

Grand Circle Cruise Line[®]

THE LEADER IN VALUE AND WORLDWIDE DISCOVERY SINCE 1958

Your Grand Circle Travel Planning Guide



The Danube's Imperial Heart
2026

Grand Circle Cruise Line®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with Grand Circle Cruise Line. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

When you cruise with us, you can expect an award-winning experience aboard our privately owned river ship. In addition to the convenience of unpacking just once, you will also enjoy the warm hospitality provided by our friendly, English-speaking crew, coupled with camaraderie of your fellow American travelers.

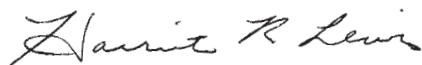
In addition, up to four **expert, local Program Directors** will accompany you from the beginning of your trip to the end. Assigned to a group of 38 travelers on average, these passionate leaders are ready and eager to share their homeland and insights as only a local can. Whether it is recommending their favorite restaurant, connecting travelers with people and culture, or providing the best ways to enhance your leisure time, your Program Director will be available to take care of all the details and ensure that you have a fun and carefree travel experience. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Throughout your journey, you will experience Exclusive Discovery Series events designed to connect you with local people and culture. From sharing traditional fare and lively conversation during Home-Hosted Visits, to discussing Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, you will gain an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our low-cost Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-2610**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis
Chair
Grand Circle Cruise Line

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Vienna, Austria

New! The Danube's Imperial Heart: Budapest to Vienna

Hungary: Budapest | **Slovakia:** Bratislava | **Austria:** Vienna

9 days starting from \$3,795

including airfare

Single Supplement: **\$995**

For departure dates & prices, visit

www.gct.com/ebv2026pricing

Join us and sail for 5 nights aboard the privately-owned, 162-passenger **M/S River Aria or M/S River Adagio** and 2 nights in a Vienna Hotel on a comprehensive four-country journey along the Danube. Witness the detailed Art Nouveau architecture of Budapest, explore Bratislava's quirky art scene, taste the local flavors of Vienna's famed *Naschmarkt*, and stroll along the fairytale streets of Old World Prague.

IT'S INCLUDED

- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges, unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- **Accommodations** for 5 nights aboard a private river ship with wireless Internet access in all common areas and cabins, and 2 nights in a Vienna Hotel or similar
- **19 meals:** 7 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 7 dinners—including 2 meals in a local restaurant
- **All-inclusive drinks:** Enjoy onboard beer, wine, and soft drinks at no additional cost
- **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- **9 included tours** with personal headsets and **1 Exclusive Discovery Series Event**—Home-Hosted Visit
- **Local Program Directors, a Grand Circle Cruise Line exclusive:** Our dedicated experts are with you and your group of 38-45 travelers from beginning to end to provide an insider's knowledge and perspective
- **Baggage handling** for 1 piece of luggage per person, including tips
- **5% Frequent Traveler Credit** toward your next trip
- **All port charges**

Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.

The Danube's Imperial Heart: Budapest to Vienna



ITINERARY SUMMARY

1 • Depart U.S.

2-4 • Budapest, Hungary

Embark ship

Port Budapest

5-6 • Bratislava, Slovakia • Vienna, Austria

Ports Bratislava • Vienna

7-8 • Vienna

Port Vienna

9 • Return to U.S.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR VACATION

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

all with FREE Single Supplements

Budapest, Hungary

PRE-TRIP: 3 nights from \$895

NEW! ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Budapest** before your *Budapest* pre-trip extension from **\$230** per room, per night

WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderately Easy

Group Size

- This trip has a group size of 38-45 travelers (with approximately 3-4 groups onboard) each with a local Program Director exclusive to Grand Circle

Pacing

- 9 days, 5 nights aboard our privately owned **162-Passenger** M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*, and 1 two-night hotel stay
- Return flights often require departing in early morning hours
- Air travel time will be 9-18 hours and will have at least one connection

Physical Requirements

- Included features on your trip may consist of 3-4 hours of physical activity each day. Travelers should be able to walk 1-3 miles unassisted within a time frame of 1-2 hours, and walk on uneven surfaces, including steep and unpaved paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones, which can be slick in wet or colder conditions
- Optional activities and elective walks may be offered in addition to the activity levels above

- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters
- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must travel with a companion who can assist them throughout the trip
- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

Terrain & Transportation

- Diverse terrain and uneven walking surfaces, including steep paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones
- Travel by 162-passenger river ship and 49-seat coach
- Changes in water-level depths may require adjustments to your itinerary
- Docking in Budapest may be up to 30 minutes outside of the city center, with transportation to and from the ship by motorcoach

Climate

- Daytime temperatures range from 40-73°F during cruising season
- June-August are the warmest months

The Danube's Imperial Heart: Budapest to Vienna

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

3 nights in *Budapest, Hungary*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Arrive in Budapest, Hungary

Day 3 Explore Budapest

Day 4 Budapest • Discover the House of Terror • Optional *Etyek Wine Region* tour

Day 5 Budapest • Visit Szentendre

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart today for your flight to Budapest, Hungary.

Day 2 Arrive in Budapest, Hungary • Embark ship • Captain's Welcome Dinner

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Morning: Arriving in Budapest, you'll be met at the airport by a Grand Circle representative and transferred to your ship, joining travelers who took our *Budapest, Hungary*, pre-trip extension.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Before dinner, gather onboard with your fellow travelers for a welcome briefing followed by a Port Talk—something you'll enjoy every

evening throughout your Danube River Cruise Tour—to learn a bit about Budapest. Your Program Director will describe the approaching port area and town prior to arrival so you can prepare for the next day's activities, including any free time you may have. Get to know your new travel companions and the Captain's crew over an included Welcome Drink.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room, enjoy the Captain's Welcome Dinner.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 3 Explore Budapest

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Begin your day with a brief introduction from your Program Director, then set off on a bus tour of Hungary's lovely capital, spanning both sides of the magnificent Danube River. Along the way, you'll stop at Heroes' Square, one of Budapest's most iconic landmarks, before continuing through a blend of architectural styles from Roman ruins to contemporary art nouveau homes.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations, or join them on an optional discovery walk. Perhaps you'll visit Central Market Hall, located in a historic building and one of Budapest's most popular markets. The bustling market sells a variety of goods including local meats, fruit and vegetable, and traditional arts and crafts from Hungarian artisans.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: Relax onboard this evening.

Day 4 Budapest

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The ship may be required to dock outside of the city center; if so, it will take around 30 minutes to reach the city by bus.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: The morning is free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Enjoy the afternoon at your leisure and conclude the day at cocktail hour.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: Your Central European River Cruise begins as the ship sets sail toward Bratislava. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge as you cruise. Enjoy evening entertainment led by your Program Director, featuring lighthearted music and fun to ease you into the night.

Day 5 Explore Bratislava, Slovakia • Home-Hosted Visit

- Destination: Bratislava
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Upon arrival in Bratislava, you'll discover Slovakia's capital known for its picturesque setting at the foot of the Little Carpathian Mountains.

This petite city—the smallest of the three capitals you'll visit on this itinerary—is full of irresistible charm and personality, and was once the seat of power for neighboring Hungary. As you stroll through Old Town, Bratislava's historic heart, take in the beautiful St. Martin's Cathedral, built in the 14th and 15th centuries. Walk along the pedestrian zone, and you'll find Michael's Gate with its 15th-century tower, offering excellent views of the city, including the massive Bratislava Castle. Whimsical public art installations, such as the photo-favorite "The Watcher" sculpture, serve as visual reminders of Bratislava's eyes towards the future.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Enjoy free time in Bratislava on your own. Later, join a local family for a Home-Hosted Visit—an **Exclusive Discovery Series** event—for a taste of coffee and cake, accompanied by lively conversation about daily life in Slovakia.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 6 Bratislava • Vienna, Austria

- Destination: Vienna
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Enjoy some free time onboard this morning before settling in for a day of scenic cruising as we make our way towards Vienna. You may wish to relax in your cabin, chat with fellow travelers in the lounge, or take in the views from the Sun Deck.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Enjoy a day of leisure and scenic sailing towards Vienna. Arrive in the Austrian capital this evening before dinner.

Dinner: Gather with your fellow travelers in the ship's dining room for the Captain's Farewell Dinner.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish.

Day 7 Explore Vienna • Optional *Musical Vienna* tour

- Destination: Vienna
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel in Vienna

Activity Note: This morning's combined bus and walking tour will be approximately 3.5 hours long. The walking portion will include

cobblestones, uneven surfaces, and narrow streets with no options to sit down during the tour.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Disembark your ship and set out to explore Vienna, Austria, starting at the *Ringstrasse*—Vienna's grand main boulevard—one of the many achievements of the Emperor Franz Joseph. In 1857, the Emperor ordered the demolition of the ancient city walls, which were no longer needed as fortifications and were impeding the growth of the city. In their place was constructed an elegant 2.5 mile-long boulevard, encircling the city center. The buildings that line the *Ringstrasse* bring together all the greatest architectural styles in an exuberant celebration of all that seemed possible during the Industrial Revolution. Continue on along the city sidewalks, passing by the well-known Imperial Palace, home to many generations of the Habsburg family, and the renowned Spanish Riding School.

Lunch: Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations. You may want to head to the old Jewish Quarter to see the only Viennese synagogue to have survived the 1938 *Kristallnacht*. Or perhaps explore Austria's capital aboard a *fiaker*. These horse-drawn carriages have been in business since the 17th century, and drivers are happy to show you the sights and delight you with Viennese anecdotes. You'll also find out for yourself whether or not it's true that drivers whistle strains of Mozart's beloved *Magic Flute* as they conduct passengers through the city. At the end of your day, you'll transfer to your hotel and check in before dinner.

Dinner: Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Or, perhaps you'll experience our *Musical Vienna* optional tour to one of the city's famed concert halls to attend an enchanting performance of the classical Austrian music of Strauss and Mozart.

Day 8 Vienna • Optional Schoenbrunn Palace tour

- Destination: Vienna
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel in Vienna

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Discover more of Vienna's charms on your own.

Or, take an optional tour of the expansive summer estate of Habsburg royalty, Schoenbrunn Palace (whose name means "beautiful spring"). Featuring 1,400 rooms, meticulously maintained gardens, and an architectural legacy that stretches back to the 17th century, the palace is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Your visit includes a tour of palace highlights—such as the Carriage Museum, home to a golden coronation coach used for important Habsburg functions, exquisite state carriages, and perhaps the most popular: Empress Sisi's riding gear.

Lunch: Enjoy lunch on your own.

Afternoon: Enjoy free time this afternoon—your Program Director will offer suggestions to help you make the most of your time in Vienna.

Dinner: This evening, gather for a celebratory Farewell Dinner at your hotel.

Evening: Continue the celebration with light entertainment led by your Program Director, featuring music and fun.

Day 9 Vienna • Return to U.S

- Destination: Vienna
- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

OPTIONAL TOURS

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with us. We will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form and swiping your credit card at the ship's front desk. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept MasterCard and Visa on all trips, and Discover on all trips except river cruises in France. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

Please note: *Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.*

Musical Vienna

(Day 7 \$110 per person)

Vienna without music wouldn't be Vienna. So, you may want to join an optional evening excursion to one of Vienna's concert halls, where you'll enjoy a classical music performance. You'll be enchanted by the most beautiful melodies of classical Austrian music of Strauss and Mozart.

Schoenbrunn Palace

(Day 8 \$105 per person)

Join us for an optional tour of the expansive summer estate of Habsburg royalty, Schoenbrunn Palace (whose name means "beautiful spring"). Featuring 1,400 rooms, meticulously maintained gardens, and an architectural legacy that stretches back to the 17th century, the palace is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Your tour also includes a visit to the Carriage Museum.

PRE-TRIP

Budapest, Hungary

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » **Accommodations** for 3 nights
- » **5 meals:** 3 breakfasts, 1 lunch, and 1 dinner
- » **3 tours** with personal headsets: Hungarian Parliament Building • House of Terror • Szentendre
- » Dedicated services of a local Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- » All transfers

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Experience Budapest, the lively capital of Hungary and both the political and cultural heart of the nation. Full of monuments to its past, it is also a place of contemporary arts and culture, cafes and restaurants, and museums and galleries—all enhanced by the presence of the mighty Danube.

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. today on your flight to Budapest. Please refer to your individual air itinerary for exact departure and arrival times.

Day 2 Arrive in Budapest, Hungary

- Destination: Budapest
- Accommodations: Barceló Budapest or similar

Morning: Arrive today in Budapest. You'll be met at the airport by a Grand Circle representative and directed to the bus that will take you to your hotel. Free for your own discoveries— or you can join your Program Director for a walk to get acquainted with the vicinity around your hotel.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Get to know your Program Director and fellow travelers over a welcome briefing and Welcome Drink.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 3 Explore Budapest

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Barceló Budapest or similar

Activity Note: In the event the Parliament Building tour is not available for your departure date, a similar program will be arranged for your group.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Gather onboard with your fellow travelers for a welcome briefing and drink before setting off by public transportation for an included morning tour of the Hungarian Parliament Building. This massive domed structure dominates Budapest's skyline on the banks of the Danube. Gothic Revival elements, such as gargoyles, pointed archways, and spires, decorate the city's most famous landmark.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations. Perhaps you'll use your 24-hour pass to continue exploring Budapest. Hungary's capital flourished as a cultural and commercial center in the latter part of the 1800s. In the time since, the city has greatly expanded the number of its buildings to meet the needs of its ever-growing populace. Despite modern development, many of Budapest's most iconic structures continue to reflect two architectural styles—classically focused Historicism and the more predominant Hungarian Art Nouveau. Facades embellished with decorative ceramic tiles depicting Hungarian folk motifs helped set the country's interpretation of the international art moment apart, while its preservation has earned the cityscape a spot on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Dinner: Enjoy a Welcome dinner with your fellow travelers at a local restaurant.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 4 Budapest • Discover the House of Terror • Optional *Etyek Wine Region* tour

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Barceló Budapest or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Set off again by public transportation with your Program Director, bound for a guided tour of the House of Terror. A museum dedicated to the abuses of the communist and fascist leadership of Hungary in the 20th century, the House of Terror houses exhibits documenting Hungary's relationships with Germany's Nazi Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in addition to locally based organizations. The museum also serves as a touching memorial to those who suffered under these regimes.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations. Or, join us for an optional *Etyek Wine Region Tour*—an excursion to a local wine cellar for an evening of traditional food and a wine tasting.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 5 Budapest • Visit Szentendre

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Join your Program Director for a visit to the charming town of Szentendre. Set in a painterly landscape, this village is twelve miles north of Budapest, where the Danube River makes a sharp bend through the Pilis and Borzsony hills. Artists have drawn inspiration from these surroundings for almost 200 years, and the town has many galleries.

As you stroll here, you can browse the art and absorb the atmosphere of this picturesque town, some of whose streets consist of narrow steps climbing the hills. This is also a fine place to shop for Hungarian arts and crafts.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Transfer to your ship in the early afternoon. Tonight you'll join your fellow travelers on your *The Danube's Imperial Heart: Budapest to Vienna River Cruise Tour*.

OPTIONAL TOUR

Etyek Wine Region

(Day 4 \$130 per person)

Join an excursion to Etyek, a region of Hungary not too far outside of Budapest that's known for its booming and relatively young wine industry. Gaze upon the rolling hills that line the road to this region, adorned with vines and greenery, as you ride there with your fellow travelers. You'll sample a number of wines at your first venue and enjoy tasty, traditional snacks. At your second stop, you'll taste four more wines and enjoy a three-course Hungarian dinner.

YOUR RHINE, MOSEL, MAIN, AND DANUBE RIVER SHIPS

Sail aboard our privately owned 140- to 162-passenger vessels

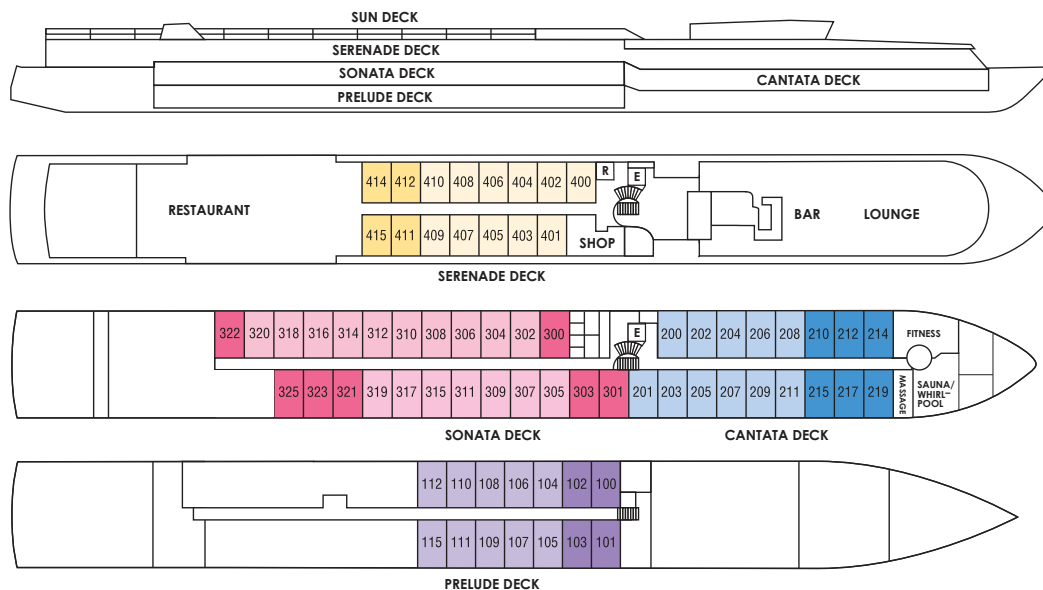
Grand Circle Cruise Line's Rhine, Mosel, Main, and Danube ships were designed specifically to create an unforgettable European river cruise experience for American travelers. Explore storybook landscapes with up to four groups of no more than 38-45 travelers, each with one of our dedicated, local Grand Circle Program Directors, and enjoy the attentive onboard service of our top-notch English-speaking ship crew.



SHIPBOARD FEATURES

- **Dining room with single, open seating:** Enjoy regionally-inspired cuisine in your ship's dining room.
- **Bar & lounge:** Relax with friends old and new.
- **Complimentary beverages:** Enjoy house beer and house wine—as well as soft drinks—at any time of day while onboard.
- **Complimentary wireless Internet access:** Connect online in cabins and common areas.
Please note: Wireless Internet access may be limited at certain points throughout your River Cruise.
- **Sun Deck:** Sit outside and enjoy the view as your ship glides past the European countryside.
- **English-speaking crew:** Our staff is dedicated to your comfort, and all shipboard announcements are made in English.
- **Smoking/non-smoking:** Smoking is not permitted indoors, but is permitted on the Sun Deck.
- **Shipboard security:** State-of-the-art shipboard radar ensures safe navigation at night and in low visibility; safe docking space; onboard security staff; state-of-the-art fire safety system; and secured entryway doors.

M/S RIVER HARMONY



Registry: Malta

Width: 38 ft.

Length: 366 ft.

Passenger capacity: 140

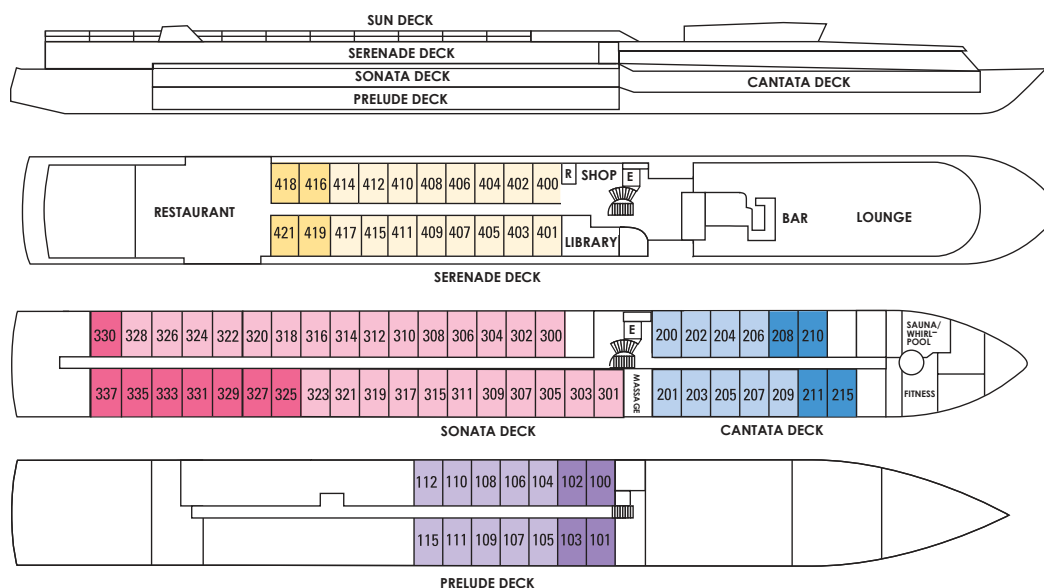
International crew: 34

Decks: 4

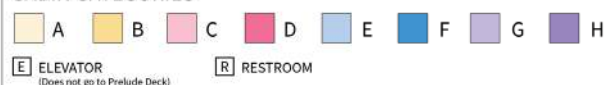
Number of cabins: 70—all outside

Elevator: Yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

M/S RIVER ARIA & M/S RIVER ADAGIO



CABIN CATEGORIES



Registry: Malta

Width: 38 ft.

Length: 418 ft.

Passenger capacity: 162

International crew: 38

Decks: 4

Number of cabins: 82—all outside

Elevator: Yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this vacation.

- **Main trip only:** You will need 3 blank passport pages.
- **Pre- and/or post-trip extension:** No additional blank pages are needed for any of the extensions.

Entry Requirements

We’ll be sending you information with detailed instructions, application forms, and fees about 100 days prior to your departure. In the meantime, we’re providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. This info is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.

- **Europe (Austria, Slovakia, Hungary):** Starting in 2025, U.S. citizens will be required to fill out an online European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) visa-waiver to enter countries in the European Union. There is no confirmed start date for the ETIAS at the time of printing. The ETIAS will be valid for 3 years.

Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **www.pvsinternational.org**.

Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).

RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

Keep Your Abilities in Mind

Please review the information below prior to departing on this vacation. *We reserve the right for our Program Directors to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home if their limitations or behavior are impacting the group's experience.*

GROUP SIZE

- This trip has a group size of 38-45 travelers (with approximately 3-4 groups onboard) each with a local Program Director exclusive to Grand Circle

PACING

- 9 days, 5 nights aboard our privately owned **162-Passenger** M/S River Aria or M/S River Adagio, and 1 two-night hotel stay
- Return flights often require departing in early morning hours
- Air travel time will be 9-18 hours and will have at least one connection

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Included features on your trip may consist of 3-4 hours of physical activity each day. Travelers should be able to walk 1-3 miles unassisted within a time frame of 1-2 hours, and walk on uneven surfaces, including steep and unpaved paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones, which can be slick in wet or colder conditions
- Optional activities and elective walks may be offered in addition to the activity levels above
- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters
- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must travel with a companion who can assist them throughout the trip
- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Diverse terrain and uneven walking surfaces, including steep paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones
- Travel by 162-passenger river ship and 49-seat coach
- Changes in water-level depths may require adjustments to your itinerary
- Docking in Budapest may be up to 30 minutes outside of the city center, with transportation to and from the ship by motorcoach

CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures range from 40–73°F during cruising season
- June–August are the warmest months

Health Check

Feeling healthy and confident of your mobility is essential to fully enjoy your trip abroad. If you have ongoing medical conditions or concerns about your health, we highly recommend that you schedule a checkup with your personal physician at least six weeks in advance of your departure date.

- Discuss with your doctor any aspects of your itinerary that may affect your health and be guided by his or her advice. (You can use the “Keep Your Abilities in Mind” on the previous page as a guideline to discuss with him or her.)
- You may want to have a dental exam before your trip. A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling.
- If you have a condition that requires special equipment or treatment, you must bring and be responsible for all necessary items related to your condition.

No Vaccines Required

Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: travel.state.gov (Select “Find International Travel Information” then select “Country Information”; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Your Health Abroad” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don't push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-321-2835**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

Water

- Tap water aboard ship and in the countries you'll visit is perfectly safe for drinking, although it may not taste the same as at home.
- If you prefer bottled water it is usually for sale in hotels, food shops, and restaurants.
- Another alternative is to bring a reusable water bottle from home, which you can fill up on the ship or in your hotel before you set out for the day.

MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments, such as local currency, an ATM card, and a credit card.**
- **Traveler's checks are not recommended.** They can be difficult to exchange and the commission fee for cashing them is quite high. It's more practical to view them as a last resort in the event of a special situation.
- **You will not be able to pay with U.S. dollars on this trip.**

Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like www.xe.com/currencyconverter, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

Euro Countries: European Euro (€)

Hungary: Hungarian Forint (ft)

How to Exchange Money

If you want to exchange money before your trip, you can usually do so through your bank or at an exchange office. Your departure airport in the U.S., a travel agent, or an AAA office are also possible outlets. Or you can wait and change money on the trip instead—but it might be helpful to arrive with some local currency in case you run into a bank holiday or an “out of order” ATM.

On your trip, the easiest way is to withdraw funds from a local ATM. The ATM will give you local money and your bank at home will convert that into U.S. dollars.

You can also exchange cash at some hotels, large post offices, and money exchange offices. To exchange cash, you'll usually need your passport and bills in good condition (not worn, torn, or dirty). New bills (post 2016) are best.

Please note that many banks in Europe will only exchange money for their own customers. Never exchange money on the street. All exchange methods involve fees, which may be built into the conversion rate; ask beforehand.

ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.

Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world.. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

Using Your Credit Card in Europe

Most of us are used to credit cards with the embedded computer chip (the ones you insert instead of swiping). In Europe—where they’ve had this type of card longer than us—these credit cards usually require a PIN (personal identification number) to make a purchase. And in contrast, most U.S. credit cards either do not require a PIN or don’t have one. So what do you do if you want make a purchase with your credit card in Europe?

Don’t worry. 90% of the time you won’t need to do anything special. You’ll insert your card and the purchase will go through as normal. Often you won’t even be asked to sign anything.

But bring more than one form of payment with you. For those rare cases when your credit card doesn’t work, the best plan is to already have a backup form of payment with you. Debit cards are a good alternative as they have a PIN. And there’s always cash.

Consider asking your credit card company. You can try contacting your credit card company before you leave to see if they will issue you a PIN. Many won’t—but at least you’ll know. You could also try looking at their website to see if they have guidance about getting a PIN.

Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don’t assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don’t work outside of the U.S.!

Onboard Ship

Two Separate Bills Will be Issued

- **Shipboard account:** This bill is for any on board purchases (drinks, souvenirs, etc.) and is calculated in Euros. The bill is payable at the ship's front desk; we accept cash or credit/debit card only. For cash we accept Euros. For credit/debit cards, we accept MasterCard and Visa. Other forms of payment, such as checks, American Express, and Discover Card are not accepted for this bill.
- **Optional tour account:** This bill is for any optional tours taken during the trip and is calculated in U.S. dollars. The bill is paid at the ship's front desk (they will have you fill out a form) by credit/debit card only; other forms of payments such as cash and checks are not accepted. For more information on optional tours—including which cards we accept for payment—see the “Preparing for Your Trip” chapter.

Please note: Payments made by credit card may take up to three months to process. We ask that you use a credit card that will not expire until three months after your trip ends. Because our headquarters are in Boston, the charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as “OPT Boston” (depending on your credit card company).

Exchange Services: Policy Update

Due to international banking laws, we are not able to exchange money onboard the ship. If you need to obtain local currency, please see the “How to Exchange Money” section for helpful tips and information.

Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. For those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines. All tips below are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency (this is usually preferred) or in U.S. dollars. Do not use personal or traveler's check for tips.

- **GCCL Program Director:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Grand Circle Program Director at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$7–\$10 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Program Director is with them. *Please note that tips for your Program Director can only be in the form of cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Program Director during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Shipboard Crew:** We recommend a flat tip of \$10–\$12 U.S. per traveler, per day. You'll give this tip once—at the end of your cruise—and it will be pooled among the entire cruise staff. **Policy Update:** *Due to international banking laws, we are no longer able to process crew tips on a credit card; crew tips can only be in the form of cash.*
- **Housekeeping Staff at Hotels:** We recommend \$1 per traveler, per day. (This is for hotels only; on the ship Housekeeping are part of crew, so you don't need to tip them separately.)

- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides and motorcoach drivers on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

Time at Leisure

When you are exploring on your own, it's useful to know when to tip and how much, because local customs often differ from the U.S. Here are a few helpful guidelines for the most common services a traveler might use:

- **Taxis:** In many cities the tip is included in the fare, and will be announced on a sign inside the cab; otherwise a 10% tip is appropriate.
- **Restaurants, cafes, and bars:** A service charge is usually included in restaurant and bar bills. If not, it is customary to leave a tip of around 10% of the bill for your waiter or bartender.
- **Public restrooms:** Most public restrooms in Europe have attendants that take care of cleaning and supplies. It is customary to leave a small tip for them—usually 2 zlotys in Poland, 10 crowns in the Czech Republic or half a euro elsewhere—so hold on to those coins! Some restrooms are pay-toilets; you pay the staff at the entrance to the restroom or drop the appropriate coin into the slot on the stall door. In this case, the fee is set and no tip is needed. U.S. dollars are usually not accepted for this fee, so bring small change in the local currency with you to the restroom just in case.

AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early (select trips only):** If you chose to Arrive Early and purchased air through Grand Circle, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose to Arrive Early, but did not purchase air through Grand Circle, accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose to Arrive Early and purchased air through Grand Circle but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Customized Air:** You booked international air with us, and have customized it in some way. If you have customized your trip's dates to arrive early, stay longer, or stop on your own in a connecting city, airport transfers will NOT be included. You must also arrange your own accommodations for any additional nights. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at www.gct.com/myplanner under "My Reservations".

Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with Grand Circle Cruise Line, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Overseas Arrival:** Once you arrive overseas, you'll need to collect your luggage and clear customs. A Grand Circle representative will meet you outside of customs and assist you with your transfer to the hotel or ship. Important note on porters: Airport porters are NOT allowed in the baggage claim area. On arrival, you must take your luggage off the baggage carousel and load it onto a cart, which you will then move through customs. When you exit customs, you'll handle your cart until reaching your transfer vehicle. Your driver will load your luggage into the transfer vehicle.
- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.

- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45–30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

Arrival Time

If you are booking your own international airfare or have personalized your flights, we recommend that you choose flights that arrive by 2pm on Day 2 of your trip (or pre-trip extension, if you are taking one) if you are interested in joining your Program Director for an orientation walk in the vicinity of your hotel.

Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as GCCL travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-321-2835**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: **www.rome2rio.com**

Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your vacation by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved onsite can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard and Visa on all trips, and Discover on all trips except river cruises in France. We can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.) We do not take Amex, cash, or checks for optional tours.

- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as “OPT Boston”.
- We will give you details on the optional tours while you’re on the trip. But if you’d like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at www.gct.com/myplanner).

Communicating with Home from Abroad

Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone is “unlocked”, meaning it can accept a local SIM card. If your cell is “unlocked” then you will be able to purchase a local SIM for it and then buy minutes with “Pay as You Go” cards, so that you have a local contact number for your friends and family.

Calling Apps

We recommend you use WhatsApp while abroad to communicate home and with your Program Director while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as Skype or FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan’s data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

Calling Cards & 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.). One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

Internet Access and Email

While sailing Internet access may be unavailable, depending on locks, bridges, and regional remoteness. Internet access will be most consistently available when the ship is docked in larger cities.

Receiving Calls from Home

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one is to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

Austria: +43

Hungary: +36

Slovakia: +421

PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on bag per person.
Weight restrictions	Varies by airline. The current standard is 50 lbs for checked bags and 15 lbs for carry-on bags.
Size Restrictions	Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches (length+width+depth). Generally, 62 linear inches is the checked bag limit; carry-on limit is 45 linear inches.
Luggage Type	A sturdy, fabric-sided suitcase with built-in wheels and lockable zippers is recommended.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as the main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<p>One suitcase and one carry-on bag per person: Due to the space limitations on bus transfers, you'll be restricted to one suitcase and one carry-on bag per person. This is to ensure that we have room for everyone's luggage. We ask that you abide by this limit to avoid inconveniencing your fellow travelers and prevent additional airlines luggage fees (which are your responsibility). Most airlines now charge to check more than one suitcase per person for flights to Europe and other international flights.</p> <p>Luggage rules: Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.</p>	

Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.

- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.
- If your luggage is lost due to airline error, GCCL and your Program Director will work with the airlines to resolve, but GCCL does not have the ability to speed up the process of locating any missing luggage.

Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** Consider a duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Due to space limitations on our motorcoaches, you are allowed one piece of checked luggage per person. Porterage at airports and hotels is provided for **one** bag per person. All bags should have luggage tags.
- **Carry-on Bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.
- **Locks:** For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

- **Travel light:** A good rule of thumb is to gather together everything you want to bring; then take half of that. To have a varied travel wardrobe, yet keep your luggage light, we recommend you select a color scheme and pack color-coordinated clothing items that can be mixed to create different outfits.
- **Pack casual clothes:** Comfortable, informal apparel is acceptable at each of your destinations. At dinner, you will not need to wear “dressy” clothing; men do not need jackets or ties and women do not need fancy dresses. You may want one or two “smart casual” outfits for the Welcome Reception or Farewell Dinner, but it's completely up to you.
- **Consider clothing designed for travel, sports, or camping:** With modern fabrics, lightweight packing for comfort and protection through a wide range of weather is easy.
- **Plan to dress in layers on shore excursions.** Be prepared for a variety of weather conditions: warm days with sun, chilly temperatures with showers, and evenings that could dip into the 40s or 50s, depending on your travel season.
- **Bring rain gear:** Regardless of your month of travel, rainfall is certainly a possibility. We suggest you bring a folding umbrella and waterproof shell. Water-resistant walking shoes are advantageous in case heavy downpours pass through.

- **Good walking shoes are critical.** This program features many included tours that follow steep, unpaved or cobbled routes; and even an average day of light sightseeing or shopping can put great demands on your feet. If you prefer more ankle support, take light hiking boots. In case you get caught in the rain, we suggest you bring an extra pair of walking shoes, and rain boots or galoshes. Aboard ship, you'll want non-slip shoes with rubber soles.
- **Day excursions:** On days that include full or half-day bus excursions, please remember to bring drinking water and any needed medications with you.

What to Bring

We have included suggestions from former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. We recommend using www.weather.com and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

Your cabin already has: Shampoo, conditioner, hair dryer, soap, body lotion, shower cap, and towels. **And don't forget a reusable water bottle**—you'll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

Recommended Clothing

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts to layer
- ☐ Trousers, jeans, or skirts
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes and/or water resistant shoes
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ☐ Sleepwear
- ☐ Socks and undergarments
- ☐ A jacket or sweater, depending on the time of year

Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc.
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses and your prescription
- ☐ Sunglasses with a neck strap
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- ☐ Travel money bag or money belt

- ☐ Moisturizer, lip balm
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat or visor
- ☐ Pocket-size tissues
- ☐ Moist towelettes (packets) and/or anti-bacterial hand lotion
- ☐ Light folding umbrella
- ☐ Photocopies of passport, air ticket, credit cards
- ☐ Camera, spare batteries, and memory cards

Medicines

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines
- ☐ Vitamins
- ☐ Cold remedies: Sudafed/Dristan
- ☐ Pain relievers: Ibuprofen/naproxen/aspirin
- ☐ Laxatives: Senokot/Ex-Lax
- ☐ Stomach upset: Pepto-Bismol/Mylanta
- ☐ Anti-diarrheal: Imodium
- ☐ Band-Aids, Moleskin foot pads
- ☐ Antibiotics: Neosporin/Bacitracin

Optional Gear

- ☐ Travel alarm
- ☐ Compact binoculars
- ☐ Hanging toiletry bag with pockets
- ☐ Washcloth
- ☐ Travel-size tissues
- ☐ Basic sewing kit

- ☐ Hand-wash laundry soap (Woolite), clothespins/travel clothesline/stopper
- ☐ Electrical transformer and plug adapter—see “Regional Electricity” section.
- ☐ Reading materials
- ☐ Travel journal/note pad
- ☐ Swimsuit, if your ship/hotel has a pool or whirlpool
- ☐ Addresses for postcards
- ☐ Photos, small gift for Home-Hosted visit
- ☐ Phrase book
- ☐ Pocket-size calculator for exchange rates
- ☐ Insect repellent
- ☐ For hotel stays: Many hotels will provide hair dryers, but not all. If a hair dryer is essential to you consider a travel-size version. Hair dryers are provided on your ship.

Electricity

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

Voltage

Aboard the ship, cabins are equipped with 220-volt outlets. In your bathroom you will find a 110-volt outlet; this outlet is only for low-voltage appliances, like electric shavers. (Your bathroom also comes equipped with a hair dryer).

Electricity in Austria, Hungary, and Slovakia is 220–240 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220–240. But you should check the item or the owner’s guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B; standard European plugs are Type C, E, and F. **Of the three, a Type C adapter is the most useful as it fits into Type E and F sockets.** Type C is usually what is sold in stores as a European adapter.

Aboard ship, the plugs in your cabin bedroom are Type F. The 110V socket in your cabin bathroom takes U.S. plugs, but not polarized ones (where one prong is bigger than the other). *Previous travelers have mentioned this because some small appliances, like Waterpiks, have polarized plugs.*

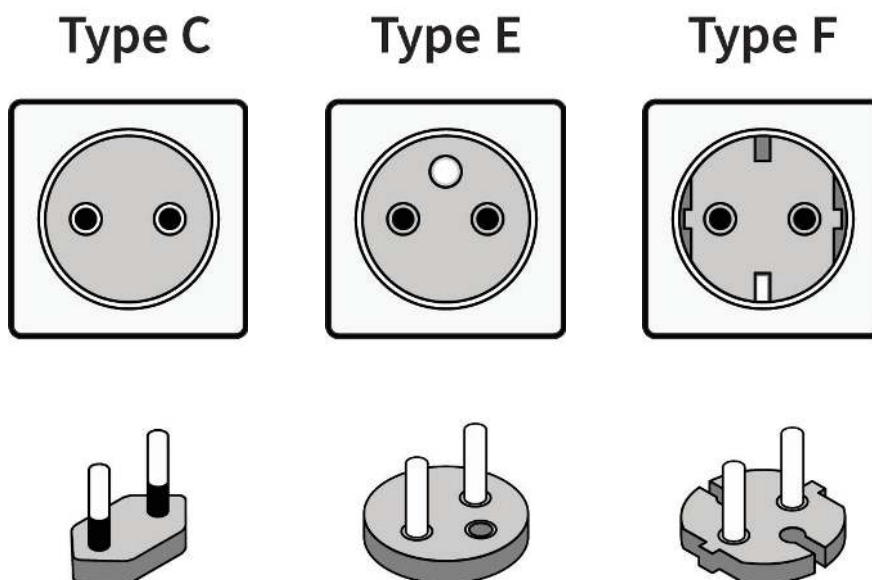
Note that even though you'll only need the European plug adapter on this trip, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

For your reference, here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

Austria: C and/or F

Slovakia: C

Hungary: C



CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Vienna, Austria: Austria has a central European climate: variable weather reigns, and rain and drizzle are common occurrences year-round. Spring weather is moderate, with intermittent sun and showers; afternoons in early spring average about 60° F and about 70° later in the season. Summers are typically sunny and warm, though you should be prepared for a few cloudy and wet days. Evenings, too, can get quite chilly. Autumn weather with some drizzle comes early to this region of the world, so by November it can be on the brisk side, with daytime temperatures in the mid to high 40s, and evenings that dip into the 30s.

Slovakia: Because of Slovakia's landlocked position, seasonal extremes are common without the curbing effects from the Atlantic Ocean. This means that summer can be extremely hot while winter weather can bring bitterly cold temperatures. Weather can fluctuate more during spring and fall, with some days on the cool side but with the occasional warm day. By the end of October, temperatures have started to drop and the evenings are chilly.

Hungary: Hungary is completely landlocked, and its inland position cuts it off from the moderating influence of the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, seasonal weather is more prone to extremes. Summers can be very hot and winters absolutely frigid. If you're traveling during the peak of summer, be prepared for some high temperatures, though it could also be comfortable and pleasant. As fall approaches, some days may be on the cool side, but stints of warm weather still occur. By late October, the air is usually brisk and evenings are chilly.

Traveling in Summer? Expect Heat Waves

We'd like to call out that the last few summers in this region have been extremely hot, with average temperatures in the mid-80s and prolonged heat waves in the 90-100 degree range. If you are traveling in the summer, know that we may need to adjust our daily activities to avoid the hottest parts of day and that many shops, restaurants, etc. do not have air conditioning.

Weather Conditions and River Depths

Throughout the river cruise season, weather conditions affect river depths, and water levels may require adjustments to your itinerary. When river depths rise or fall during your River Cruise, we will be required to adjust your itinerary for your safety and to adhere to the current governmental and nautical requirements. Though we strive to adhere to our planned itinerary, we may not always be able to follow it exactly as planned. Therefore the sequence of ports visited and the days on which included features and optional tours occur may vary.

Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use **www.weather.com** for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	VIENNA, AUSTRIA			BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	39 to 31	84 to 75	1	37 to 26	87 to 79	13
FEB	43 to 33	82 to 68	2	42 to 28	88 to 72	11
MAR	52 to 38	81 to 62	4	52 to 35	85 to 58	15
APR	63 to 46	76 to 54	2	62 to 40	78 to 50	14
MAY	73 to 55	76 to 54	7	75 to 49	77 to 52	14
JUN	79 to 59	76 to 57	4	85 to 55	76 to 53	15
JUL	84 to 63	76 to 54	7	87 to 58	75 to 49	15
AUG	88 to 64	78 to 54	5	90 to 57	80 to 50	12
SEP	75 to 57	84 to 61	5	75 to 51	85 to 56	14
OCT	63 to 48	86 to 65	2	65 to 42	89 to 64	15
NOV	50 to 39	86 to 75	3	47 to 34	88 to 77	16
DEC	40 to 33	85 to 78	2	38 to 30	86 to 80	14

MONTH	BUDAPEST, HUNGARY		
	Temp High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	38 to 25	86 to 77	7
FEB	43 to 27	85 to 68	6
MAR	53 to 35	81 to 57	6
APR	63 to 41	75 to 51	7
MAY	70 to 51	77 to 51	8
JUN	80 to 56	72 to 51	8
JUL	85 to 59	76 to 48	7
AUG	90 to 59	76 to 48	7
SEP	80 to 52	82 to 52	5
OCT	65 to 43	86 to 60	5
NOV	50 to 34	87 to 75	8
DEC	40 to 28	86 to 79	8

ABOARD YOUR SHIP: CABIN FEATURES, DINING & SERVICES ON BOARD

Our River Ships

Our private fleet of custom-built river ships—with designs incorporating suggestions from Grand Circle Cruise Line travelers—offers a host of amenities to make you feel right at home. Each ship is designed to carry a moderate number of travelers, ensuring an intimate shipboard atmosphere, plus the ease of maneuverability that's so important when entering small river ports. Amenities on each ship include a restaurant with panoramic windows and wraparound promenade, sun deck with lounge chairs, a whirlpool, library, sauna, bar, lounge, dance floor, and small souvenir shop.

By owning our ships, we can assure that you'll be sharing this unique travel experience with only like-minded Grand Circle Cruise Line travelers. You'll find your ship to be an intimate haven that's especially conducive to camaraderie. We'll all be together for the joint celebrations, such as the Welcome Cocktail Party, where you'll experience the gala ambiance of a larger group. At other times, such as when we venture ashore, we'll break into smaller groups with individual Program Directors to allow for more intimate and personal discoveries.

Included features of all Grand Circle Cruise Line European river ship cabins:

- A layout of at least 150 square feet
- All outside cabins
- Individual climate control (heat and air conditioning)
- Twin beds that ship staff convert into a daytime couch
- Storage space under beds of 57 inches x 22.8 inches x 11.8 inches (length + width + height)
- Sufficient closet and dresser space
- Color TV, including CNN programming and a bow camera for ship-front views
- Direct-dial international telephone
- Hair dryer
- Desk
- Private bath with shower

Cabins on the Serenade deck have small balconies with sliding doors; those on the Sonata deck have large picture windows; cabins on the Cantata deck have two picture windows, and Prelude Deck cabins have a square window, placed high in the cabin. For safety reasons, cabin windows do not open.

An important word: While our fleet features larger-than-usual riverboat cabins, please keep in mind that these ships are river vessels, not large ocean cruise ships. Riverboat cabins, in comparison, are relatively small, and ship amenities, in general, are comfortable but not lavish.

Cabin Assignments

You will receive confirmation of your deck and/or cabin category upfront in writing; it will be on your invoice and online in My Planner at www.gct.com/myplanner. However, your cabin number may not be assigned until you arrive onboard the ship. (This is normal procedure for ships in many parts of the world, including Europe.) If there's no cabin number on your invoice or online, you can presume it will be assigned later and communicated to you when you board.

Dining

You'll enjoy fine cuisine and excellent views in your ship's dining room, featuring a warm decor of dark woods, rich carpeting, and white-linen and china table settings. Your ship's daily service includes breakfast and lunch buffets, and a more formal dinner. Our professional chefs will create unique menus for you that feature regional specialties. Complimentary house wine, draft beer, and a selection of soft drinks are included with both lunch and dinner. In addition, a selection of other fine wines and beer is available for purchase, starting at approximately \$20–35 per bottle (prices vary according to vintage). Travelers may also bring a bottle of their own favorite wine to dinner to enjoy at their table. Should you care to avail yourself of this service, there will be a corkage fee of approximately \$10 per bottle, charged to your cabin account.

Please note that if you bring your own alcohol aboard, it can only be consumed in the dining room as described above, or in your cabin. Consumption of alcohol purchased outside the ship is not permitted in the lounge or public areas. We also offer complimentary coffee and tea throughout the day, available at meals and from the machine in the reception area.

Open-table, single seating for all meals: Each meal is open seating—reservations of any kind are not accepted. Dinner has only one designated time for its open seating.

Dining times: Dining times for all meals may vary depending on the day's sightseeing and sailing schedule, but in general, meal times are as follows:

- Early bird breakfast: 6:00–7:00 am
- Breakfast: 7:00–9:00 am
- Lunch: 1:00–2:00 pm
- Dinner: 7:00–9:00 pm

Celebrations: Recognition of an anniversary or birthday can be accommodated. Please call Grand Circle Cruise Line to submit your request no later than 45 days prior to departure.

Dress code: The dining-room dress code is casual, though most travelers dress nicely for the Captain's Welcome Reception and Farewell Dinner.

Electricity

Cabin bathrooms are equipped with a 110V outlet for electric shavers. The rest of the cabin has 220V, with Type C/F “Europlug” outlets. See the electricity section of the packing chapter for more details.

Embarkation/Disembarkation

On the day you board ship, your cabin will be available at around noon. The restaurant will open at 12:30 pm and serve a light lunch. On the day of disembarkation, your cabin will no longer be available after 8:00am. You may sit in the ship’s lounge or on the sun deck until disembarkation.

Dock and Landing Etiquette

River waterways are simply not big enough to support large landing docks such as those built on ocean shorelines. It is common for river ships to tie up alongside each other at some piers—particularly in ports where docking area is restricted. While we try to arrange the most convenient mooring available in each port of call, other boats may occasionally obstruct views, and you may have to step across other ships when you want to go ashore. On some rivers influenced by the tide, the ship might get below the level of the shore. It might be more difficult to see the ship from the riverbank, and the view from the cabins might be obstructed by the docking wall.

Docking Accessibility

For certain cities along your trip, your ship may be docked up to 1 hour outside the city center. Transportation to and from the city proper will be done via motorcoach.

Headsets

During your trip, complimentary headsets, or *Whispers* receivers, are provided on our guided tours through the cities we visit. These receivers and headsets allow you to hear your Program Director and our local guides better. If you use a hearing aid or have strong preferences for headphones, we highly encourage you to bring your own headsets/ear buds with you. The plug size is usually the same as that used by iPods, computer jacks, etc.

Wireless Internet Access

Limited Wireless Internet service is available for free in the cabins and common areas on board your Grand Circle Cruise Line ship. If you want to use the WiFi connection you’ll need to bring your own device (laptop/tablet/netbook) — ships do not rent or loan these devices. To use the WiFi, please visit Reception after you board for access information. Shipboard access is subject to the challenges of travel: ship location, signal availability, and usage volume on board will affect connectivity and speed. The ship’s Internet connection demands a strong 3G cell phone signal, which is unavailable in many of the areas we visit. You can expect disruptions of both long and short duration.

Laundry and Linen Service

Laundry service is available for a fee. Please note that neither self-service laundry facilities nor dry cleaning services are available. Bed linens are changed at the start of your cruise and then once a week (i.e. twice during a 14-night cruise); towels are changed daily.

Medical Care

Our entire fleet adheres to stringent European safety standards. In addition to an emergency call button in all cabins, ships also feature fully staffed reception desks, 24 hours a day.

Onboard Activities

During your cruise you'll enjoy exclusive Discovery Series events, organized discussions, group activities that relate to the region (may include a language lesson), and talks on upcoming ports of call.

Recreational Facilities

These include a fitness center, sun deck with lounge, library, and lounge with bar and dance floor. The bar is open from 9:30 am to 1 am, and features both complimentary drinks (soft drinks, house beer, house wine, and non-alcoholic cocktails/beer) and drinks for purchase (spirits, alcoholic cocktails, bottled beers, and a selection of wines). Prices are in Euros. The fitness center has an exercise bike and walking/running treadmill. A massage therapist is available as well (prices listed on board).

Bicycles

We're pleased to offer complimentary bicycle rentals onboard your ship for use during free time, including all of the necessary safety gear, such as a helmet, brightly-colored safety vest, and a lock. Because there is a limited supply of bicycles available, they will be offered on a first-come first-served basis. For more information or if you are interested in using one of the bicycles, please speak to the Front Desk staff or Hotel Manager onboard your ship.

Smoking/Non-Smoking Policy

Smoking is not allowed anywhere inside our Grand Circle Cruise Line European River Ships, including in individual cabins or balconies. The only area on the ship where smoking is permitted is outside on the sun deck.

Elevator/Chairlift

Each ship has an elevator and chairlift service to the sun deck from the deck below (or you can use the staircase to the sun deck, which has one flight of ten to twelve steps). The elevator does not provide service to or from the Prelude Deck. The staircase to/from the Prelude Deck features about six stairs, with a banister to hold on to. The chairlift is a single-seat transport that slides up the staircase banister.

Passport Procedures

For your convenience, your passport will be held by the hotel manager after embarkation and returned to you on disembarkation day. This is standard ship's procedure, and is designed to speed up border crossings and to ensure the crew has all the necessary documents on hand during potential controls in our ports of call.

Lost & Found

Any lost or forgotten items found on board the ship will be held for 90 days from disembarkation. After 90 days, all unclaimed items will be discarded or donated.

Ship Specifications

M/S River Adagio

- **History:** Built in 2003
- **Size:** 410x38 ft
- **Capacity:** 163 passengers, 38 crew members
- **Layout:** 82 cabins, 4 decks; Elevator-yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

M/S River Aria

- **History:** Built in 2001
- **Size:** 410x38 ft
- **Capacity:** 163 passengers, 40 crew members
- **Layout:** 82 cabins, 4 decks; Elevator-yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

M/S River Harmony

- **History:** Built in 1999
- **Size:** 361x38 ft
- **Capacity:** 140 passengers, 32 crew members
- **Layout:** 70 cabins, 4 decks; Elevator-yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

Your Program Director

Grand Circle Cruise Line is committed to showing you a destination through the perspective of those who live, work, and play there. How better to do that than to have a resident with you every step of the way? We are proud to be the only cruise line to provide you the dedicated services of an expert Program Director, a resident or native of the country who is delighted to share their in-depth knowledge of local history, culture, and hidden gems.

Fluent in English and skilled in fostering camaraderie among travelers, our Program Directors are constantly cited by our travelers as the main reason they continue to travel with us. During your cruise, you'll enjoy multiple Program Directors aboard your ship, who will each be with you and your group of 25–47 travelers throughout your journey—both on ship and on land. And with personal headsets on every included and optional tour, you'll be able to enjoy their perspective and enthusiasm as you explore at a level deeper than most Americans go.

Central European Culture

The three countries visited on your main itinerary—Hungary, Slovakia, and Austria—all have very rich, and very distinct cultures. But they also have significant overlap, which makes sense when you consider that up until this century, these nations did not even exist in their current sovereign states but were variously part of each other. Much of this had to do with the Hapsburg dynasty who controlled most of Central Europe (and beyond) from late medieval times till the 20th century. On a cultural level, that meant that Germanic culture was held as the ideal. This is often expressed as an appreciation for cooperation, for precision and accuracy, and a certain level of formality.

In Slovakia and Austria this comes through in the way people appreciate good manners and well-behaved children. You are expected say “good day” to everyone you meet, and to be polite. If you are not, don't be surprised if local grandmas cluck their tongues at you.

At the same time, Slovaks have a dark sense of humor and they love to poke fun at themselves and especially, the government. But one thing they do thank the government for is its traditional support for the arts. During the Soviet era (and still today), the Czechoslovakian as well as the Hungarian governments subsidized many programs for artists as well as theaters and concert halls, so attending plays and musical performances is a regular and affordable pleasure for all members of society.

While Austrians may not share the same love for poking fun at their government, they do love to keep things fun and highly value *gemütlichkeit* (warmth or happiness). In addition, Austrian society and the government make large efforts to instill an appreciation for the arts at a young age. Austrian children typically have required music and art classes, and it is not uncommon to find Austrians as members of bands, choir, or music groups.

History has shaped the Hungarian people in slightly different ways. Hungarians have struggled for centuries to find their own identity while under the control of more powerful states, from Austria to Turkey to Germany and the Soviet Union. Especially among the older generation, there is a sense of somber nostalgia called the “Trianon Syndrome” that harkens to a post-World War I Treaty that whittled Hungary down to about 60% of its previous size. The country has yet to fully recover from this loss, and some still look back on the pre-Trianon years as Hungary’s golden age. On the other hand, most Hungarians have a strong sense of pride about their fierce Magyar forebears, their legendary cuisine, and their close family ties. Regarding the latter, they are not insular and will extend true hospitality to all guests.

The Danube River

The Danube River is the second-longest river in Europe and the only major European river to flow from west to east. It rises in the Black Forest region of Germany and flows in a generally easterly direction for a distance of 1,766 miles before emptying, on the Romanian coast, into the Black Sea. This legendary river not only shaped the destinies of all the countries that line its banks, but influenced the whole continent as no other European river ever could.

The Danube river basin is more than 300,000 square miles and includes parts of Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldavia, and Ukraine. The river is ancient and full of history, passing through the cities of Ulm, Regensburg, and Passau in Germany; Linz and Vienna in Austria; Bratislava in Slovakia; Budapest in Hungary; Belgrade in Serbia; and Galatzi and Brăila in Romania. Canals link the Danube to the Main and Rhine, providing a commercial route between the Black and North Seas.

The strategic location of this great river was recognized centuries ago by Roman Emperors who sought to control it. Ruins from that period now perch on banks above the river, reminding you of the Danube’s multi-faceted past. Even today, the Danube continues to be one of Europe’s greatest assets, in part because it provides a water link between the four national capitals on its banks: Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, and Belgrade. Back in the heyday of river transport, other great cities grew up along the Danube’s banks too, serving as ports for the various cargo being carried on the river, namely salt, wood, and ores. These same products now are transferred on the railroad and highways, which run alongside the Danube’s course.

There is no question that few river voyages can match the romantic appeal of a journey down the Danube. Here is the heart of the lilting Strauss waltzes, of myth-laden castles, Old World villages, and rolling vineyards. As you sail along this twisting river, stopping at fascinating ports, you’ll gain an understanding of the art, music, and culture of a fabled region with a history that stretches back more than 3,000 years.

Austrian Cuisine

Austria has quite a bit of culinary overlap with neighboring Germany. But you have only to consider the scope of the Hapsburg Empire to understand the many influences that have also shaped the national cuisine: the empire once ruled over Switzerland, Holland, Alsace, Burgundy,

Spain, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and Italy, and happily appropriated many of their ingredients and cooking techniques. This is to say nothing of the Turkish influence that wafted westwards across the Austro-Hungarian empire.

- One constant on Austrian menus is the national dish, **wiener schnitzel**, the classic Viennese veal cutlet which is pounded till thin, breaded, fried and served with wedges of lemon and greens. It can also be made with chicken or pork.
- **Tafelspitz**: A filet of beef (or veal) that is gently simmered with vegetables, and served with applesauce and horseradish. Late spring brings spargel, or asparagus, which are particularly tender and flavorful here. It'll appear as a special on many menus, often served with a delicate hollandaise or just butter, lemon, and toasted bread crumbs.
- **Kasspätzln**: A Tyrolean casserole of chewy, hand-made egg noodles that are mixed with sauteed onions, covered with *bergkäse*, a strong local cheese, and baked till browned. Before serving, it is topped with crispy fried onions and parsley.
- **Speckknödeln**: A bacon dumpling that is often served as an appetizer or in stews or clear soups. It is just one of the dozens of different dumplings that grace the Austrian table.
- **Frittatensuppe**: Or “pancake soup” is a Styrian specialty that is popular all over Austria. It's a bowl of clear beef consommé with strips of cooked crepes or pancakes.
- **Würstelstande**: Or sausage booths. These street stalls are the go-tos for snackers on the go, and the sausage of choice will usually be a wiener sausage, which Austrians will only ever call a “Frankfurter.” You can also ask for a *bratwurst*, a *Käsekrainer* (which is studded with cheese), or a *Debreziner*, which is a lightly-smoked, reddish sausage spiced with paprika.
- **Sachertorte**: A classic chocolate sponge cake layered with apricot jam, and covered in chocolate ganache. It's available all over, but for the quintessential Viennese experience, try it where it originated, at the Sacher Hotel, or at the famed Demel bakery.
- **Mozartkugel**: Small, round candies are balls of pistachio marzipan and nougat, covered with dark chocolate.

One thing Austria can thank the Turks for is coffee. Legend has it that when Hapsburg troops chased the Turks out in 1683, the retreating invaders left behind bags of coffee beans. Within two years the first Viennese coffee house opened, and the rest is history. In 2011, UNESCO designated Viennese coffee house culture as part of humanity's intangible cultural heritage, saying that the coffee houses have a “very specific atmosphere” and are places “where time and space are consumed, but only the coffee is found on the bill.”

Slovak Cuisine

Slovakia shares a culinary heritage with its neighbor, the Czech Republic, that emphasizes meat, potatoes, dumplings, and fermented vegetables (usually, sauerkraut). These are often served with heavy gravies or sauces, but the high-caloric impact is somewhat mitigated by the fact that

most Slovaks eat their heaviest meal at lunch, and have a lighter supper of just cold cuts and condiments. You'll also find that in the major cities, young chefs are experimenting with lighter and healthier versions of the classic dishes they grew up with.

- **Vepro-knedlo-zelo:** Shorthand for *veprové s knedliky a kyselé zeli*, this dish consists of a succulent roast pork and dumplings concoction that is often seasoned with caraway, and served with sauerkraut. You will see it on just about every restaurant menu.
- **Houskové knedlíky:** Bread dumplings made with flour, yeast, egg yolks and milk, sometimes with bread cubes added to the mix. After the dough rises it gets boiled or steamed, then sliced.
- **Ovocné knedlíky:** Fruit-filled dumplings served with cottage cheese as a main course.
- **Bryndzové halušky:** Potato dumplings (similar to Italian *gnocchi*) topped with a creamy, soft, Slovakian sheep's milk cheese that has its own EU protected designation of origin status. It is then topped with crumbled bacon bits and a garnish like chopped chives, onions or dill. It is the national dish of Slovakia.
- **Svicková na smetane:** A dish where beef is marinated in vinegar and herbs; then roasted with vegetables; then simmered till tender. The broth and vegetables are pureed with sour cream to make a sauce, and it all gets garnished with cranberries.
- **Párek v rohlíku:** The quick meal where a small *parek* sausage is completely enclosed within the bun, like pigs in a blanket.
- **Laskonky:** A dessert of two crispy meringues filled with caramel or chocolate buttercream.
- **Trdelník:** A dessert made by wrapping dough around a metal or wooden stick, then roasting it over an open flame. The tubular treat is then dusted with sugar, and topped with nuts and cinnamon.
- **Veterník:** A profiterole made of puff pastry filled with vanilla and caramel cream. The whole pastry is then dipped in a shiny caramel icing for a belt-busting grand finale.

Pubs are an integral part of Slovak life, and the region brews some of the best beer in the world.

Hungarian Cuisine

It won't take long for you to figure out that paprika (*paprikás*) and sour cream (*tejföl*) figure prominently in many classic Hungarian dishes. But don't be fooled, Hungarian food is delicious and diverse, and even dishes accented with paprika have distinctive tastes, thanks to the eight different grades of "red gold" that are used here.

- **Gulyas:** Or goulash is a saucy beef dish that in Hungary is more like a soup than the stew you may be familiar with.

- **Pörkölt:** A hearty stew of beef, pork, lamb, chicken, or liver simmered with onion, paprika and other spices, and served with a side of chewy *nokedli* (egg noodle dumpling). It's comfort food at its finest, and Hungarians like to say, "It's not a real Sunday without *pörkölt*." If you thicken the stew with sour cream, you get *paprikás*.
- **Töltött káposzta:** Rolls of pickled cabbage stuffed with seasoned rice and ground pork or beef, in a sauce accented by sour cream. It is a favorite around Easter and Christmas.
- **Halászlé:** Or fisherman's soup, is cooked in a kettle over an open fire. It is based on Danube river fish like carp, catfish, perch, or pike and seasoned with hot paprika, giving it a bright red color. If you order it **a la Baja**, it will have thick pasta and mainly carp. *Szeged*-style will have four types of fish.
- **Lángos:** A popular street food of crispy, chewy, deep-fried flatbread smothered with sour cream and garlic sauce, and topped with grated cheese and sometimes, sausage and bacon.
- **Lecsó:** Similar to the French ratatouille, this dish is a stew of peppers, tomatoes and onions. Some cooks do put meat in it but typically it is served just with bread and a dollop of sour cream.
- **Uborkasaláta:** A salad of thinly sliced cucumbers dressed with white vinegar, dill, and onions.
- **Palacsinta:** Hungary's answer to crepes, they can have sweet or savory fillings, and they are always served rolled. The famous Budapest restaurant Gundel serves their own version filled with a rum-walnut cream which is then flambéed, and drizzled with chocolate sauce.
- **Dobos torte:** This dessert was named after the master confectioner who invented it in 1885. It includes six layers of sponge cake covered in chocolate buttercream with a glistening topping of caramel. It is a staple at the many famous coffeehouses of Budapest (and Vienna), and not to be missed.
- **Somlói galuska:** A cake is topped with chocolate cream, walnuts, rum and whipped cream, and it is another specialty of the renowned Gundel restaurant.

Vienna in Brief

Vienna's "Ring," once the location of the city walls and today a broad boulevard in the inner zone (the oldest part of the city), encircles most main sights. In the center is Stephansplatz, site of the city's famous St. Stephen's Cathedral. Just a short walk away is the Hofburg (the Habsburgs' official residence), the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Art History Museum), and the Staatsoper. The pedestrian thoroughfare, Kaernter Strasse, is the city's major shopping venue; it runs from Stephansplatz past the Staatsoper to Karlsplatz. The "Ring" itself is two and one half miles long and 187 feet wide. Constructed in the mid 19th century to protect Vienna from outside threats, the Ring encircles the Old City. All sites inside the Ring are part of the First Bezirk (or 1st precinct, designated by the #1010 in addresses). The remainder of the city is also sectioned into precincts.

Local Transportation

Vienna is divided into 23 numbered districts. Most sights are concentrated in the city center, the 1st District, which is largely a pedestrian zone and easily reached by public transportation. Many 1st District attractions are within walking distance of one another. You can walk from one end of the Old City to the other in about 30 minutes. Even the walk from the Ring to either train station is only a half hour or so. Beyond this central hub, districts proceed from the 2nd on up to the 23rd.

Vienna's transit network consists of five U-Bahn (subway) lines, trams, buses, and several rapid transit and commuter trains. Ask your Program Director or hotel concierge for more information about the best options available for obtaining tickets to your desired destination.

Note on Ticket Validation: You must validate all tickets yourself by inserting them into machines at the entryway of S-Bahn and U-Bahn platforms or on buses and trams. When entering streetcars, look for a blue box with a white "E," which is for validating tickets.

Viennese Specialties

Like the rest of Austria, Viennese cuisine is the culmination of various ethnic influences, including Bohemian, Hungarian, Croatian, Slovenian, German, and Italian. But the city has a few local specialties you may wish to try:

- **Soups:** *Griessnockerlsuppe* (clear soup with semolina dumplings), *rindsuppe* (beef broth), and *gulaschsuppe* (Hungarian-style goulash soup).
- **Main courses:** Familiar dishes are *bauernschmaus* (a combination of many varied sausages and pork items with sauerkraut and dumplings), *tafelspitz* (boiled beef with vegetables), *wiener schnitzel* (breaded veal or pork cutlet), *schweinebraten* (roast pork), *backhendl* (fried and breaded chicken), and *gulasch* (stew). *Nockerl* are little dumplings, usually served with sauce.
- **Desserts:** Vienna's *apfelstrudel* (apple strudel) is probably the best in the world. *Palatschinken* are light, sugared pancakes; *klaiserschmarren* is a diced omelet, served with jam and sprinkled with sugar. And of course, don't miss the famous *sachertorte* (chocolate cake with layers of apricot jam)!
- **Coffee:** Austrian coffee, of which there are at least 20 varieties, is delicious and not to be missed. Introduced 300 years ago by the Turks during their unsuccessful attempt to conquer Vienna, coffee has become an art form, served in veritable institutions known as the Viennese coffeehouses. Among the many kinds of coffee are *kleiner schwarzer*, a small cup without milk; the *melange*, a large cup with foamy milk; *mokka*, strong black Viennese coffee; *kapuziner*, which is the same as *melange* but topped with whipped cream; and *tuerkischer*, Turkish coffee boiled in a small copper pot and served in tiny cups.

Budapest in Brief

Budapest is divided by the Duna (Danube River) into a right and left bank. Of the city's three main districts, two—Buda and Obuda—are found on the west bank; Pest is on the east bank. Most of the major shopping venues, the House Parliament, the National Museum, Museum of Applied Arts, and Museum of Fine Arts are located in Pest. Buda, on the west bank, is the site of Castle Hill, Fishermen's Bastion, Matthias Church, and the National Gallery. In essence, Pest is the hub for dining, shopping, banking, and nightlife; and Buda contains the historical and cultural part of the city. The main shopping street in Pest is Vaci Utca, now a pedestrian zone, which runs parallel to the Danube and is every bit as elegant as the Merceria in Venice or the Faubourg-St.-Honoré in Paris.

Local Transportation

The public transportation system in Budapest—a metro (subway), buses, streetcars, and trolleybuses—is economical, efficient, and simple to use, but closes down around 11:00 pm. Certain trams and buses run on a limited schedule all night. A day ticket (napijegy) allows unlimited travel on all services within the city limits. You can also buy tickets for single rides from metro stations or tobacco shops. You can travel on all trams, buses, and on the subway with this ticket, but you can't change lines. Bus, streetcar, and trolleybus tickets must be canceled on board. Don't get caught without a ticket: spot checks are frequent, and you can be fined if you don't possess one.

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your vacation. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. Grand Circle is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

Crafts & Souvenirs

Austria

Popular buys include glassware, crystal, porcelain, petit point, musical instruments and scores, fur hats, ski wear, and, of course, lederhosen (leather pants), loden-cloth coats, and sachertorte (chocolate cake). But be forewarned: the quality of Austrian wares is exceptionally high, and so are the prices!

Value Added Tax: In Austria, a Value Added Tax is levied on most articles, services, and meals, and ranges from 10% to 30%. Depending on how much you spend on certain goods in specially marked Tax Free Shopping stores, you may be eligible for a partial refund of this tax. Ask the shopkeeper or salesperson for details. Be sure to save all receipts and the special Global Tax Refund forms for Customs, as receipts alone are not enough.

Slovakia

Handicraft shops in Slovakia feature pictures painted on glass or wood, puppets in elaborate costumes, and shepherd axes. Travelers who enjoy musical instruments from other countries should keep their eye out for a *fujara*, a type of flute that is played upright like an oboe. At 3 feet long, it might not fit in your carry-on, but it is typically Slovakian. Slovakia is also known for its wines and for *slivovica*, a potent plum brandy.

Hungary

Look for exquisite Herend porcelain, cut glass, fine peasant embroidery and needlework, homespun cloth, carpets, charming carved wood objects and, of course, dolls in national dress. Other excellent buys are recordings of classical and folk music.

U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, www.cbp.gov has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Austria

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 32,382 square miles
- **Capital:** Vienna
- **Languages:** German is the official language. English is also spoken, particularly in all tourist areas and major cities.
- **Location:** Austria is bordered by Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein.
- **Geography:** Landlocked in Central Europe, Austria features the mountainous Alps in the south and west, but also is home to flat plains and gentle slopes in the north and east.
- **Population:** 8,665,550 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 73.8%, Protestant 4.9%, Muslim 4.2%, Orthodox 2.2%, other 0.8%, none 12%, unspecified 2%
- **Time Zone:** Austria is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Vienna.

National Holidays: Austria

In addition to the holidays listed below, Austria celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/06 Epiphany

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

08/15 Assumption of Mary

10/26 National Day

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/08 Feast of the Immaculate Conception

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 St. Stephen's Day

Austria: A Brief History

Austria has been populated since Neanderthal times, but its most significant early culture was the Hallstatt, which arose around 400 BC when Celtic people settled along the shores of the Hallstatter See. The Celts formed a confederation called Noricum, established a prosperous salt trade, and forged iron implements. When Romans arrived in 15 BC, they made the area a province. In exchange for their excellent Noric steel (which the Romans used for swords), the Celts received protection—and they needed it, as Germanic Teutons and other tribes invaded.

When Charlemagne arrived in the 8th century and created a zone in the Danube Valley called the East March. In 976, the Babenburg dynasty became the margraves of this “eastern realm” or Österreich, German for “Austria.” The Babenburgs extended the territory and made Vienna their capital. When they died, Rudolf I took over in 1278, ushering in the dynastic powerhouse that dominated Europe for 500 years. Consolidating power through strategic marriages, they built a network from Spain to the Netherlands to Germany. The Hapsburgs were all prince-electors of the Holy Roman Empire, and from 1452 they elected their kinsmen as its Emperors. But holding power was not easy. In 1618 Europe erupted into a Thirty Years War that caused nearly eight million deaths. It was largely a contest between Bourbon and Austro-Spanish Hapsburgs. Things further destabilized when the Turks advanced to Vienna. They remained a threat until 1699.

Austria bloomed during the Enlightenment reigns of Maria Theresa and her son, Joseph II. They instituted reforms, and were patrons of the arts (with Mozart as their court composer). Decades later, a result of the Napoleonic wars was that the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved in 1806. But the Hapsburgs survived, creating a German Alliance of hundreds of small states. In 1867, Austria and Hungary united as a dual monarchy—and reveled in the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s cultural flowering. Vienna, newly magnificent after a flurry of building, was its epicenter. The Empire prospered until Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in 1914, sparking World War I. The 1919 defeat of the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Turkey, and Bulgaria) ended the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which split into several nations per the Treaty of Versailles.

Austria became a republic, but suffered inflation, unemployment, and the loss of a national identity. Political tensions erupted into violent street fights, and in 1934, a Conservative government took legislative powers from the parliament, making Austria a fascist country. Though the Treaty of Versailles had expressly forbidden the reunification of Germany and Austria, Hitler (himself an Austrian) had other ideas about this Anschluss. When the Nazis goose-stepped into Austria in 1938, they were welcomed by cheering crowds. Austria’s military, economy, and political infrastructure were integrated into Germany’s war efforts; the execution of Jews and resistors stepped up; and many Austrians participated in the Nazi’s crimes.

Austria was liberated by Allied and Soviet troops in 1945, a second republic was established, and Austria remained under occupation. In 1955, Russia demanded that Austria declare its neutrality as a condition for ending Soviet occupation. This status enabled Austria to be a bridge between East and West during the Cold War. But the nation never came to terms with its war history. That started in 1986, when former U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim ran for president. He won and served until 1992, and investigations into his wartime activities were inconclusive.

Austria joined the EU in 1995, adopted the euro in 1999, and is one of Europe’s most prosperous nations. It is considered a liberal democracy, and consistently ranks high for its quality of life.

Slovakia

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 18,933 square miles
- **Capital:** Bratislava

- **Languages:** Slovak is the official language; Hungarian is also spoken.
- **Ethnicities:** Slovak 80.7%, Hungarian 8.5%, Roma 2%, other and unspecified 8.8%
- **Location:** Slovakia is bordered by Austria, Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic.
- **Geography:** Situated in central Europe, Slovakia has a strategic position as a “bridge” between the countries of Austria (on its west) and Ukraine (on its east), and Hungary (to the south) and Poland (to the north); it’s also bordered by the Czech Republic (to the northwest). The land has rugged mountains, rich in mineral resources, and vast forests and pastures. The Carpathian Mountains dominate the topography of Slovakia, with lowland areas in the southern region.
- **Population:** 5,445,027 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 62%, Protestant 8.2%, Greek Catholic 3.8%, other or unspecified 12.5%, none 13.4%
- **Time Zone:** Slovakia is on Central Europe Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Bratislava.

National Holidays: Slovakia

In addition to the holidays listed below, Slovakia celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/01 Republic Day

05/01 Labor Day

05/08 End of World War II

07/05 St. Cyril & St. Methodius Day

08/29 National Uprising Day

09/01 Constitution Day

11/01 All Saints’ Day

11/17 Fight for Freedom and Democracy Day

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 St. Stephen’s Day

Slovakia: A Brief History

Slovakia only gained true independence as a nation in 1993, after the peaceful dissolution of the Czechoslovak federation that it had variously been part of for most of the 20th century. But sovereignty aside, Slovak culture has been evolving for hundreds, if not thousands of years.

What is now modern-day Slovakia has been inhabited since Paleolithic times. The earliest identifiable people were the Celts, who arrived around 400 BC and colonized lowlands along the Danube and its tributaries. They lived in small huts and established villages around hill forts. Romans set up shop here around 174 AD, but their focus turned elsewhere. Huns and Germanic tribes moved in. By 500 AD, Slavic tribes had established themselves in settlements along the Morava, Váh, and Hron rivers. Growing in number, they became the progenitors of the Slovak people. By 830 AD, they united with Bohemia and Moravia to form Great Moravia.

Great Moravia was conquered by Hungarian Magyars in the 10th century, and for nearly 1,000 years, Hungarian domination continued. In fact, Hungary's first king, Saint Stephen, established eight counties in what is present-day Slovakia, and the region was the frontier of the Kingdom of Hungary throughout the medieval era. When Turks invaded in the 16th century, they captured much of south and central Hungary (and Slovakia). Budapest was taken, but the Hungarian royalty moved to Bratislava. They paid obeisance to the Austrian Hapsburgs, upon whom they depended for defense against the Turks. And so Slovakia became a Hapsburg territory, and between 1526 and 1830, 19 Hapsburg rulers of Hungary were coronated in Bratislava.

The emergence of a Slovak national identity dates to the late 18th century, coincident with the appearance of a written language. The romantic nationalism that swept Europe in the early 19th century also swept Slovakia, and was focused on literature and folklore. But after the failed Hungarian Revolution of 1848, Hungary's weakness left an opening for a political Slovak national political movement. It was sidelined in 1867 after Hungary and Austria reached a compromise and formed the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Slovakia's dream of independence did not materialize until 1919, when it joined with Bohemia, Moravia, Czech Silesia and Carpathia Ruthenia to form Czechoslovakia. During the interwar period, this was the only true democracy in Eastern Europe.

When Hitler annexed Czechoslovakia, Slovakia became a client state headed by Josef Tiso, a Catholic priest and Nazi collaborator. Under his rule, nearly all the Jews remaining in Slovakia were deported to death camps in Poland, or killed in Slovakia. In 1944, the Slovak Uprising attempted to overthrow the Tiso government. It was put down by the Nazis, but guerilla operations continued until Slovakia was liberated in 1945 by the Red Army and Czech, Slovak, and Romanian partisans. After the war, a reunited Czechoslovakia became a Soviet satellite.

The nation endured the repression and hardships of the Stalin years. But in the 1960s Czechoslovakia enjoyed a period of liberalization under Slovak-born president Alexander Dubcek. This ended with the "Prague Spring" of 1968, when the Soviets invaded with Warsaw Pact troops. The dissidents moved underground until 1989, when they helped bring about the fall of communism during the Velvet Revolution. In 1993, Slovaks and the Czechs agreed to separate in what is called the "Velvet Divorce." Thus, Slovakia finally became truly independent.

Slovakia joined both NATO and the European Union in 2004. Today, Slovakia is a modern country with a strong market economy, complemented by a comprehensive social security system that offers universal health care, free education and generous civil liberties.

Hungary

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 35,911 square miles
- **Capital:** Budapest
- **Languages:** Hungarian (Magyar) is the official language.
- **Ethnicities:** Hungarian 85.6%, Roma 3.2%, German 1.9%, other 2.6%, unspecified 14.1%

- **Location:** Hungary is located in central Europe
- **Geography:** Hungary is a landlocked country that has borders with seven countries: Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia to the east; Serbia and Romania to the south; Ukraine to the northeast; and Slovakia directly to the north. Most of Hungary is a fertile, rolling plain lying east of the Danube River, and drained by the Danube and Tisza Rivers.
- **Population:** 9,897,541 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 37.2%, Calvinist 11.6%, Lutheran 2.2%, Greek Catholic 1.8%, other 1.9%, none 18.2%, unspecified 27.2%
- **Time Zone:** Hungary is six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Budapest.

National Holidays: Hungary

In addition to the holidays listed below, Hungary celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/01 New Year's Day

03/15 1848 Revolution Memorial Day

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

08/20 Hungary National Day

10/23 1956 Revolution Memorial Day

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 Boxing Day

Hungary: A Brief History

Hungary has been populated for half a million years. It was settled by Illyrians, Thracians and Scythians, and the Celts arrived around 400 BC. Romans established a province in western Hungary called Pannonia, but left in the 2nd century AD, when Attila the Hun briefly took over.

The progenitors of modern Hungarians were the Magyars. In 895, seven Magyar tribes under the leadership of Árpád formed an alliance. (These chiefs are depicted in the iconic statues of Budapest's Heroes' Square.) They were fierce and superior horsemen who conquered lands as far west as Spain. But the Magyars realized that their survival depended on forming ties with more powerful entities—namely, Byzantium or the Holy Roman Empire. They chose Rome.

Magyar rule was solidified in 973, when Géza, the great-grandson of Árpád, had himself and his grandson Vajk baptized—gaining the favor of Rome. Vajk took the Christian name Stephen (István) and in 1000 he became the first King of Hungary. His kingdom lasted 500 years and its endurance gave Hungary a strong taste for sovereignty. But by 1526, nearly all of Hungary was occupied by Ottoman Turkey. The remaining western and northern parts gained the protection of Austria. But when the Hapsburgs drove the Turks out in 1686, they also made the rest of “liberated” Hungary an Austrian province. Over time there were setbacks (and revolts) under the Hapsburgs, but also an economic and cultural flowering that continued into the 20th century.

In 1848, Hungary revolted against Hapsburg rule and failed. But in 1867, Austria and Hungary formed a federated dual monarchy with two parliaments, two capitals (Vienna and Budapest) and a hyphenated name: Austria-Hungary. Hungary was industrialized, and its economy soared. When Austrian Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated in 1914, Hungary entered World War I as a German ally. Losses were enormous, the empire dissolved, and unrest broke out. Large minorities within Hungary's borders clamored for independence, and got it, thanks to the Treaty of Trianon. It gave lands to the new nations of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania, reducing Hungary to 40% of its traditional size—a loss many Hungarians still mourn.

To recoup its former lands, the increasingly right-leaning Hungarian government of Miklós Horthy turned to fascist Italy and Germany. Hungary did recover some lands, but it was also drawn into World War II as an Axis ally. After the Hungarian army was virtually decimated, Horthy tried to negotiate a separate peace with the Allies. But Hitler invaded, installed the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross party, and resumed the murder of thousands of Jews, partisans, Romani, and intellectuals. In December 1944, the Red Army had encircled Budapest and a two-month siege began. By the time the Nazis surrendered in April 1945, much of Budapest had been destroyed.

The Soviets occupied Hungary after the war and made it a satellite state. In October 1953, 50,000 Budapest students began an anti-Soviet demonstration calling for Hungary's liberal-minded Imre Nagy to be Prime Minister. The secret police fired on them and overnight, Hungary was in revolt. Nagy formed a government and offered amnesty to those involved in the violence. But when he announced that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact and pursue neutrality, the Soviets stormed in with tanks. The world watched in horror as nearly 20,000 Hungarians died.

Communism fell in 1989 and on October 23—33 years after the 1956 Uprising—Hungary became the Republic of Hungary. The new Hungary joined NATO in 1999; and the EU in 2004. The current Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, a onetime anti-Communist, now serves his fourth term. He has moved far right and been criticized for increasing authoritarianism.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

General

The Improbable Voyage by Tristan Jones (Travel Account) In 1985, former Royal Navy skipper Tristan Jones embarked on a 2,307-mile voyage across Europe, traveling from the North Sea to the Black Sea via the Rhine and Danube rivers. Battling ice and cold, life-threatening rapids and narrow gorges, German bureaucrats and Romanian frontier police, Jones made his way through eight countries and emerged triumphant, albeit penniless, at the Black Sea. His spirited account of his adventures gives readers a vivid glimpse of the quality of life along Europe's oldest water routes—and of life on the Danube toward the end of the Cold War era.

Danube by Claudio Magris (Travel Account) This widely regarded descriptive travel book follows the river as it flows from its source in Germany to its mouth in the Black Sea, with wonderful descriptions of the scenery en route.

Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends by Lonnie R. Johnson (History) A panoramic history of Central Europe that provides a comparative analysis of the key events that have shaped Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia. The author abandons the Cold War convention of defining Central Europe in the bipolar terms of East and West, and emphasizes the underlying continuities in the region's history.

Austria

The Habsburgs: The History of a Dynasty by Benjamin Curtis (2013, History) Discover how this Austrian family gained power—and held it—for more than 500 years, shaping all the nations featured on this adventure.

When Nietzsche Wept: A Novel of Obsession by Irvin D. Yalom (2013, Fiction) Set in 19th-century Vienna, this novel is built upon a clever conceit: the psychoanalytic sessions between the impoverished and suicidal philosopher, Frederic Nietzsche; and distinguished physician Josef Breuer, who is undergoing his own existential crisis. The twist is that Nietzsche, too proud to seek help, does not know that he is Breuer's "patient." As the two meet in Vienna's salons and coffeehouses, we encounter the personalities of the day, including Sigmund Freud, and gain a sense of the healing power of connection.

The Age of Insight by Eric Kandel (2012, Art) This book takes us to Vienna in 1900, where leaders in science, medicine, and art began a revolution that changed forever how we think about the human mind—our conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions—and how mind and brain relate to art. Kandel traces the ideas and advances of Vienna, in rich and rewarding detail, and their enduring influence today.

The Painted Kiss by Elizabeth Hickey (2005, Historical Fiction) The author, an art historian, imagines the relationship between the artist Gustav Klimt, and his younger model-mistress, the couturier Emilie Flöge. She was the inspiration for his famous work, *The Kiss*, and it was her name that he uttered as his dying words.

The Austrians: A Thousand-Year Odyssey by Gordon Brook-Shepard (1996, History) A noted historian, draws upon his long-standing associations with Austrian leaders and his special access to the private Hapsburg family archives to trace the identity of Austria as it developed over a millennium.

Slovakia

In the Name of the Father by Vladimir Balla (2017, Fiction) A combination of the author's award-winning novella and three additional short stories, this satirical work explores the mind of a man who is looking in all the wrong places to place blame for his serial adultery, failed marriage, dysfunctional family relationships, and his wife's mental illness. With his dark humor, Balla has been called "the Slovak Kafka."

The Luck of the Weissensteiners by Christoph Fischer (2012, Fiction) When Greta, who is both Slovak and Jewish, falls for Wilhelm, who is German, everything seems to go well. But then World War II breaks out, and trouble ensues.

A Country Lost, Then Found: Discovering My Father's Slovakia by Rick Zednik (2012, Memoir) In this touching memoir Zednik first describes what it was like for his father to break all ties with Slovakia (due to the 1968 Soviet invasion); the second half reveals what it was like for the author himself to visit Bratislava after the end of the Cold War, and rediscover his extended family.

A History of Slovakia: The Struggle for Survival by Stanislav J. Kirschbaum (2005, History) A ground-breaking work this is the first comprehensive study to describe the resilience of the Slovaks—from the 7th-century Avar invasions to the break with the Czech Republic in 1993.

A False Dawn: My Life as a Gypsy Woman in Slovakia by Elena Lacková (2000, Biography) In the late 1970s, Lacková began telling her life story to Milena Hübschmannová, a leading Romani scholar. It is a startling and moving glimpse at a long-despised culture, and the strength of its families. We follow Lacková from her World War II struggles, to her exhilaration as a youthful playwright, to her emancipation (and gradual disillusionment) as a female socialist state official. Filled with details about daily life, superstitions, gender roles, and more.

Hungary

Budapest: A Critical Guide by András Török (2016, Guidebook) Frequently updated and widely loved, this is more than your average travel guide, but a witty insider's look at the quirks and pleasures of Hungary's most dazzling city. Even if you never went here, this book would be fun to read.

Budapest Noir by Vilmos Kondor (2012, Mystery) The death of a call girl in a seedy neighborhood a few days after the death of Hungary's Prime Minister doesn't seem to be of interest to anyone, except a dogged reporter. A classic noir-style mystery that unravels in 1930s Budapest.

Fatelessness by Imre Kertész (1975, Literature) This semi-autobiographical novel follows the experiences of a young Hungarian Jewish boy imprisoned at Auschwitz. Kertész drew on his own experiences there, and went on to be the only Hungarian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002.

The Bridge at Andau by James Michener (1957, Nonfiction) For a brief time in 1956, the bridge at Andau became an escape route for Hungarians fleeing the Soviet suppression of the famous popular revolt that wracked Budapest and riveted the world. Historian Michener was living at the Austrian-Hungarian border at the time, and captures here the dramatic nature of the true-life events surrounding the revolt and the plight of the refugees.

Suggested Films & Videos

Austria

The Woman in Gold (2015, Drama) Helen Mirren stars as Maria Altmann, an Austrian-Jewish Holocaust refugee who successfully sued the Austrian government for the return of a major artwork that was stolen from her family by the Nazis: Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bauer-Bloch*, who was her aunt. Based on a true story.

Museum Hours (2012, Drama) A lonely guard at Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Art Museum befriends an enigmatic American visitor, who has been called here due to a family emergency. Through conversations sparked by the art they both admire, the two begin sharing their lives, and the life of Vienna.

Before Sunrise (1995, Comedy/Drama) Two strangers meet on a rain and decide to get off in Vienna for just one evening. As they explore some of the city's most evocative landmarks, their conversations go from wryly philosophical to deeply personal, before they must decide to go their separate ways. Stars Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke collaborated on writing the sparkling dialogue.

Amadeus (1984, Drama) The pious Italian composer Antonio Salieri is obsessed with his rival, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, whom God has favored with divine talent and worldly success—despite Mozart's immaturity and vulgarity. The Oscar winner for Best Picture, this epic from director Milos Forman is gorgeously filmed, and lifted by its pitch-perfect performances by F. Murray Abraham (as Salieri) and Tom Hulce (as Mozart.)

Hungary

Son of Saul (2015, Documentary). Winner of the Cannes Grand Prix, Oscar, and Golden Globe awards, this film by László Nemes follows a day and a half in the life of Saul, a Hungarian inmate at Auschwitz forced to work as a *Sonderkommando*—a prisoner ordered to remove corpses from the gas chamber.

Mephisto (1981, Drama) This retelling of the Faust legend takes place in 1930s Germany, where amoral actor Hendrik Höfgen rapidly rises to become Germany's most famous actor, and head of the State Theater, by currying favor with the Reich. Sharply observant, yet untroubled by

scruples, Höfgen realizes that his best performance is the one that takes place off stage as he acts the role of a loyal Nazi. Buoyed by the electrifying performance of Klaus Maria Brandauer, this gem by István Szabó was the first Hungarian film to win an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film.

Useful Websites

Grand Circle Forum (tips from previous travelers)

www.gct.com/forum

Grand Circle Frequently Asked Questions

www.gct.com/faq

International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

www.cdc.gov/travel

Electricity & Plugs

www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets

Foreign Exchange Rates

www.xe.com/currencyconverter
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM Locators

www.mastercard.com/atm
www.visa.com/atmlocator

World Weather

www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

www.travlang.com/languages

Packing Tips

www.travelite.org

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

www.cbp.gov/travel

Transportation Security

Administration (TSA)

www.tsa.gov

National Passport Information Center

www.travel.state.gov

Holidays Worldwide

www.timeanddate.com/holidays

Useful Apps

Flight Stats

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

LoungeBuddy

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

Timeshifter

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

GoogleMaps or Maps.me

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

Triposo

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

Rome2rio

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

Flush or Sit or Squat

Find a clean toilet anywhere

Uber or Bolt or Grab

Ride sharing around the world

Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus

ATM locations

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

TunnelBear

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

What's App or Skype or Signal

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

Duolingo, FLuentU, or Babbel

Learn dozens of foreign languages

Google Translate

Fast and simple translations

XE

Currency conversions

SizeGuide

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

Best Units Converter

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

Happy Cow

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

Eatwith

Dine with locals all over the world

Meetup

Connects you with locals who share your interests

Skyview

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

Travello

Find travel friends on the road

TripWhistle

Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Tourlina

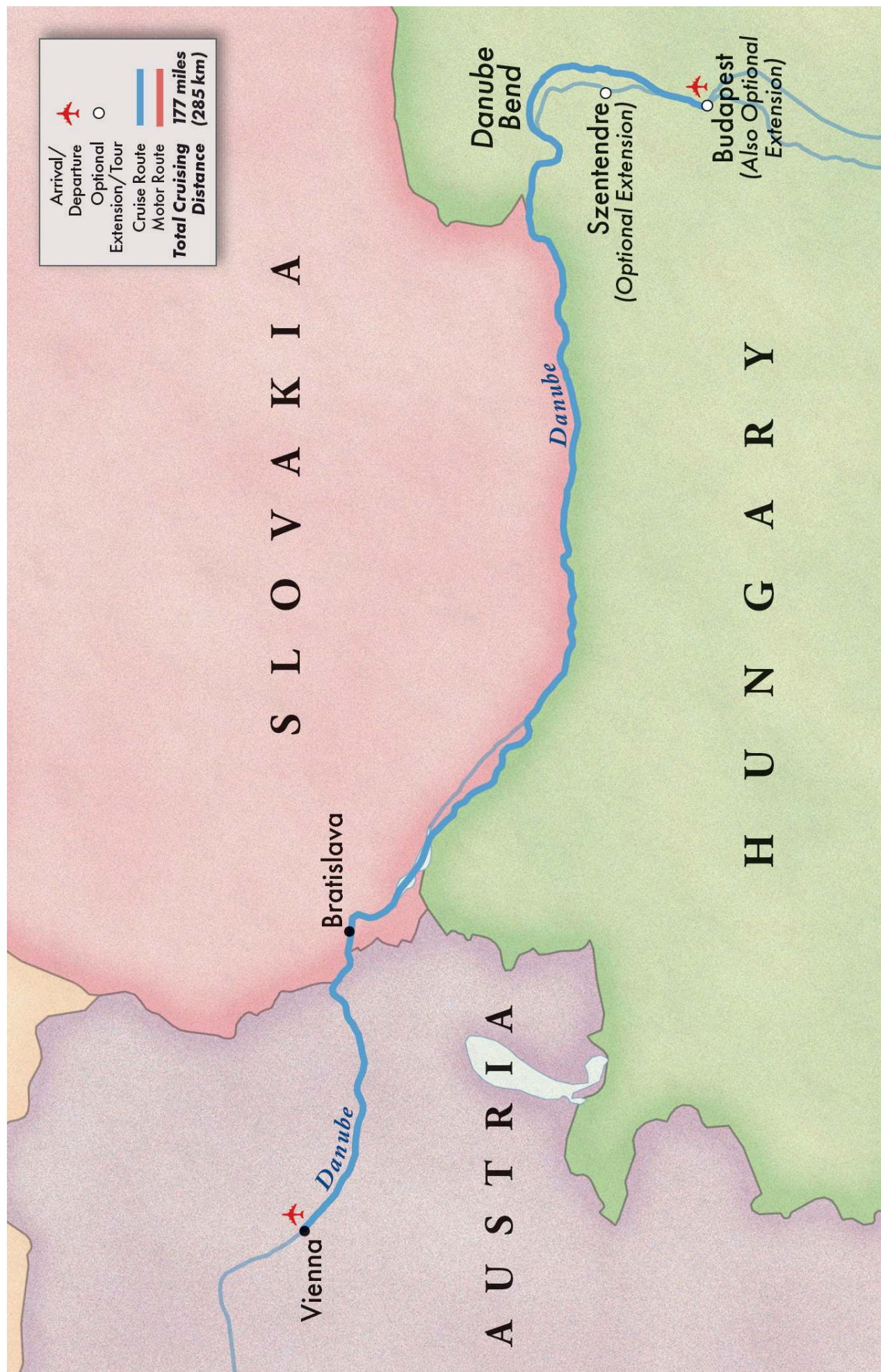
For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

ALIX for One

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

Chirpey

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



SHARE YOUR TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

We invite you to share your videos, slideshows, and photos of your past Grand Circle vacations to help inspire your fellow travelers. Go to www.gct.com/myplanner to upload your photos or video of at least 7 minutes in length and they may be featured on our website.

Most Popular Videos, Slideshows & Photos from our Grand Circle Vacations Created by our Travelers



Submitted by Fran Geisler, 8-time traveler
from Edisto Island, SC



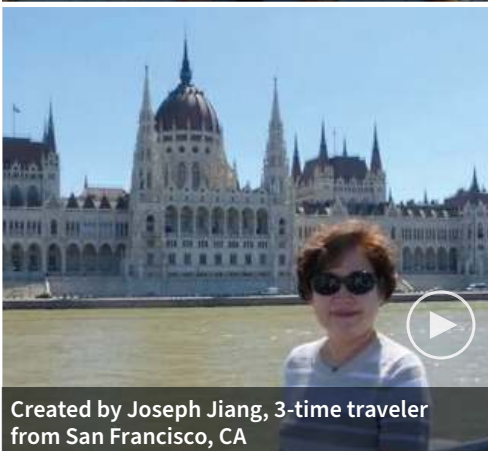
Submitted by Milly Champeau, 6-time
traveler from Clinton, TN



Submitted by Elinor Graham, first-time
traveler from Ocala, FL



Created by Sarah Brown, first-time traveler
from Providence, RI



Created by Joseph Jiang, 3-time traveler
from San Francisco, CA



Created by Sheila Knox, 20-time traveler
from Modesto, CA



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