



## Riverboat Cruising in France A TYPICAL CRUISE

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### Cruising aboard a riverboat – a typical week

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We're often asked what a typical riverboat cruise is like, but with 5 rivers to choose from in France and an array of cruise lines and ships on offer, that's a difficult question to answer.

Here, though, is a glimpse into a five star cruise in the **Bordeaux** region, to give you a taste of what could be in store for you.

#### Day 1: In Bordeaux

Arriving alongside the Scenic Diamond 'Space Ship' in **Bordeaux** we were beside ourselves with excitement, this being our first riverboat cruise. The welcome, it must be said, was first rate and as friendly as could be, complete with a glass of champagne, before being shown to our accommodation – we'd opted for a **balcony suite** on the Diamond deck.

It was a good size, with more than enough room for the two of us and plenty of storage space so we could empty our suitcases and put them away. It was light and airy with a premium feel to everything, including the lovely white bed linen. I couldn't resist a quick lie on the specially made beds I'd heard so much about (very comfortable) and a plump of the pillows that we'd chosen from the pillow menu (yes, you can really do that). The bathroom was nice and big, beautifully finished with black and white tiles, amazingly fluffy bathrobes and those L'Occitane toiletries I love so much. A full length sliding French door opened up onto our private balcony.

But enough about the suite for now, we couldn't wait to have a good look around the ship. The first thing you notice is that everywhere has floor to ceiling windows and superb views. It makes the entire ship feel open and welcoming. The decor inside is that of a high-end five star hotel I'd say, marble and glass everywhere, wooden floors, leather sofas and lovely fabrics for the soft furnishings.

Next to the reception area where we first boarded is the **Diamond Lounge**, the main area where most activities happened and home to the main bar. Forward of that is the **River Café** with smart leather chairs and French café style tables, for all day snacks and lighter lunches. It also has a terrace area at the front, for al fresco eating and drinking.

The main dining area was the spacious **Crystal Dining Room**, where breakfast, lunch and dinner happened. Breakfasts and lunches were buffet style, with cold and cooked-to-order items, while dinners were all table service. Scenic, by the way, is known for its food and it certainly was stunning. We were most impressed however by the high quality and wide choice of wines on offer, all included in the price and available all day long.

The next deck up, the same level as our suite, there was another, smaller restaurant called **L'Amour**, which offered a superb tasting menu for a small number of guests; you had to book this in advance. And above that was the amazing sun deck, with plenty of loungers and a plunge pool.

That first day we had a quick look around **Bordeaux** by ourselves, a glass of chilled white on the sun deck and then it was time for dinner. I had a garden salad with marinated mussels to start, cream of pumpkin soup to follow and a main course of pan fried cod with artichoke. My favourite, though, was a dessert of apple fritters with Calvados. The food all trip was stunningly good and the wines, as I said, were superb quality and well matched.



#### Day 2 – Libourne

We slept so well! Our first morning began with a cruise up the Dordogne from Bordeaux to **Libourne**. There was a French cooking masterclass on, but as this was our first taste of river cruising, we were more interested in taking in the view from the sun deck. After a light lunch in the River Café, we went off to explore nearby **Saint-Émilion** in the afternoon. This, of course, is real wine country, but we were taken aback at the beauty of Saint-Émilion itself, a picture-perfect medieval town if there ever was one. But the real star of the show that day was the 'Sundowner' they'd laid on for us at the estate of Château de la Rivière, a stunning venue for a glass or two of equally amazing wine.



#### Day 3 – Libourne and Blaye

This morning we had a choice of activities – either go on the guided tour of **Libourne**; go for a tour and wine tasting at Château Franc Mayne; or head to Bergerac for foie gras tasting on the farm. It was tough choice, but we opted for the tour of Libourne. Scenic also offer a **TailorMade** option, which is basically a GPS-operated piece of kit that allows you to go touring on your own. It guides you round, shows you where to go and has a running commentary on what you're looking at. It's truly inspired and lets you go off and explore if you don't fancy a guided tour.

Lunch was served on board, this time we went for the buffet in the main dining room and in the afternoon we cast off, heading downstream to **Blaye**. We enjoyed the beautiful views across the Gironde estuary from the sun deck. There was time for a cocktail or two in the bar with some of the new friends we'd struck up conversations with and then dinner.



#### Day 4 – Blaye and Pauillac

Today was all about **Blaye**, which is the nearest port to Cognac, but also a lovely destination in its own right. Our choices of excursions today were a gentle stroll around the Citadel of Blaye, a more active tour around the town, or a 30km cycle ride around the countryside. We went for the latter, which, thanks to the electrically assisted bikes, was more relaxing than it sounds! After lunch and an afternoon cruise across the estuary to **Pauillac** we got the chance to attend a classical concert in the stunning Château Agassac, a fairy tale chateau (complete with moat) set in the most beautiful countryside. It was the highlight of the whole trip and an experience I won't ever forget.



#### Day 5 – Pauillac and Bourg

Waking in **Pauillac** we had a leisurely breakfast and joined the excursions exploring the Médoc region, where we did some serious châteaux visiting and wine tasting. It was very well organised with several different coaches heading to different châteaux to avoid over-crowding. This afternoon we once again crossed the spectacular estuary to **Bourg** and had a choice of activities. We went for the active option, which was a visit to the Carriages Museum in Bourg Castle and then a self-guided around town.

That night we dined in the L'Amour Restaurant and had the seven course tasting menu with matching wines – lobster tart; steak tartare; garlic and pea soup; venison ragout vol-au-vent; duck breast; opera cake; Roquefort cheese. Need I say more?



#### Day 6 – Cadillac

After a gentle cruise up the Garonne river, we arrived in **Cadillac**, which is the gateway to the Sauternes region. Rather than the coach trip, we opted for a cycling tour of the vineyards this morning to try to work off some that exquisite dinner, stopping at Château Myrat to taste some amazing wine.

Cocktails in the lounge with our new-found friends and then dinner. After which, we were treated to a superb New Orleans style jazz band. They were probably the best of the evening entertainment we had, although all I must say that all the entertainment laid on was really very good.



#### Day 7 – Bordeaux

After a morning cruise back down the Garonne we arrived in **Bordeaux**. What a stunning city this is to arrive at on a river ship, it has such an elegant looking riverside. The active excursion today took us on a circular cycle tour of historic Bordeaux, through the Royal Gate, the Palais Rohan and the public gardens before going back to the ship. We were hugely tempted by the 'Culinaire' experience that included shopping in the market with the chef before a cooking lesson back on board but, ultimately, we wanted to maximise our sightseeing in Bordeaux.

That night was our farewell dinner, featuring some of Bordeaux's best regional dishes and paired wines and, like all of the food for the entire trip, it was absolutely gorgeous. The next morning, we disembarked and were whisked off to the airport, the end of our first river cruise and what a luxurious, gastronomic adventure it was.



It has been an all round wonderful, amazing, incredible cruise, we have been pampered and completely looked after every step of the way. I would thoroughly recommend Scenic, they think of everything. Butler service, amazing food, included tours, comfortable buses, clean and comfortable rooms, only the best wines, fresh wet washers to clean your hands when arriving back on board, maps, port talks, culinaire classes, cheese appreciation and wine appreciation, super polite, friendly, hilarious, professional staff. I could go on and on, it has been the most perfect holiday and we thoroughly enjoyed every hour of it.

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