



rolling down the **MISSISSIPPI**

The American Queen Cruise Line's Memphis to New Orleans route gives travelers insight into the beautiful world of the South.

story and photos by karen pulfer focht

ON THE RIVER

There is just something about watching the river that calms the soul—taking in life on the river, life in the river, and life by the river. The American Queen Cruise Line, based in Memphis, has given people an opportunity to do just that.

Along with the Mississippi River flows the heart of America. It's survived great Civil War battles, many storms, and earthquakes. It has been a roadway for canoes, booming river commerce, and paddle wheelers. It's been home to many including Indian chiefs, Mark Twain, Tom Lee, a pyramid, catfish, dinosaurs, and ancient mud. It's the great geographic barrier that split the country but united the people.

Here in the South there were river-people brave enough to settle along its ever-changing waters. Mississippi is from a Native American name meaning "Great River." High upon river bluffs and along the river bottoms the people have changed, communities have changed, the terrain has changed, but the river has kept rolling along.

Several times a year, the American Queen travels from Beale Street to Bourbon Street with a load of passengers from all over the world interested in learning about life on the lower Mississippi.

Many of the guests are celebrating anniversaries or birthdays and checking a trip on the Mississippi off of their to-do lists. Some are traveling with alumni, friends, or spouses; some are children escorting their elderly parents, and some travel alone.

Each day the tables, rocking chairs, and swings on the front deck fill as people sit with their new friends, sharing a cup of coffee, a meal, or a cold beverage.

For the next several days, they will get a glimpse into life on the river. Along the way, history buffs relish the tales of love and war and pride and promise. They will hear from the people of the Deep South who live on the bluffs and bayous of the Mississippi. They'll hear river lore, including colorful stories about river men, in what were once rowdy river towns with definite sordid histories.

Guests relax as the boat meanders downstream, reading good books or simply setting their imaginations free as they watch the river. The boat pulls into historic ports in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana, like Greenville, Natchez, Notoway, and St. Francisville. Travelers have an opportunity for a drink in a historic saloon in a town that was once wild with gambling, brawling, and brothels.

Days are spent visiting plantations, learning about the trials of flooding and farming. There are also tales of Southern kings who families settled near the river—the kings of rock 'n' roll, the blues, soul, and cotton.

Those who engage the locals may meet manly men who show pictures of the 1,000-pound wild boar they hunted or watch a fisherman haul in giant catfish. Tourists can hear personal conversion stories of men who are doing life in prison as they visit Angola, the penitentiary in Louisiana, or they might



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The American Queen offers Memphis to New Orleans voyages many times a year. A popular stop on the route includes Natchez. Club Ebony in Indianola was built following World War II, and the late BB King purchased the club in 2008. Greenville is another port that provides insight into the agricultural importance of the Mississippi Delta. The formal dining room features delicious dining while onboard. Many cruisers make new friends while traveling the Mighty Mississippi. Vicksburg's historic sights as well as its picturesque waterfront make it a fun stop for cruisers.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The cruises begin or end in New Orleans where guests can enjoy popular tourist treats like riding a street car down Canal. Oak Alley in Vacherie, Louisiana, is known as the "Grande Dame of the Great River Road."

take advantage of an opportunity to come face to face with an alligator as they explore a swamp.

The more sedentary traveler finds contentment observing the banks of the river, many still unspoiled, as they sip a cold drink outside their room. Passengers from as far away as Australia, New Zealand, and England describe their river observations and experiences as "fascinating" and "mind-boggling." They often express a new awe and wonder as they learn a new respect for the "Big Muddy" and the people who claim the shores of the river as home.

Southern hospitality is around every bend in the river, and in every corner of the boat where much of the mostly American crew is from the South, including Memphis and New Orleans. The crew isn't just polite-friendly; they are genuinely outgoing and true hospitality specialists. After traveling from the other side of the world to see the Mississippi River, David Lindsay, 80, from Tasmania, Australia, says he was "enjoying the people the most" on his voyage.

As the boat moves south, it stops so guests can visit historic homes draped in Spanish moss, quaint boutiques in small downtowns, and whatever else is within reach of the "hop-on hop-off" bus that meets the boat in every port.

There are many cruises to choose from with a variety of themes offered. The most popular cruise is from Memphis to New Orleans, but from Memphis, cruises also go north.

This particular cruise ends in New Orleans, where the tourists disembark, and the staff and crew get the boat ready to head back north later that day. M

TRAVELING TIPS

*Book excursions early;
many sell out fast.*

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*Computers are available on board
for staying connected.*

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Leave time to relax and watch the river.

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*There is a dress code for the
formal dining room.*

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*The average age of cruisers
is mid-sixties.*

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*Consider booking with a group
to create lasting memories with friends.*

For more information:
americanqueensteamboatcompany.com



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Spend the afternoon on a comfortable porch swing as you watch the river roll by. The American Queen is the only authentic paddle wheel steamboat in the United States. Sunsets along the Mississippi River are a breathtaking sight. Lewis Hawkins helps travelers see the river through the eyes of river man Mark Twain; he presents the monologue "The Life and Times of Mark Twain" on the boat for guests.

