre of Vienna. Morning visits to the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Court Treasury. Free afternoon for independent exploration. After dinner return to central Vienna for an exclusive, out-of-hours visit to Schloss Belvedere, one of the greatest Baroque ensembles, built for Prince Eugene of Savoy. See the world's largest collection of paintings by

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Klimt, including *The Kiss*. Also works by Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka and others.

**Day 5: Vienna, Wachau Valley.** Morning visit to the Leopold Museum, home to a collection of turn-of-the-century art and artefacts including the works of Egon Schiele. The afternoon is spent sailing through the Wachau, an especially beautiful stretch of the Danube.

**Day 6: Dürnstein, Melk.** Moor at Dürnstein. The ruins of a castle in which Richard the Lionheart was imprisoned cling to a steep hill which rears behind, while a gorgeous Baroque abbey church perches on the waterfront. In the afternoon, the domes of Melk abbey appear on an outcrop. A tour of the abbey passes through a sequence of ceremonial courtyards, guest apartments, hall and library, culminating in a church of unsurpassed decorative riches.

**Day 7: Linz, Český Krumlov.** Arrive in Linz in the early morning. The historic capital of Upper Austria, the old part of the city lies just south of our mooring, around the Hauptplatz, the largest market square in Austria. This and the streets and alleys around are composed mainly of attractive historic buildings, among which are the Alter Dom (Old Cathedral) and the Altes Rathaus (Town Hall). Alternatively, join the optional excursion to the picturesque UNESCO town of Český Krumlov.

**Day 8: Passau, Munich.** The ship moors in Passau and coaches leave for Munich city centre and the airport by 9.30am. See *Practicalities* for travel options. Alternatively, you can choose to stay on independently in Passau.

## Lecturer

Gavin Plumley is a writer, broadcaster, lecturer and the English-language commissioning editor for the Salzburg Festival. He studied music at Keble College, Oxford and specialises in the culture of Central Europe during the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As well as writing for newspapers, magazines and opera and concert programmes worldwide, Gavin has lectured at the National Gallery, the British Museum and Wigmore Hall.

## Practicalities

### Included:

- **Accommodation** on a first-class river cruiser, MS Amadeus Nova, for 7 nights.
- **All meals**, from dinner on the first day to breakfast on the last with wine, beer and soft

drinks.

- **Flights** (economy) with British Airways and Lufthansa.

### Option 1:

**Monday 6 July:** London Heathrow to Budapest (BA 868) departing at 09.50 and arriving at 13.20.

**Monday 13 July:** Munich to London Heathrow (LH 2480) departing 18.35 and arriving at 19.40. Coaches take you first to the centre of Munich, where you have approximately four hours of free time.

### Option 2:

**Monday 6 July:** London Heathrow to Budapest (BA 874) departing at 13.20 and arriving at 16.50.

**Monday 13 July:** Munich to London Heathrow (LH 2476) departing 14.35 and arriving at 15.40.

- **Coach travel** between airport and ship, and to sites when not reached on foot.

- **Lectures** by Gavin Plumley on the ship, plus services of local guides ashore. We anticipate additional guest speakers will be announced in due course.

- **Excursions**, visits and admission costs. Additional, optional excursions will be available to book nearer the time, at a supplementary cost.

- **All tips** for waiters, ship crew, guides, drivers; all city and port taxes.

- **The assistance** of an experienced team of Martin Randall Travel staff.

- **A printed booklet** including practical details, maps and background information.

**How strenuous?** Quite a lot of walking is involved, some of it uphill and over roughly paved paths. A good level of fitness is necessary. The cruise should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. We ask that you take these simple fitness tests before booking.

*If you have a medical condition or a disability which may affect your holiday or necessitate special arrangements being made for you, please discuss these with us before booking - or, if the condition develops or changes subsequently, as soon as possible before departure.*

## Cruise accommodation

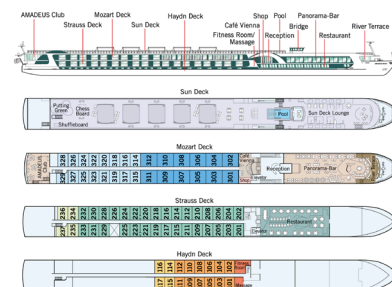
**MS Amadeus Nova** (lueftner-cruises.com): Launched in 2024, the MS Amadeus Nova is one of the most comfortable river cruisers in Europe. The multinational crew is dedicated to the highest standards of service.

With a floor area of 16m<sup>2</sup> (Haydn deck) or 17.5m<sup>2</sup> (Strauss and Mozart decks) the cabins are reasonably spacious by the standards of river cruisers. All have windows to the outside and are equipped with the facilities one would expect of a first-class hotel such as adjustable air-conditioning, telephone, TV and safe. Bathrooms have showers only. Special attention has been paid to noise insulation.

In layout and furnishings the cabins are identical, the significant differences being the size of windows and height above water level (higher cabins enjoy better views and fewer stairs).

Cabins on the top decks (Mozart and Strauss) are the most desirable, with floor-to-ceiling windows which slide open, and minibars. There are 12 suites (Mozart) measuring 26.4m<sup>2</sup> with a corner sofa and small balcony. Cabins on the lowest deck (Haydn) have smaller windows which do not open. There are no single cabins as such but we are allocating some twin-bed cabins for single occupancy.

The public areas include the lounge and bar, a library area and a restaurant which can seat everyone at a single sitting. The sun deck has a tented area for shade.



MS Amadeus Nova, deck plan.



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**Prices**

**Haydn deck – lowest**  
Single occupancy: £4,020  
*Not available for double occupancy*

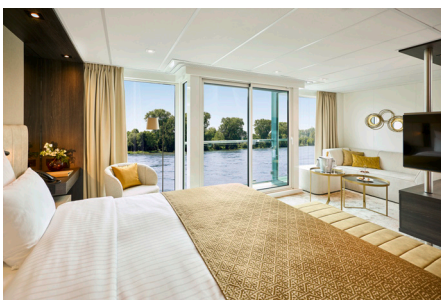
**Strauss deck (back) – middle**  
Two sharing: £3,830 per person  
Single occupancy: £5,360

**Strauss deck (front) – middle**  
Two sharing: £4,090 per person  
Single occupancy: £5,730

**Mozart deck – top**  
Two sharing: £4,430 per person  
Single occupancy: £6,210

**Suites – Mozart deck**  
Two sharing: £5,080 per person  
*Not available for single occupancy*

**No flights:** if you choose not to take one of the included flight options, there is a price reduction of £350 per person.



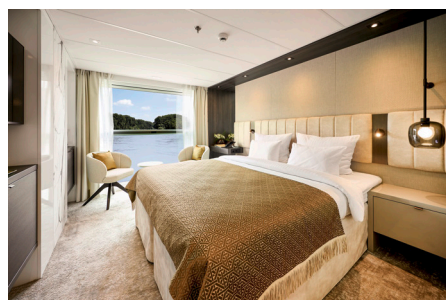
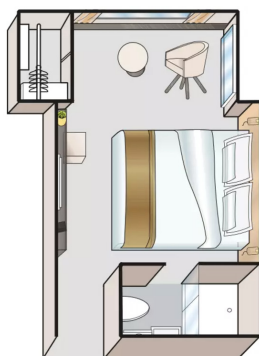
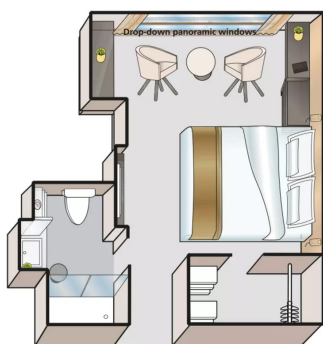
Suite - Mozart deck (above).



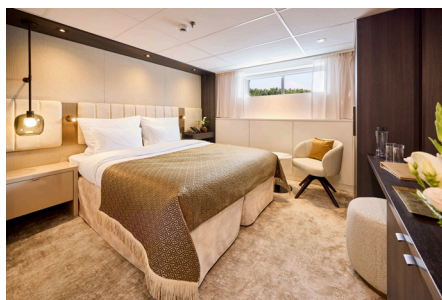
Sun deck.



Restaurant.



Mozart & Strauss deck cabin.



Haydn deck cabin.



Amadeus Club.



MS Amadeus Nova.