

Experience her story





From the cheerful tunes of the onboard calliope at departure, to the peace of returning to port at journey's end, a cruise on the Riverboat Twilight is an adventure. Aboard the vintage-1890 steamboat replica, amidst the beautiful shorelines of the upper Mississippi River, you can easily imagine days gone by.

"There's something about sitting on the deck and just watching the water go by – it's mesmerizing and relaxing," said Captain Kevin Stier. He has plenty to share about river folklore and history.

THE KEY CITY

In Dubuque, the Twilight ties up near the historic Ice Harbor, which was cut through a maze of bayous in the 19th century to give riverboats easy access to downtown. Today, a short walk will take you to the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium within the rejuvenated Port of Dubuque.

Downstream, on a rise of land jutting outward from gigantic oaks, stands the Julien Dubuque Monument. The founder of the city was a French-Canadian entrepreneur who created his legacy in lead mining. He was buried at this spot in 1810. The stately limestone grave marker towers above the site of a former Meskwaki village.

NINE-MILE ISLAND

Before the 1930s, when the lock and dam system was constructed, the river was treacherous to steamboats. Today, we have the certainty of a nine-foot navigational channel. There are four lock and dam structures in this part of the river: Lock and Dam #10 in Guttenberg; #11 in Dubuque; #12 in Bellevue; and #13 in Fulton.

"If you rode on steamboats back in the early days," said Captain Stier, "a lot of people were in steamboat wrecks. The river was so shallow back then, they'd hit snags in the river bottom. It would rip a hole in the boat and the water would come rushing in."

Near Nine-mile Island, located nine miles downstream from Lock and Dam #11,





"Just below Dubuque, we have a very famous steamboat wreck that not many people know about."

— Captain Kevin Stier

folklore AND HISTORY on the river

stands a navigation marker called the Royal Arch. "It's named after a steamboat that was on the Davenport-Galena-Dubuque trade," said Captain Stier.

"The Royal Arch sank there back in 1858. They were coming to Dubuque with a load of dry-goods and hit a snag on the river bottom that ripped a sizable hole in the old wooden boat." It is rumored that the hull is still buried at Nine-mile Island.

DEADMAN'S SLOUGH

Farther downstream, the water veers into Deadman's Slough. The Captain shared a tale that he heard from a 90-year-old passenger. "Deadman's Slough is named after the Armistice Day Blizzard of 1940 for all the people that froze to death on the river," he said.

"It started out as a really nice day, the kids were out of school for the holiday, and people decided to go duck hunting. As the day wore on, the ducks came in droves. The people who shot their quota went home. But the people that watched the spectacle didn't survive. By 9:00 a.m., the wind was blowing 30 mph and they couldn't get their boats across the river to safety."

Newspapers back in the day were filled with stories of dramatic rescue. Some marooned duck hunters lost fingers or toes to frostbite. The sudden storm dropped two feet of snow, waterfowl froze in the river, trains were halted, poultry and livestock perished. Thankfully, today we know in advance when bad weather is coming.

TETE DES MORTS CREEK

Another colorful river folktale is found at Tete des Morts Creek. It empties into the Mississippi River at the southern boundary of the original land holdings of Julien Dubuque. (The mouth of the Little Maquoketa River above present-day Dubuque marks the northern boundary.)

Translated from the French, "têtes des mort" means "heads of the dead." More than 250 years ago, the Fox (Meskwaki) were involved in a conflict with their enemies at this location. When French explorers visited, they made a gruesome discovery: many human skulls marked the battle site.

BEAUTY, PAST & PRESENT

"The majestic bluffs that overlook the river along this region, charm one with the grace and variety of their forms and the soft beauty of their adornment," wrote Mark Twain in his 1883 book, *Life on the Mississippi*.

On the elegant Riverboat Twilight, passengers can experience times past while enjoying the comfort of today. A diesel-electric engine propels the vessel and provides onboard electricity and air-conditioning.

The exterior sundecks offer outstanding views, especially when the trees show their autumn colors. "The stretch from Savanna north looks like it did when the steamboats were running," said the Captain. "It looks like Mark Twain's time."

WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Riverboat Twilight travels alongside the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, home to numerous birds, plants, fish, and wildlife. "Every year you see more and more wildlife out here, more deer, more pelicans, more eagles," said Captain Stier. "Miles of backwater are full of wildlife – about 257 known species of birds, 57 species of fish."

En route, he points out pelicans and cormorants, along with bald eagles' nests. He once saw a pair of mountain lions drinking at the shore, and sometimes can spot swimming whitetail deer. Passengers get an up-close perspective on this vital wildlife habitat. "It's right here, in everybody's backyard," he said.

THE RIVER CRUISE EXPERIENCE

Along with the folklore and history, wildlife and scenery, a cruise on the Riverboat Twilight is a leisurely way to unwind. "To me, it's such a relaxing, laidback trip," said the Captain. "People come away from it every day saying, 'This is absolutely the best trip I've been on in my life.'"

Passengers with a river tale to share are invited to visit the pilothouse at any time, except during locking. After all, the story of life on the Mississippi is still underway.

For more details about the historical attractions along the route taken by the Riverboat Twilight, and other information about the cruise itinerary, visit www.RiverboatTwilight.com ♦

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