

Day 1 — Basel, Switzerland

Embark your ship and settle into your stateroom. Located where Switzerland, Germany and France meet, Basel reflects a fascinating blend of traditions. The city straddles the Rhine at the river's farthest navigable point, and an alluring cluster of old-town buildings huddles along the riverbank. Around Market Square, guild houses recall Gothic, Renaissance and baroque splendor; the red-sandstone Rathaus, or Town Hall, is the centerpiece. More than 40 museums of art and culture lend modern polish to its history-rich streets. And there is no more refined way to sample it all than over cheese fondue or croissants.

* Ground transfers are included with Viking Air purchase.

Day 2 — Breisach, Germany

Breisach is a gateway to the fabled Black Forest region, built on a basalt rock outcropping in the Rhine plain. It is located in one of the warmest parts of Germany, across the river from French Alsace, famous for its wine growing. But Breisach, too, can boast about its wine: it is home to Europe's largest cellars, with a storage capacity of more than 160 million liters. The most prominent landmark of Breisach is the Romanesque-Gothic St. Stephen's Cathedral, built between the 12th and 13th centuries. Its two towers are visible from throughout the city and from the Rhine.

Day 3 — Strasbourg, France

The largest port on the Upper Rhine, Strasbourg is the cultural center of France's Alsace region. Thanks to its location at the border of France and Germany, it boasts a convivial mix of cultural influences. The well-preserved old town is enclosed on all sides by the little Ill River, with sites so compact that it is easy to explore the "island" on foot. And there is plenty to explore: cobblestone streets lined with wooden houses and intersected by picturesque canals. Indulging in Alsatian café culture is central to any visit here; enjoy coffee and cake amid lovely half-timbered houses.

Day 4 — Speyer, Germany

The quiet German town of Speyer lies on the west bank of the Rhine. The city features a Romanesque imperial cathedral, burial place of eight emperors including some of the most famous Holy Roman Emperors. Speyer was once a major Celtic center that traded hands several times between the Romans and the Huns. The term Protestant originated here at the Diet of Speyer in 1529, when 14 free cities of Germany and six Lutheran princes protested the Edict of Worms that had banned the writings of Martin Luther and labeled him a heretic and enemy of the state.

Day 5 — Scenic Sailing: Middle Rhine

The Rhine River flows through one of Germany's most scenic regions. As you sail its most picturesque stretch, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Middle Rhine, you will pass vineyard-blanketed hills whose steep slopes require vintners to pick grapes by hand, keeping a centuries-old tradition alive. Splendid castles line the banks, all of which have stories to share, and the Lorelei Rock presides at a dramatic curve in the river. This infamous river maiden mesmerized sailors with her song and lured them to their demise at her feet.

Day 6 — Cologne, Germany

Cologne reveals its Roman heritage in its city layout and the ancient ruins that lie scattered through the town. Cologne's modern plazas and Hohe Strasse host welcoming shops, enticing restaurants and cologne boutiques. Of note is the city's 13th-century cathedral, a stunning example of Gothic artistry and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Having survived Allied bombs during World War II, the cathedral's imposing twin spires are visible for miles and its stained glass windows fill the interior with brilliant colored light. Its steps lead to a platform with astounding views.
