

Boating Holidays in France

Contributed by Martyn Davis
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Ever considered a boating holiday or a canal boat holiday? then France should be at the top of your list as this country offers some of the most varied landscape in Europe.

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With the vast amount of different rivers and canals in France, and having such a varied landscape, you can be sure that you will be able to find just the right type of holiday for you and your family.

So, as you cruise along one of the rivers or canals at a leisurely pace you will get to see things that most people will never experience and each region also offers you the chance to experience their fantastic and sometimes unusual cuisine along with the incredible French wine that is as varied as the different regions.

{bot_wrgoogle}Only a boating holiday in France will enable you to fully appreciate the idyllic countryside and architecture from Roman to Renaissance periods along with the beautiful chateau that are dotted along the banks, with the added plus of the glorious weather to match, it is not like traveling along the Norfolk Broads in the United Kingdom most of the year, when you are guaranteed to get some rain or gloomy days!

There is such a wide choice available for your boating holiday and you can pick the area with the climate for you; the further down South you go, the warmer it gets, but don't forget that whilst cruising along, you need to be on the right hand side of the river or canal, just as the roads are in France!

One point, a license is required to be able to travel by boat on the French waterways, unless of course you only have something like a canoe! Basically, any boat that has a motor means that you have to have a license, although temporary permits called La Carte Plaisance are available and are issued by the boat rental company or charter firm that you book with.

A la Carte Plaisance is valid only for a set period of time for any habitable boat, which is under 15 metres in length, but there is also permit available for your children to drive the boat if they are between the ages of 14 and 16, if you feel they have a good sense of direction! but this is a great way to get all the family involved in the fun, but you must ask for a La Carte Junior in order to be allowed to do this.

With many of the river guides today available in English, you can be sure that you will not miss any of the local attractions or delights on offer. You can find these guides along with extra information from the regional tourist offices, but these are also normally issued to you by the charter boat company before you set off on your holiday.

Choosing the part of France you wish to visit is so important to get the best out of your holiday and in the North West of France there is Brittany, which is an area known for cider and crepes, to the East of France were there are rivers and canals throughout the regions of Alsace and Lorraine and you will find this area great for experiencing a diverse landscape from rolling hills to forests, whilst trying some of the local French beer and crisp white wines that this region produces.

How about Burgundy within the center of France which is a great place to experience local cuisine and fine wines and the quaint historical towns provide lovely afternoon walks taking a step back in time with the history.

Also, lets not forget the South of France, obviously with the more beautiful weather, you can experience traveling along the Canal du Midi, which is the oldest canal in Europe and runs from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and at the same time you will be able to take in the amazing variety of wildlife such as flamingos whilst on your canal boating holiday.

Yet as with any country, there are always rules and regulations on how you travel the waterways, whether it be the rivers or canals and before you embark on your boat trip you will be given some basic tuition, so that you can be issued with your license.

And did you realize that there are over 2000 locks in France, which are known as *écluse*? but don't worry too much as some locks are automatic and some are still operated by a lockkeeper, however others will need to be operated by yourselves, so the general 'training' is very important, otherwise you could find yourselves in a bit of a pickle initially, although most people on the canals are so very helpful and will come to your aid if you get stuck.

Although the rivers and canals are used extensively by pleasure boats these days, they are also still used by commercial vessels as well and it is these merchant vessels that have the priority on the waterways, plus also the traffic going upstream has priority over those traveling downstream.

As with road systems, the waterways have speed limits and although you are not likely to wish to speed along, these do have to be obeyed, but, it is the left-hand side that is used for overtaking just as it is on the French roads, and the slower boat must also slow down more to let the faster vessel pass.

The condition of the French rivers and canals is excellent and you will find that they even have designated areas for swimming and water sports, because, for obvious reasons, swimming is not permitted wherever you feel like going for a quick dip, yet if you are into fishing, then you can even do a spot of this while you are meandering down the river - just don't forget to get a license for that as well!

Along your chosen route you will find lots of fantastic areas where you can stop for lunch and stock up on supplies for that ever so important alfresco dining whilst you are cruising leisurely along. You will find additional facilities along the way which are necessary, things like emptying your waste, which has to be done at specific points, but these are also fantastic and are very easily accessible, as it is illegal to dump waste into the river or canal system.

So even if you have never done this sort of thing before, you will without a doubt have an incredible fun time and when your boating holiday in France is nearing its end, you know that no one will want to leave.

About the Author:

www.placesinfrance.com

Martyn Davis European Traveler, Author, Photographer and Business Development Manager, For all your French holiday needs and travel guide to France, with tourist information, landmarks and attractions - Boating Holidays In France