A better way to explore

VIKING RIVER CRUISES PROVIDES VIEWS OF HISTORIC LANDMARKS FROM DELUXE RIVER CRUISE SHIPS, USES SABRE FOR AIR RESERVATIONS

Taking a cruise doesn’t always mean going out to sea.

In fact, you’ll find the fastest-growing segment of the travel industry is cruising the great rivers of the world.

The world leader in river cruising, Viking River Cruises, with U.S. offices in the Los Angeles area, expects to host nearly 100,000 passengers this year on river cruises in Europe, China, Southeast Asia, Russia, Ukraine and Egypt.

“The number of travelers on river cruises worldwide is growing by about 16 percent annually, compared to five percent growth for ocean cruises,” said Martha Troncoza, Viking vice president of air operations.

Business is so good that Viking will christen six new Longships this year to cruise Europe—its top destination. Originally, Viking announced four new Viking Longships for 2012, but the response was so overwhelming it added two more. And, recently the company announced that it has commissioned six more new Viking Longships for the 2013 season.

For the past five years, Viking has used Sabre Travel Network for airline reservations. Troncoza recommended Sabre when she came to Viking five years ago, having used Sabre solutions in her previous job at an ocean cruise company.

“We knew in 2007 that strong growth would continue, and we needed an air booking solution that could grow with us,” Troncoza said. “Most of our staff knew Sabre and were comfortable with the system already. It was a smooth transition.”

SABRE QUALITY ASSURANCE: A TURNING POINT

Most passengers of Viking River Cruises book airline reservations through Viking, so volume is high and automatic quality checks are critical.

Troncoza says engaging Sabre for ticketing and quality control was “a turning point” for Viking in efficiency and customer service. Viking uses Sabre automation to verify customer itineraries and prices, and to process invoices.

Before Sabre, agents took seven minutes to book each customer reservation - and with a greater margin for error. That’s now done much more quickly and accurately.

While Viking air passengers have tripled in recent years, the number of Viking agents has only doubled. And agents have even more time for attentive customer service due to the booking and quality efficiencies.

GREAT CITIES, SITES BECKON

Cruise companies are answering a growing public demand, fueled in part by Baby Boomers reaching retirement age.

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Viking River Cruises
appeals to them for many reasons, including more intimate settings and different ways to see historic places.”

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*Martha Troncoza*
*Viking River Cruises*

Boomers might also be lured to river cruises for the unique exposure they give travelers to historic and beautiful cities, landscapes and culture. The vessels dock in the heart of magnificent riverside cities such as Paris, Vienna, Budapest and St. Petersburg.

Travelers unpack once and can travel to as many as eight countries, all while maximizing their sightseeing with an included guided tour in every port, plus time at leisure to explore. And, while on the water, ships glide past castles, farms, small villages and green hillsides. Distant mountains offer spectacular views. It’s common for people to wave from river banks to guests on the passing river ships.

“It’s continuous scenery,” Troncoza said.

River cruise passengers spend a lot more time on land than do ocean passengers. The river boats, of course, are smaller, built for 120 to 260 passengers. They have a more casual environment than huge ocean cruise ships, and offer all-inclusive onboard services, including meals and complimentary wine, beer and soft drinks with onboard dinner and lunch service. Ground tours and excursions are also part of the price.

“We feel like we provide tremendous value and a wonderfully immersive travel experience at the same time,” Troncoza said.

River cruising costs are comparable to ocean cruises. Depending on where you go and for how long, fares start at $1,256 per person for 2013 sailings.

Recently, awareness for Viking has grown nicely due to its sponsorship of PBS’ Masterpiece Classic series and its hit show “Downton Abbey.” The series is a viewing favorite of Viking guests and prospective customers.

**AWARD-WINNING RIVER TRAVEL EMERGES, GROWS**

Founded 15 years ago, Viking began offering river cruises in Russia, which remain popular today. While Europe is the number one region, other key destinations for Viking include China, Ukraine and Egypt along the Nile. Viking’s popular Mekong River cruise also includes nights in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

According to industry reports, Viking has approximately 30 percent of the market share in the river cruise business.

Viking has earned glowing recognition in the travel industry. *Conde Nast Traveler* placed Viking on its annual Gold List, and Viking has also received Readers’ Choice and Best Small Ships awards. Viking was also named a World’s Best by *Travel + Leisure* magazine, read by the world’s most experienced and sophisticated travelers.

Viking is a privately-held company, with its U.S. headquarters in Woodland Hills, California. It also has offices in Australia and the UK.

**STAYING AHEAD**

1. **VIKING RIVER CRUISES RIVES THE CREST OF THE FASTEST-GROWING SEGMENT OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY.**

2. **VIKING WILL ADD SIX NEW VESSELS—THE VIKING LONGSHIPS—THIS YEAR AND SIX MORE IN 2013 TO MEET RISING PASSENGER DEMAND.**

3. **UNPACK JUST ONCE, BUT EXPLORE MANY GREAT CITIES AND SEE WONDERFUL SIGHTS.**

4. **SABRE HANDLES TICKETING AND QUALITY CONTROL – INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE QUALITY.**

5. **AIR BOOKING AGENTS KNOW AND LOVE THE EFFICIENCY SABRE PROVIDES.**