

MISSISSIPPI RIVER CRUISE

Cruise on American Queen from Memphis to New Orleans

March 26, 2024 – 17 Days

50th
ANNIVERSARY

WELLS GRAY TOURS
a world to experience



American Queen



New Orleans

This is a wonderful combination tour and cruise. Starting in Nashville, we experience the famous attractions of Music City, USA – Grand Ole Opry, Country Music Hall of Fame, Wildhorse Saloon, Johnny Cash Museum, and RCA Studio B. Then we drive to Memphis, the Birthplace of Rock 'n' Roll and stay 3 nights at the Guest House at Graceland. A whole day is devoted to the Elvis Experience, but we also enjoy Beale Street, Rock 'n' Soul Museum, and Sun Studio. The *American Queen* is waiting and, during the next 7 days, we cruise down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. There are stops every day with memorable historical tours in Vicksburg, Natchez, St. Francisville, Baton Rouge, and Nottoway. The cultural riches, sensual indulgences, and unparalleled service that define New Orleans still flourish – the French Quarter, School of Cooking, Mardi Gras World, Oak Alley Plantation, and a swamp tour.



INTERNATIONAL
TOUR



GROUP SIZE



ACTIVITY LEVEL

► 38 Meals Included:

16 breakfasts, 10 lunches, 12 dinners

► Fares per person:

\$13,645 twin; \$20,650 single – Category C Outside

\$14,095 twin; \$21,545 single – Category B Outside

\$14,395 twin; \$22,145 single – Category A Outside

Other cruise categories are also available. No GST.

► Early Booking Bonus:

\$300 discount on first 12 seats; \$150 on next 8

► Experience Points: Earn 200 Experience Points

► Departure from: Victoria



Providing Quality Packaged Travel Since 1972

ITINERARY

Day 1: Tuesday, March 26

Transportation is provided to Seattle for an overnight stay at the Embassy Suites near the airport. Meet your fellow travellers during a reception with cocktails, beer, and wine.

Accommodation: Embassy Suites Sea-Tac

Day 2: Wednesday, March 27

We fly on Alaska Airlines to Nashville. **Welcome to "Country Music, USA."** We stay three nights at the Drury Plaza Hotel in the downtown area. Drury is a chain of 150 hotels, still family-owned after three generations of Drurys. It is known for its daily "Kickback" with drinks and a generous array of snacks. A "Welcome to Nashville" get-acquainted dinner is included.

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodation: Drury Plaza Hotel

Day 3: Thursday, March 28

This morning, a local guide shows us around Nashville featuring Music Row, Ryman Auditorium, the Parthenon replica, and Printers Alley, and past the homes of several stars. A barbecue lunch is included at the iconic Wildhorse Saloon. Afterwards, we take a tour of **RCA Studio B** where Elvis recorded more than 200 songs. It became famous in the 1960s for the production style and technique known as the Nashville Sound which revived the popularity of country music. Next, we visit the extraordinary **Country Music Hall of Fame** housed in a striking limestone and glass building that resembles a curved piano keyboard. Transfers are provided this evening to Broadway Street so you can experience music in the Honky Tonks.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodation: Drury Plaza Hotel

Day 4: Friday, March 29

The morning is leisure time. This afternoon, we attend a candy-making class at the **GooGoo Cluster**, a famous Nashville candy product created locally in 1912. The **Johnny Cash Museum** is next, then dinner is served at Paula Deen's Southern Restaurant. Tonight is the renowned show, **Grand Ole Opry**. Running since 1925, the Opry features about 20 performers from its exclusive membership of about 70 stars. However, we

cannot tell you who will perform as the stars are announced just a few days prior.

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodation: Drury Plaza Hotel

Day 5: Saturday, March 30

Leaving Nashville, we head west across Tennessee to **Memphis**. After lunch, we meet a local guide for a tour around Memphis, the "Birthplace of Rock 'n' Roll." Highlights include Overton Park where Elvis Presley did his first paid performance in 1954. We pass Galloway House, the Methodist church where Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two put on their first performance, and the Lorraine Motel where Martin Luther King was shot. We stay two nights at the Guest House at Graceland, one of Memphis' top-rated hotels. Tonight, we stroll along famous **Beale Street** with dinner and entertainment at Blues City Café or King's Palace Café.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: Guest House at Graceland

Day 6: Sunday, March 31

Memphis is **Elvis Presley**, the King of Rock 'n' Roll. The Guest House is adjacent to **Graceland**, consisting of the mansion, museums, and galleries, and we spend the morning immersing ourselves in the Elvis Experience – the mansion, the Elvis the Entertainer Career Museum, the Automobile Museum, and his airplanes. In the afternoon, we visit the **Rock 'n' Soul Museum** which tells the story of musical pioneers who, for the love of music, overcame racial and socio-economic barriers to create the music that shook the world. Dinner is at Marlowe's Restaurant, famous for 45 years for its ribs and Elvis memorabilia.

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodation: Guest House at Graceland

Day 7: Monday, April 1

We tour **Sun Studio**, the recording studio opened by rock 'n' roll pioneer Sam Phillips in 1950. Country music and rockabilly artists including Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, Charlie Feathers, Ray Harris, Warren Smith, Charlie Rich, and Jerry Lee Lewis recorded their music here through the late 1950s. We board the **American Queen** after lunch and settle into our

staterooms. For the rest of the afternoon, explore the ship, meet the Riverlorian expert, and attend the safety drill at 5 pm. Soon after, the *American Queen* pulls away from the Memphis dock and our journey down the **Mississippi River** begins. After our first elegant dinner in the J.M. White Dining Room, you may want to attend Showtime with staff introductions in the Grand Saloon or musical entertainment in the lounges.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: *American Queen*



Day 8: Tuesday, April 2

We dock at Terrene Landing and a shore excursion goes to nearby **Cleveland**. The town is often called the "Birthplace of the Blues" and brims with musical history. The GRAMMY Museum is an innovative museum that spans all genres of music and showcases many exhibits that explore the best music from genres including Rock, Hip-Hop, Classical, Latin, R&B, and Jazz.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: *American Queen*

Day 9: Wednesday, April 3

The *American Queen* arrives in **Vicksburg** which was founded in 1811 and grew as a vital river port city. Described as the "Key to the South" by Abraham Lincoln, Vicksburg carries a history unlike any other Civil War city. In 1863, a siege lasting 47 days was intended to starve the city into submission since its location high atop the bluff made it almost impenetrable. The surrender of Vicksburg, together with the defeat of General Robert E. Lee at Gettysburg, marked the turning point of the Civil War and thus the Union Army

gained control of the entire Mississippi River. The Hop-On Hop-Off bus lets you visit the Church of the Holy Trinity, the 1830 Anchuca Mansion, Old Court House Museum, Yesterday's Children Antique Doll & Toy Museum, Biedenharn Coca-Cola Museum, Lower Mississippi River Museum, and Old Depot Museum.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: *American Queen*

Day 10: Thursday, April 4

We dock at the extraordinary heritage town of **Natchez**. Two hundred years ago, Natchez became a major river port and cotton was shipped downstream to New Orleans and overseas. Wealthy plantation owners and boat operators built incredible mansions which have been restored to their splendour and recall this era of fortunes and high society, supported by slaves. Cotton made Natchez wealthy and in 1860 it was considered the richest city in the USA. The Hop-On Hop-Off bus gives you access to several attractions such as the Visitor Centre, Afro-American Culture Museum, and Charbonneau Distillery. Several mansions can be visited — Magnolia Hall, built in 1858 in Greek revival style; Stanton Hall, built by cotton merchant Frederick Stanton in 1857; the house of William Johnson who was a slave, gained his freedom at age 11, and became the Natchez barber; and Rosalie Mansion, built by a cotton planter in 1823.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: *American Queen*

Day 11: Friday, April 5

Established in 1809, **St. Francisville** is the oldest town in the Louisiana Parishes. Beside the river was a settlement called Bayou Sara in the 1790s. When it was destroyed by flooding and fires, many of the structures and artifacts were hauled up the bluff into St. Francisville where they are still standing. The town is referred to as "two miles long and two yards wide," and there is lots to see. Spanish moss trees grow throughout the town, lending a beautiful southern comfort to the atmosphere. A Hop-On Hop-Off bus service is provided by the ship, so you can take a tour around town and visit attractions such as the Grace Episcopal Church, built in 1860, and West Feliciana Historical Museum. Old Market Hall

dates to 1819 and hosts many local artists and craftsmen. You can also stroll down Royal Street and discover many interesting boutiques.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: *American Queen*

Day 12: Saturday, April 6

We dock in **Baton Rouge** for the day. It dates to 1699 when French visitors called the spot "red stick" (baton rouge) because of a boundary marker pole, stained with animal blood, on the river bluff. The city is most noted for its Art Deco skyscraper which is the Louisiana State Capitol. Tours from the ship go to the retired destroyer *USS Kidd* and the Capitol Museum.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: *American Queen*

Day 13: Sunday, April 7

We dock at the town of White Castle, then drive to the impressive mansion of **Nottoway**. The antebellum home flaunts three floors, 64 bedrooms, and displays an incredible 22 white square columns which contribute to its nickname, the "White Castle of Louisiana." The White Ballroom is painted entirely in white and displays elaborate gold décor throughout. The mansion is set amidst a natural backdrop of vibrant gardens and 200-year old oak trees.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: *American Queen*

Day 14: Monday, April 8

The *American Queen* arrives in **New Orleans** and we disembark. Our coach takes us to **Oak Alley Plantation**, the Grand Dame of the River Road. A 400-metre-long canopy of giant live oak trees, believed to be 300 years old, forms an impressive avenue leading to the classic Greek-revival style antebellum house. Later, we take a pontoon boat trip through a **cypress swamp**. Floating among trees draped with Spanish Moss, we watch for alligators, turtles, egrets, and many other native bird and animal species. We stay two nights at Wyndham Hotel, located in the **French Quarter** on Royal Street and a block off Canal Street. This evening, we walk six blocks through the French Quarter to **Maison Bourbon Dixieland Club** for a drink and jazz music.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodation: Wyndham Hotel



Day 15: Tuesday, April 9

This morning, a local guide takes us on a walking tour of the **French Quarter** where we hear the fascinating 300-year history of characters who built this city. Some highlights are the Spanish Quarter, St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square (where the original Louisiana Purchase is housed), Louis Armstrong Park, and **Bourbon Street**. After this walk, everyone gets a voucher to enjoy, at your leisure, a New Orleans tradition of coffee and beignets at Café Du Monde. There is free time for lunch at the Historic French Market. Then we board the coach for a driving tour of the city: Audubon Park; **St. Louis Cemetery**, an above-ground cemetery known for its voodoo history; elegant **St. Charles Avenue**, lined with gracious mansions and trees; Tulane and Loyola Universities; Flooded House Museum which shows the devastating effect of Hurricane Katrina; and the central business district beside the Mississippi River. Tonight, we go to **New Orleans School of Cooking** for a demonstration of the taste of Louisiana, Cajun and Creole, and recipes are provided. Our host entertains us with history, tall tales, and trivia.

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodation: Wyndham Hotel

Day 16: Wednesday, April 10

The morning is free time to explore more of New Orleans on your own. In the afternoon, we visit **Mardi Gras World**, the famous float-making studio where 90% of the floats used in New Orleans' Mardi Gras parades are built. We tour the many carnival dens and observe artists and sculptors as they create the world's largest fleet of floats.

Afterwards, we fly on Alaska Airlines to Seattle.

Meals included: Breakfast

Accommodation: Embassy Suites Sea-Tac

Day 17: Thursday, April 11

Transportation is arranged from Seattle to your pickup point in the Victoria area.

Meals included: Breakfast

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Coach Transportation to Seattle airport and return
- Flight from Seattle to Nashville and return to Seattle from New Orleans
- Current air taxes and security fees
- 9 nights of accommodation and hotel taxes
- 7 nights accommodation and all shore excursions aboard the *American Queen*
- Airline luggage fees for 1 suitcase per person
- Locally-guided tour of Nashville
- Lunch at Wildhorse Saloon
- RCA Studio B
- Country Music Hall of Fame
- Transfers to Broadway Street
- GooGoo Cluster candy-making class
- Johnny Cash Museum
- Dinner at Paula Deen's Southern Restaurant
- Performance at Grand Ole Opry
- Locally-guided tour around Memphis
- Graceland Tour
- Rock 'n' Soul Museum
- Sun Studio
- Oak Alley Plantation
- Swamp boat tour
- Locally-guided walking tour of the French Quarter
- Locally-guided driving tour of New Orleans
- New Orleans School of Cooking class
- Mardi Gras World
- Gratuities for local guides and drivers in Nashville, Memphis, for entire cruise week, and in New Orleans.
- Knowledgeable tour director
- Luggage handling at hotels
- **38 meals:** 16 breakfasts, 10 lunches, 12 dinners



This tour is limited to 25 participants, a more intimate travel experience.



Activity Level 2: Moderate activity including walking tours of the French Quarter and walking to attractions on uneven pavement up to 1 km. Touring the historic sites usually requires some stairs and standing. There are stairs and an elevator aboard the *American Queen*. There can be longer walks in airports. There are many stops during this tour and you must be able to get on and off the coach by yourself without delaying your fellow travellers. The coaches cannot carry a scooter or motorized wheelchair. **Everybody** participating in this tour is expected to be capable of handling Activity Level 2. The tour director and driver have many responsibilities, so please do not expect them, or your fellow travellers, to provide ongoing assistance. If you are not capable of keeping up with the group or require frequent assistance, the tour director may stop you from participating in some activities or some days of the tour. In extreme situations, you may be required to leave the tour and travel home at your own expense; travel insurance will probably not cover you.

AMERICAN QUEEN

American Queen is said to be the largest river steamboat ever built. The ship was launched in 1995 at a cost of \$65 million, and was christened by Lynne and Paul Harvey (of the radio show *The Rest of the Story*). She is a six-deck recreation of a classic Mississippi riverboat, built by McDermott Shipyard for the Delta Queen Steamboat Company. Although the stern paddlewheel is indeed powered by a steam plant, her secondary propulsion, in case of an emergency and for maneuverability around tight areas, comes from a set of diesel-electric propellers on either side of the sternwheel. *American Queen* has 222 staterooms for a capacity of 436 guests and a crew of 160. She is 127 metres long and 27 metres wide.

There are two restaurants on *American Queen*. The opulent J.M. White Dining Room is the centrepiece, serving breakfasts, lunches and dinners that are fittingly grand. Evening dining has a country club casual dress code. The informal Front Porch Café offers a wide variety of classic American favourites and can satisfy any craving. Should you be feeling peckish in the wee hours, there is 24-hour room service. Other facilities include gift shop, self-service laundry, chart room and library, spa, gym, and swimming pool.

The palatial Grand Saloon is two decks tall and resembles the small town opera houses of the 19th century with details modelled after Ford's Theater. Rousing musical revues and high-energy cabaret from a talented and energetic cast take centre stage each evening. College on the Mississippi performances bring authentic regional music to life with rich historical context. After the show, dance and swing to stellar performances of jazz, blues, ragtime, bluegrass, country, and rock and roll in the Engine Room Bar, or join in a lively piano sing-a-long in the Main Deck Lounge.

As history plays such a large part of your cruise experience, the Riverlorian imparts the history and lore of the Mississippi River. There is also a diverse lineup of guest historians who take to the stage and transport you to another era. These noted speakers offer astounding insights on the culture and heritage of America's Heartland and the Deep South. Relive a tale from Mark Twain for an enchanted evening and you will retire to your room convinced that you've just had a conversation with history.

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

The Mississippi River rises in Lake Itasca in Minnesota and flows 3,734 km to the Gulf of Mexico. Along the way, it gathers major tributaries such as the Missouri River and Ohio River. The Mississippi's watershed (including tributaries) drains all or parts of 31 U.S. states and two Canadian provinces between the Rocky and Appalachian Mountains, an area of 3 million sq km. The Mississippi ranks as the 4th longest and 15th largest river in the world by discharge. The word Mississippi itself comes from Messipi, the French rendering of the Ojibwe or Algonquin name for the river, Misi-ziibi, meaning Great River. Ships can navigate the Mississippi as far as Minneapolis, thanks to 29 locks. The river has two nicknames — "Old Man River" and "Father of Waters".

TOUR & CRUISE NOTES

All shore excursions included. River cruises are a very different experience to ocean cruises because the shore excursions are included. At each port along the river, a Hop-On Hop-Off bus operates on a schedule with departures from the ship about every 15-20 minutes. Attractions along the route are all included. Premium excursions for an extra fee are offered at most ports as an alternative and you can reserve on board.

TOUR NOTES CONTINUED

Staterooms. We have staterooms in 5 different categories. All have verandahs (public deck or private), tub/shower combo, and flat-screen TV.

- Category C — 140-160 sq ft; French doors open to an outside walk-around deck; located on Cabin, Texas, and Observation decks; exterior access.
- Category B — 190-205 sq ft; French doors open to an outside walk-around deck; located on Observation deck; interior corridor access.
- Category A — 190 sq ft with 40 sq ft private verandah; located on Texas deck; interior corridor access.
- Junior Suite — 145 to 230 sq ft; sitting area; French doors open to an outside walk-around deck; located on Promenade deck; exterior or interior corridor access.
- Deluxe Suite — 260 sq ft; sitting area with desk; French doors open to an outside walk-around deck; located on Promenade deck; exterior or interior corridor access; Commodore services.

Dining. There are no reservations taken for the ship's Dining Room or Café. Dinner is usually served from 5:30 to 8 pm. Come in when you are ready. Most tables seat 8 and you can sit with different people each time.

Please book early. *American Queen* has confirmed a block of cabins which are normally held until 90 days before sailing. However, any unsold cabins can be taken away from us at any time if the ship fills or if there is great demand for a category. The ship carries only 436 passengers.

TOUR POLICIES

Payments: A deposit of \$1000 per person is requested at the time of booking and the balance is due November 30, 2023. By paying the deposit, you agree to the Terms & Conditions, Activity Level and Cancellation Policy outlined. Payments can be made by online banking, cheque, Visa or Mastercard (\$5,000 limit per person per booking on credit cards).

Discounts: Early bookers receive \$300 discount on first 12 seats and \$150 on next 8 seats for booking early with deposit. The discount is not offered after November 30, 2023.

Cancellation Policy: Up to October 30, 2023, your tour payments will be refunded less an administrative charge of \$400 per person. From October 31 to November 30, the cancellation charge is \$600 per person. From December 1 to December 21, the cancellation charge is 25% of the tour fare. From December 22, 2023 to January 30, 2024 the cancellation charge is 50% of the tour fare. After January 30, there is no refund.

Itinerary and Fare Changes: As the world emerges from the pandemic, many of our suppliers such as hotels, restaurants, attractions, and transportation providers are struggling with shortage of staff, inflated costs, and supply line challenges. Sometimes we are notified about changes to the itinerary prior to departure and sometimes during the tour. We do our best to substitute a similar service if something cancels, but occasionally the only alternative is to provide a refund for the missed activity. Please note that if we are forced to cancel a component of an extensive tour due to an issue beyond our control, the current penalties still apply if you choose to cancel the entire tour. Fuel surcharges and changes to currency exchange rates, taxes or other tour costs can occur at any time, therefore Wells Gray Tours reserves the right to increase fares due to such changes up to departure.

Flight seating: We are unable to take requests for window or aisle seating on the planes. The airline will not accept them, as group seating is assigned as a block. If this is important to you, we suggest you take the "No Flight" option with a fare reduction of \$630 and book your own flight which allows seat selection.

Flight upgrades: Please enquire about current prices for upgrades on the flights. Premium economy and business class may be available.

Food Allergies: You must notify us no later than at final payment if you have a food allergy. Restaurants may not be able to satisfy all food allergies. As restaurants recover from two years of pandemic restrictions, many facing severe labour shortages, we have been informed that food allergies should be honoured, but it is impossible to handle everybody's requests for food preferences. (An allergy causes medical distress, a preference does not.) For some allergies, please consider bringing your own snacks or food items so you are not dependent on what restaurants are able to serve.

TOUR POLICIES CONTINUED

Travel Insurance: A Comprehensive Insurance policy is available through Wells Gray Tours and coverage is provided by Travel Guard. Policies purchased at deposit include a waiver of the pre-existing condition clause, otherwise policies can be purchased no later than at final payment. Please contact us for details.

Home Pickup: Home pickups may be offered in Greater Victoria, depending on the number of people booked and coach size. Decision is made about 2 weeks before departure and you will be contacted about your pickup point and time.

Photo Credits: American Queen Voyages (*American Queen*), Adobe Stock (*French Quarter, Oak Alley*).

Experience Points: This tour earns 200 e-points. Each time you travel on a Wells Gray tour, you earn Experience Points, or e-points. One e-point equals \$1. Redeem your points on select tours or accumulate enough points to earn a free tour! Redemptions offered until November 30, 2023.

Consumer Protection BC Licences: Kamloops 178, Vernon 655, Kelowna 588, Penticton 924, Victoria 65842

VICTORIA

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