

# Sailing in a new direction on the U.S. rivers

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On Sept. 28, U.S. river cruising set its paddle wheelers to full steam ahead and began to chart a new course. American Queen Steamboat Company announced that it would now be known as **American Queen Voyages**. At the same time, **American Cruise Lines** announced a complete overhaul of its paddlewheel fleet, which also includes name changes for some of its vessels. With Americans unable to cruise U.S. rivers for a solid year, the rebranding and anticipated growth for these top U.S. river cruise lines is a positive sign that American river cruising is not only back, but it's not the same product as when the pandemic halted operations in 2020.

**American Queen Voyages** expands beyond the steamboat, "As American Queen Steamboat Company has grown ... beyond our signature paddle wheelers, it is important that we build on our namesake flagship American Queen to encompass the new experiences that we offer," Michael Hicks, marketing communications director for American Queen Voyages, told me. "We are no longer a two-brand product," he added. "We are now one company, one brand: American Queen Voyages with river, lakes and ocean, and expedition experiences."

The American Queen, American Countess, American Duchess and American Empress will continue to sail on the rivers; Ocean Voyager and Ocean Navigator (previously the Victory I and Victory II) will sail the Great Lakes and oceans. Beginning in 2022, the Ocean Victory will kick off the line's inaugural expedition season, sailing extended voyages in Alaska. In 2023, the Ocean Discoverer will double the size of American Queen Voyages expedition fleet, joining the Ocean Victory in Alaska.

The new name streamlines all three products under one brand and should make it easier for agents to market American Queen Voyages to clients. A new tagline, "Discovery runs deep," indicates a commitment to the destination immersion of North and Central America. However, it's clear that no matter the update, the classic paddle wheelers are not going anywhere, even in the logo. "American Queen is the base of our brand DNA, our north star, and it resonates throughout everything we do serving guests as they yearn for something deeper."

**American Cruise Lines** is ready to modernize the rivers

The sentiment of treasuring the old but foraying into the new is also held by American Cruise Lines. The redesign, set to be complete in 2022, strives to preserve yet update its fleet of four traditional paddle wheelers in order to meet the more modern aesthetic of its newest vessel, the American Melody. The paddle wheelers also traded in their "Queen" monikers for a uniform "American" naming convention: American Splendor, American West, American Heritage and American Pride. "The new interior design will bring paddlewheel cruising to the same sophisticated standard already exhibited on American's newest modern riverboats, while retaining traditional elements true to steamboat history," according to the American Cruise Lines statement. The line, which has been in operation since 2000, began building its modern riverboats in 2018, and now includes the American Song, American Harmony, American Jazz and American Symphony.

For the past year, American Cruise Lines has also marketed its ability to explore nearby during the Covid-19 pandemic with its "Cruising Close to Home" itineraries. According to the line, its coastal ships and river vessels cruise in more than 30 states. By cruising to these domestic ports of call, in sight of land, American Cruise Lines caters to clients looking to venture from home, but not quite abroad.

What does it mean for clients?

Differentiation is key to selling a brand, especially with close competitors. The name changes for each respective line signal a move toward clarity, both for agents and for customers.

"I do believe that these changes are both positive, not only in the change of names but the revitalization of the respective ships.

"In the case of American Cruise Lines, dropping the 'Queen' and renaming the ships to be consistent with 'American' is a very good move. While I understand where the 'Queen' naming convention originated, it is a great time to rebrand them as they have done. "In the second case, I have always felt that the 'steamboat' designation was limiting and didn't add anything to the visualization of the brand, so I'm glad to see that removed." Overall, Smith said that he supported the changes for the brands, especially as they have been very popular for him recently.

**Dear Regency Travel Club the above trips and sailings have been enjoyed by our members for several years. We have two groups going in 2022. Call or text Jeannette Chabina 56-573-6665- [CHABS767@AOL.COM](mailto:CHABS767@AOL.COM)**