

U.S. RIVER, GREAT LAKES & COASTAL CRUISE LINE COMPARISON

Four small-ship choices - and how their routes, inclusions and personalities differ

Cruise line and position	Primary U.S. regions	Ship and atmosphere	What the fare generally includes	Excursions, connectivity and access	Best fit and advisor perspective
American Cruise Lines <i>Broadest domestic network</i>	Mississippi, Ohio and Cumberland; Columbia and Snake; Hudson; Chesapeake; Southeast and Intracoastal; Great Lakes; Puget Sound and Alaska.	U.S.-flagged small ships, modern riverboats and coastal ships. Relaxed, regionally focused and convenient for travelers who prefer domestic cruising.	Dining, snacks and a broad beverage program; enrichment and entertainment. Current fare benefits and promotions should be confirmed for the selected sailing.	Featured excursions are included, with premium options on some itineraries. Wi-Fi is generally offered. Elevators help onboard, but gangways and shoreside access vary.	Best all-around choice for route variety and a cruise that stays close to home. Strong for repeat clients who want to explore different U.S. regions.
Viking Mississippi <i>Upper-premium river product</i>	Mississippi River and selected Ohio River itineraries.	Purpose-built 386-guest ship with all-outside staterooms, Scandinavian design, calm public spaces and a distinctly adult, enrichment-led feel.	Meals, Wi-Fi, port taxes and fees; beer, wine and soft drinks with lunch and dinner; coffee, tea and water throughout the day.	One complimentary shore excursion in each port, with optional tours available. Gratuities are generally additional for U.S. guests. Review gangways and tour mobility.	Couples who already like Viking, prefer a consistent premium experience and value quiet surroundings, lectures and an uncomplicated daily rhythm.
Victory Cruise Lines <i>Highly inclusive Great Lakes specialist</i>	Great Lakes, St. Lawrence, New England and Canadian Maritimes; especially notable for all-five-lakes itineraries.	Intimate classic coastal ships with a history-and-culture emphasis, destination speakers and a convivial small-ship atmosphere.	Pre-cruise hotel, dining, standard cocktails, beer and wine, entertainment and enrichment are part of the inclusive value proposition.	A complimentary curated excursion in every port is included; premium choices may cost more. Small-ship access is destination dependent and should be reviewed case by case.	Clients wanting the Great Lakes to be the centerpiece and preferring a more inclusive upfront price with fewer onboard decisions.
Pearl Seas Cruises <i>Traditional small-ship coastal cruising</i>	Great Lakes, Georgian Bay, St. Lawrence, New England and Canadian Maritimes.	Pearl Mist carries up to 210 guests; spacious feel, private balconies, regional experts and a relaxed, traditional onboard style.	Passage, dining, snacks, cocktail parties and entertainment. Standard fare is less bundled than Victory and should be compared on total trip cost.	Shore tours, port-related fees and gratuities are generally additional. Complimentary Starlink Wi-Fi and an elevator to all stateroom decks are useful benefits.	Travelers who value private balconies, a familiar small-ship atmosphere and flexible touring in the Great Lakes, Canada and New England.

Advisor note: Inclusions, fleets and routes vary by date and itinerary. An elevator does not guarantee an accessible trip; review gangways, tendering, coach boarding, walking surfaces and port facilities before booking. Information reviewed August 2026; verify current terms when quoting.

CHRISTOPHER HENFLING

Certified Cruise Counsellor (CLIA) | NCL Masters Certified
Independent Travel Advisor | Henfling on the Horizon | Affiliate of Advanced Travel Consultants
972-795-8167 | cxhenfling4travel@gmail.com | henflingonthehorizon.com | Georgetown, Texas