A PLANNING GUIDE FROM BYRD ADVENTURES

Train, River or Ocean?

How to choose your next trip

A side-by-side look at scenic train travel, river cruising and ocean cruising: how each one feels, what's included, when to book, and a quick quiz to find your fit.

Byrd Adventures
rails, rivers, & seas

START HERE

The destination is the easy part

You know you want a good trip. Maybe you've even picked the region. The part that trips people up is the style: a scenic train, a river ship or an ocean ship. They can look alike in a brochure, and they feel completely different once you're on board.

I'm Donnetta Byrd, a travel advisor and owner of Byrd Adventures. Train travel, river cruising and ocean cruising are my focus, so I spend my days comparing them for real people with real budgets. I've ridden Rocky Mountaineer and Canyon Spirit twice each, and I've watched plenty of travelers pick the wrong style for the right destination.

This guide puts the three side by side so you can see which one fits the way you like to travel.

Donnetta Byrd

How to use this guide

1. Skim the comparison on page 3 for the big picture.
2. Take the quick quiz on page 9.
3. Read the pages for the style that fits, then the money page before you compare prices.

THE THREE AT A GLANCE

Three ways to travel, side by side

	Scenic train	River cruise	Ocean cruise
PACE	Days on the train, evenings in town	A new town most days, docked near the center	Sea days mixed with port days
UNPACKING	Most trips change hotels every night or two	Once	Once
SHIP OR TRAIN SIZE	Shared coaches, small groups on most tours	Roughly 100 to 200 guests	A few hundred to several thousand guests
WHAT YOU SEE	The land between places: mountains, canyons, coastlines	Villages, vineyards and cities from the water	Open sea, then a new port of call
USUALLY INCLUDED	Onboard meals and drinks; hotels and transfers on a package	Meals, wine and beer at lunch and dinner, a tour in every port	Stateroom, main dining, entertainment
USUALLY EXTRA	Hotels on a rail only fare, dinners in town	Gratuities, premium tours, drinks between meals	Gratuities, drinks, specialty dining, excursions, Wi-Fi
BEST FOR	Travelers who want the journey itself to be the point	Travelers who want culture without the logistics	Families, mixed ages, warm weather and variety

Inclusions vary by line and fare. These are the patterns I see most with the companies I book.

STYLE ONE

Scenic train travel

The trains I sell most, Rocky Mountaineer and Canyon Spirit, travel in daylight only. You spend the day in a glass dome coach with meals and drinks served on board, then sleep in a hotel. Your luggage goes ahead of you, so you aren't hauling bags on and off the train. Other journeys, like VIA Rail's The Canadian, travel overnight with sleeping cabins, and the UK has excellent day trains that pair well with a guided tour.

You'll love it if

- You'd rather watch the scenery than drive through it
- You like seeing how one place turns into the next
- A comfortable hotel bed every night matters to you

Think twice if

- Repacking every night or two would wear on you
- You want long, unscheduled days in one spot

What's included

On a Rocky Mountaineer package, onboard meals and drinks, hotels, transfers and luggage handling are built in. A rail only fare covers far less, which is why I build the whole trip around the train.

When to book

Popular departures and GoldLeaf seats go first. Plan nine to twelve months out, and earlier for summer and September, which is often the most expensive month of the season.

STYLE TWO

River cruising

River ships are small, usually 100 to 200 guests, and they dock right in town, often a short walk from the old center. You unpack once and wake up somewhere new most mornings. Many lines include a guided tour in every port, so each day has structure with time left over to wander on your own.

You'll love it if

- You want Europe's cities and villages without train stations and hotel changes
- History, food and wine interest you more than nightlife
- A smaller, quieter ship suits you

Think twice if

- You need a pool, big production shows or a kids club
- You want sea views (you'll be looking at riverbanks and towns)

What's included

On Viking, the fare covers onboard meals, beer, wine and soft drinks with lunch and dinner, a shore excursion in every port, Wi-Fi, and port taxes. Gratuities, premium tours and drinks between meals are extra. Other lines draw that line differently, and it matters when two prices look close.

When to book

Twelve to eighteen months ahead for the best cabins, especially for spring and fall sailings in Europe.

STYLE THREE

Ocean cruising

An ocean ship is a floating resort with restaurants, shows and a pool, sailing between ports with some days at sea. It's the easiest way to see several islands or a long coastline, and it handles a wide range of ages in one booking.

You'll love it if

- You're traveling with kids, grandkids or friends who want different things
- You like busy days ashore balanced with quiet days on board
- You want to see a lot of places with one unpack

Think twice if

- Big crowds at embarkation and in port bother you
- You care more about the destination than the ship

What's included

Your stateroom, main dining, entertainment and most onboard activities. Daily gratuities run about $18 to $21 per person on most major lines. Drinks, specialty dining, excursions and Wi-Fi are extra unless your fare bundles them. I can give you gratuities to the dollar when you book; the rest gets priced closer to sailing, so I give you a realistic range.

When to book

Alaska and holiday sailings about a year out. The Caribbean has more flexibility, but the best cabins and prices still go early.

CAN'T DECIDE?

You don't have to choose just one

Some of my favorite trips put two styles together.

Alaska by ship and by train

Cruise the Inside Passage, then head inland by train to Denali. You get glaciers from the water and the interior by land.

The Canadian Rockies, then Alaska

Ride Rocky Mountaineer into Vancouver and board an Alaska cruise a day or two later.

A river cruise with a train on either end

Add a scenic train day before or after a European river cruise, or a few days in London before you sail.

> *These take more planning. The timing between the two pieces is what makes or breaks them, and that's the part I handle.*

BEFORE YOU COMPARE PRICES

Two trips can look $2,000 apart and cost the same

Add up what each fare leaves out before you decide which one is the better value.

Gratuities	Included on some lines, a daily per person charge on others. Over ten days for two people, it adds up.
Drinks	Wine with dinner every night is a real line item on a ship where it isn't included.
Tours	An included tour in every port is worth a lot over a ten-day trip. Count it.
Hotels and transfers	Rail only and cruise only fares leave these to you. Packages usually don't.
The night before	I recommend a hotel night before every cruise, even when you can drive to the port. A missed embarkation is an expensive way to save one night.

Travel protection. Medicare doesn't cover you outside the US, and a medical evacuation can cost more than the trip. Many plans offer a pre-existing condition waiver only when you buy within a set number of days after your first deposit, so timing matters. I can arrange protection even on a trip you booked somewhere else.

QUICK QUIZ

Which one fits you?

Circle the answer that sounds most like you, then count your shapes. Rather tap than circle? Take it online at **byrdadventures.com/which-trip-fits-you**.

1 A perfect afternoon is

- ◆ A walking tour, then a glass of wine in the town square
- ■ The pool deck, a show tonight, nothing on the schedule
- ● Watching mountains go by from a window seat

2 Packing and unpacking

- ■ Once, with room for a lot of outfits
- ● Fine every couple of days if the view is worth it
- ◆ Once, please

3 Who's coming

- ◆ My spouse or a few friends
- ● My spouse or a friend
- ■ The whole family, kids or grandkids included

4 Crowds

- ■ Big doesn't bother me
- ◆ Small and quiet, please
- ● I like the shared excitement in the dome car

5 I'd rather see

- ● The land between places
- ■ As many places as possible in one trip
- ◆ The heart of each town

6 The weather I want

- ■ Warm and sunny
- ● Crisp mountain air
- ◆ Mild spring or fall days

● Mostly circles

Scenic train. Start with Rocky Mountaineer, Canyon Spirit or a UK train tour.

◆ Mostly diamonds

River cruise. Europe's rivers in spring or fall make a great first sailing.

■ Mostly squares

Ocean cruise. Alaska or the Caribbean, depending on whether you want glaciers or palm trees.

A mix

That's a combination trip, like the ones on page 7. Let's talk it through.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Now let's find the right trip

Once you know the style, the line, the dates and the cabin come next, and that's where a lot of value gets won or lost. That's the part I do. Book a consultation and we'll go through what you want, what it costs and when to book.

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