

VOL 1:1

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discover

Sharing our love for France's spectacular waterways

Alsace

Beautiful canalside towns, exceptional wines & fresh produce,
complex history, Art Nouveau, Vosges mountains, Nancy & Metz

Afloat in Alsace

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE PERFECT CANAL CRUISE

- **Why Alsace?**
- **Scenery & climate**
- **History**
- **Local produce & climate**
- **Wine**
- **Marne Rhine Canal**
- **Canal des Vosges**
- **When to go**
- **How to cruise**
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Being so close to the German border, Alsace has an interesting mix of French and German influences. The magnificence of the rolling landscape can leave some awestruck and certainly snap-happy with their cameras. The Marne-Rhine canal is the focus for hotel barging as it steers you towards Alsace Lorraine's beautiful towns and cities like stunning Colmar, and to the flavours of Alsace in flammekueche, Riesling and Gewurtztraminer. It's a region that continues to surprise and delight us, we hope it sparks a fondness for you too.

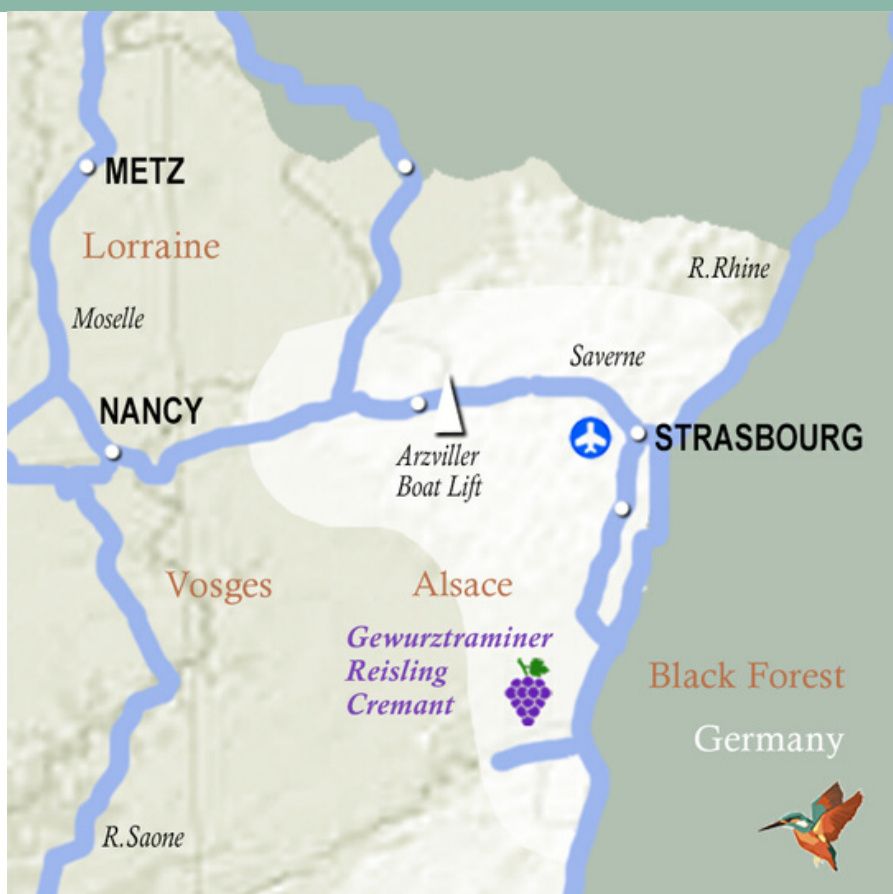
Ruth & the team



WHY ALSACE?

Because it's not as well-known as the Canal du Bourgogne or the Canal du Midi, but every bit as beautiful? Because it's within easy reach of two marvellous French cities – Nancy and Metz? Or is it because it's a focal point of European history during the last 150 years? Or perhaps for its Art Nouveau or flammekueche?

The list of attractions is long. Directly east of Paris, the region of Alsace Lorraine is bordered by the Vosges mountains to the west and the Jura to the south, while boasting plains and wetlands as well, creating striking contrasts which make it an extremely photogenic place to visit.



In terms of waterways, there's a cruise for each style: the Marne-Rhine canal hosts hotel barging and hire-boats and the Canal des Vosges (formerly the Canal de L'Est) beckons those in their own boat, whilst the mighty River Rhine has its own impressive charms to offer cruisers aboard larger river ships.

ALSACE ESSENTIALS

- Benefitting from Northern Europe's continental climate and the cooling effects of the Vosges mountains you can expect comfortably warm summers
- Elsassisch is a dialect spoken in Alsace villages resembling German and handed down through generations
- 50% of all beer made in France comes from Alsace
- Alsace produces the most single grape wines of any wine region in France
- The Marne-Rhine canal links Paris with the Rhine river at Strasbourg
- It's a beautiful landscape to explore by bike should you wish to extend your sightseeing



Why visit?

SCENERY & CLIMATE

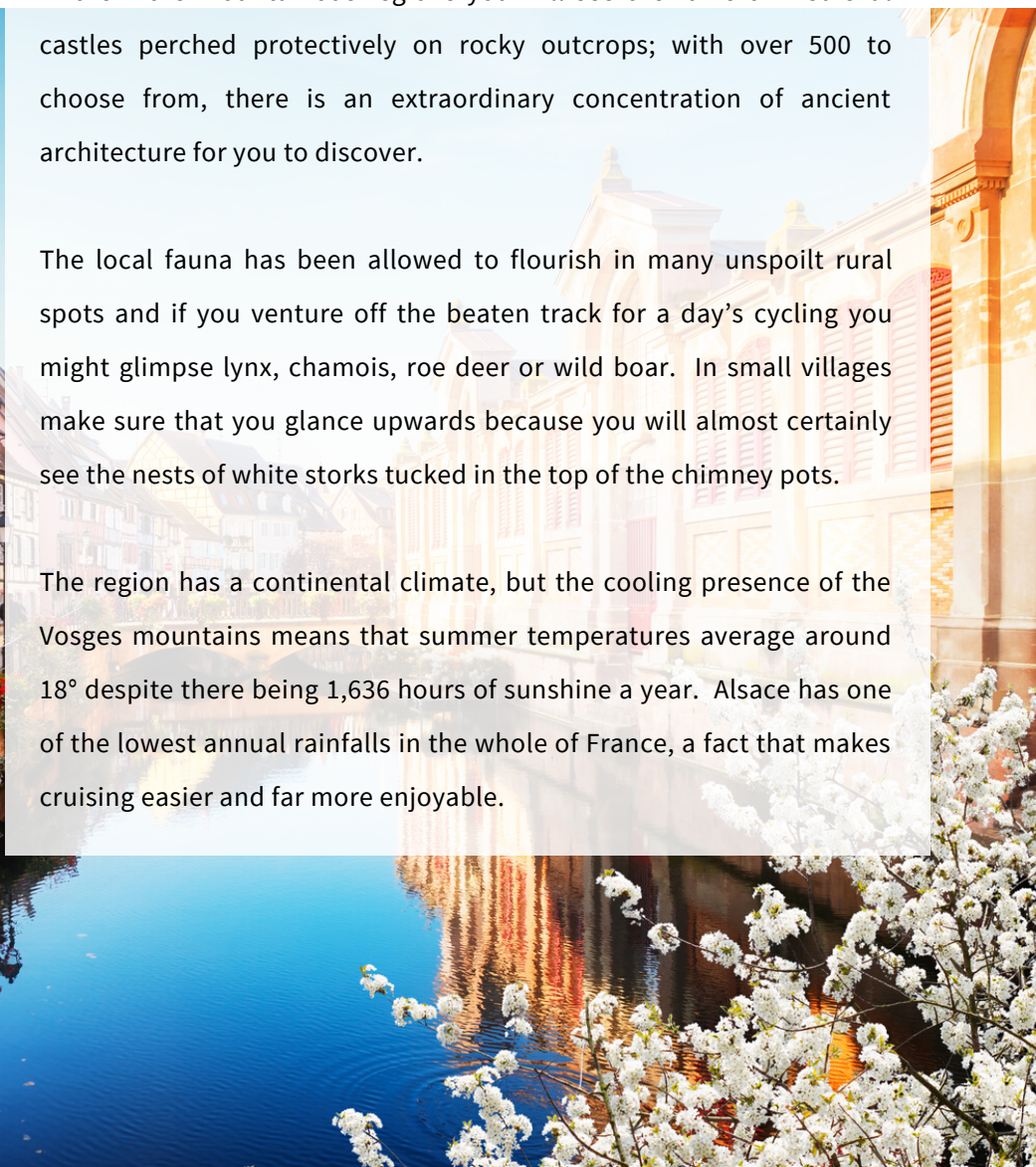
- **Magnificent landscape**
- **Long & complex history**
- **Continental climate – mild & dry**
- **Fabulous local produce**
- **World class wine**
- **Two wonderful waterways**

Being so close to the German border, Alsace has an interesting mix of French and German influences which are evident not just in the rolling and magnificent landscape (dense forests, fortified villages, golden vineyards and orchards groaning with Mirabelle plums) but in the architecture as well. Places like Colmar, which is close to the Rhine, have taken half-timbered houses decked with geraniums to the max, and the overall effect is chocolate-box attractive.

In the more mountainous regions you will see the ruins of medieval castles perched protectively on rocky outcrops; with over 500 to choose from, there is an extraordinary concentration of ancient architecture for you to discover.

The local fauna has been allowed to flourish in many unspoilt rural spots and if you venture off the beaten track for a day's cycling you might glimpse lynx, chamois, roe deer or wild boar. In small villages make sure that you glance upwards because you will almost certainly see the nests of white storks tucked in the top of the chimney pots.

The region has a continental climate, but the cooling presence of the Vosges mountains means that summer temperatures average around 18° despite there being 1,636 hours of sunshine a year. Alsace has one of the lowest annual rainfalls in the whole of France, a fact that makes cruising easier and far more enjoyable.



COMPLEX HISTORY

Alsace has been at the heart of some of the most traumatic episodes in European history during the last century and a half. In 1871 France was defeated in the Franco-Prussian war and Alsace Lorraine was annexed by the victors.

It remained in German hands until the end of the First World War when it was returned to France, but the signing of the armistice left much unfinished business between the two countries and in 1940 Hitler conquered these former territories and they returned to German control.

Since the end of the Second World War the region has lived peacefully, in part thanks to the evolution of the European Union, but as you glide through it on your luxury hotel barge or pilot yourself in a hire boat, it is interesting to discover the cultural ambiguities which have survived to this day. For example, a dialect called Elassisich, which bears a close resemblance to High German, is spoken in many of the villages. It is no longer taught in schools but handed down within families from generation to generation.

TOP TIP...

If you can, spend the night moored close to lock number 28. It is only 3km from the attractive spa town of Bain les Bains complete with therapeutic baths said to help alleviate cardiovascular problems. There's some lovely Art Deco architecture to admire as well.



LOCAL PRODUCE & CUISINE

You will see fruit trees and vines in abundance as much of the region is given over to agriculture, and farmers markets abound; we like the Marché du Canal in Colmar and the Nouvelle Douane in Strasbourg as both of them are teaming up with the finest local producers of delicacies such as choucroute (sauerkraut), foie gras, white asparagus and delicious Munster cheese.

Although Alsace is famous for its white wine, 50 per cent of all the beer made in France also comes from this region and provides a fantastic accompaniment to the various pork dishes which are so characteristic here. Be sure to try flammekueche, or tarte flambée, an irresistible bacon and onion tart made with crème fraîche and which easily gives pizza a run for its money.



DON'T FORGET THE WINE

Just as the champagne area is famous for its sparkling wine, Alsace holds the top spot for varietal or single grape wines.

Roughly 150,000,000 bottles of Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Sylvaner and Pinot Blanc are produced here every year and as with culture and cuisine, the German influence is plain to see.

If you want an excellent introduction to these wines, try a tasting at Domaine Paul Blanck in Kientzheim, one hour's drive from Strasbourg. The current producers draw on 400 years of experience in making and talking about their fine wines.

At the end of a day's cruise it's quite magical to relax on deck and sip a glass of Crémant d'Alsace, the sparkling wine of the region, and a bottle of Wolfberger, one of the market leaders, is available for a reasonable price in most supermarkets.



Which waterway?

MARNE-RHINE CANAL

- **Nancy**
- **Sarrebourg**
- **Saverne**
- **Strasbourg**

The Marne-Rhine canal was completed in the middle of the 19th century in order to provide a link from Paris to the river Rhine. It begins in Vitry-le-Francois and passes through 154 locks during the 314 kilometre journey to Strasbourg.

Here are just some of the notable places en route:



MARNE-RHINE CANAL...



Nancy

Nancy is a must-see city and even a whole weekend probably won't do it justice. The Place Stanislaus in the centre will take your breath away and deservedly holds UNESCO World Heritage Status.

The city hall is flanked by the fabulously beautiful Opera House on one side and the Musée de Beaux Arts on the other, and opposite stands a triumphal arch, all encircled with gilded railings and gates.

The city is also the French capital of Art Nouveau. Leading practitioner Emile Galle set up the Ecole de Nancy in the 1870s, creating a centre for this thriving movement and the city is bristling with architecture, stained glass and works of art inspired by these pioneers. Be sure to visit the Musée d'Ecole de Nancy to marvel at its encyclopaedic exhibitions and the Daum collection at the Fine Art Museum.

Sarrebourg

Sarrebourg is a pleasant place to moor, but don't be deceived by the apparent ordinariness of this little town as it is home to one of the major works of art of the 20th century. Housed in the Chapelle des Cordeliers, the magnificent stained glass window The Tree of Life was created by artist Marc Chagall in 1948 when the world was still coming to terms with the horrors of the holocaust. This surrealist masterpiece is full of circus images, but the jewel-like colours and scale of the work give it a luminous beauty that will have you rooted to the spot. Don't miss it!

TOP TIP...

From mid-July to mid-September the city of Nancy stages a stunning sound and light show in the Place Stanislas. Around 10.00pm when night has fallen you will witness 20 minutes of pure magic as artists in light and sound bring the history of the city to life.

MARNE-RHINE CANAL...

Strasbourg

Part time home of the European Parliament, Strasbourg is a vibrant city on the banks of the river Rhine. Le Petit France lies at the beating heart of it and is an ancient quarter filled with charming half-timbered houses that line the banks of narrow canals. It's extraordinarily picturesque and a great place for shopping or generally hanging out in pavement cafés. You might want to visit the Cathédral de Notre Dame, much admired by iconic French writer Victor Hugo and until the 19th century the tallest building in the Christian world. A climb up the tower is not for the faint-hearted but the panorama at the top is most rewarding. As you are in waterways mode, you should be sure to see the Barrage Vaubun, a 17th century dam that spans the River Ill. Recently refurbished, it is now home to a number of modern art exhibits and there is a rooftop terrace which offers stunning views of the city.

Saverne

You are unlikely to come across a grander mooring than here in Saverne.

- The Saverne marina is located in front of the magnificent Palais de Rohan, known as the Versailles of Alsace.
- There's a lovely botanical garden in the town and tech buffs should seek out the Tour de l'Ancien Telegraph Chappe.
- In 1794 France became one of the first countries to have a telecommunications system, an optical air telegraph invented by Claude Chappe, and the tower in Saverne was a vital link between Paris and Strasbourg.

TOP TIP...

One of the greatest engineering masterpieces of the entire canal network, the Arzviller Incline Plane Lift, was built to bypass a staircase of 17 traditional locks. Its system of counter weights lifts your hotel barge or up to three small boats 146 feet. A unique way to experience canal travel and nearby Lutzelbourg is a charming stopover.



CANAL DES VOSGES

The canal begins at Neuves-Maisons in the north and runs southwards for 122 kilometres to Corre on the River Saône, with 93 locks on the way. Your passage through the Moselle valley is a bucolic delight, en route to Epinal which is the second highest summit on the canal network. The canal then descends alongside the River Coney until it reaches the Saône. It was completed in 1880 in order to ensure proper connectivity in North East France after the border was redrawn following Germany's victory in the Franco-Prussian War.

If you want to escape the tourist routes and experience something more authentic, this could well be the canal for you. Here are some of the notable places en route:

Richardmenil

This is a sleepy little backwater that once had not one but two castles. One is still inhabited, but the other was destroyed in the Second World War.

Fontenoy-le-Château

If obscure French museums pique your interest then be sure to take in the embroidery museum in Fontenoy. France loves the history of things and we've visited of sugar, felt, pencils, ecclesiastical costumes, matchstick models, buttons, prunes, and hats in various parts of the country. Each of them has its own particular, if slightly faded, charm but they are all storytelling gems of local industry and national culture.

TOP TIP...

Plan your trip for spring to catch the delightful Champs-Golots in Epinal. This festival, on the Wednesday before Easter celebrates the melting of the snow. The children of the village make small illuminated boats (traditionally from old cheese boxes) and launch them in a specially constructed tank in the main square, while singing folk songs which mark the end of winter hardship.

they are all storytelling gems of local industry & national culture!

How to cruise?

HOTEL BARGE ~ SELF DRIVE ~ RIVER CRUISE

Hotel barging

Luxury barges are large, sedate and beautifully converted from vessels that used to carry cargoes of wine or wheat. Fully crewed, they offer all-inclusive cruises for those wishing to enjoy the finer things in life.

With just a handful of cabins, they offer a unique experience to share with a handful of fellow guests or you can take a whole boat charter for your own party. You'll enjoy gourmet food, fine wines and a tailor-made itinerary if you charter one – then all you need do is relax and experience the ultimate in luxury afloat.

Apres Tout and Saroche offer 5* luxury, Panache is a 4* barge and Madeleine provides more modest 3* comfort in this region.

Self drive boat hire

There are three operators with an excellent range of boats to choose from, so you are sure to find the ideal vessel to suit the size of your party (couples, families and groups of friends) and your budget. Whether you're an experienced sailor or a complete novice, the canal is easy to navigate with friendly lock-keepers on hand to help.

Completely free to travel at your own pace, you can stop wherever you please. Stock up at local fresh-food markets, discover charming cafés and restaurants on the way. At every turn you'll find mesmerising sites to see, fascinating history to explore and superb local wine to savour.

River cruises

The Rhine is one of Europe's major routes, carrying passengers on luxurious ships to the major cities en route to destinations in many countries.

Most ships will whisk you from Amsterdam in Holland through France and Germany to Switzerland, with stops at delightful historic cities such as Cologne, Rüdesheim, Ludwigshafen am Rhein and Strasbourg before reaching Basel. Alsace's scenery is the perfect picture-book backdrop for the magic of Christmas, celebrated in style on many Christmas market cruises.

When to go?

ALL THE SEASONS

Because the climate is temperature and the rainfall low, you can take your pick of when to book your cruise. Here are some regular local events to watch out for:

May

The Pentecost Fête in Wissembourg is a colourful festival that has been celebrating the folklore of Alsace since 1865. People parade through the town in traditional dress and there is music and dancing, and street-food stalls serving local delicacies.

Early July

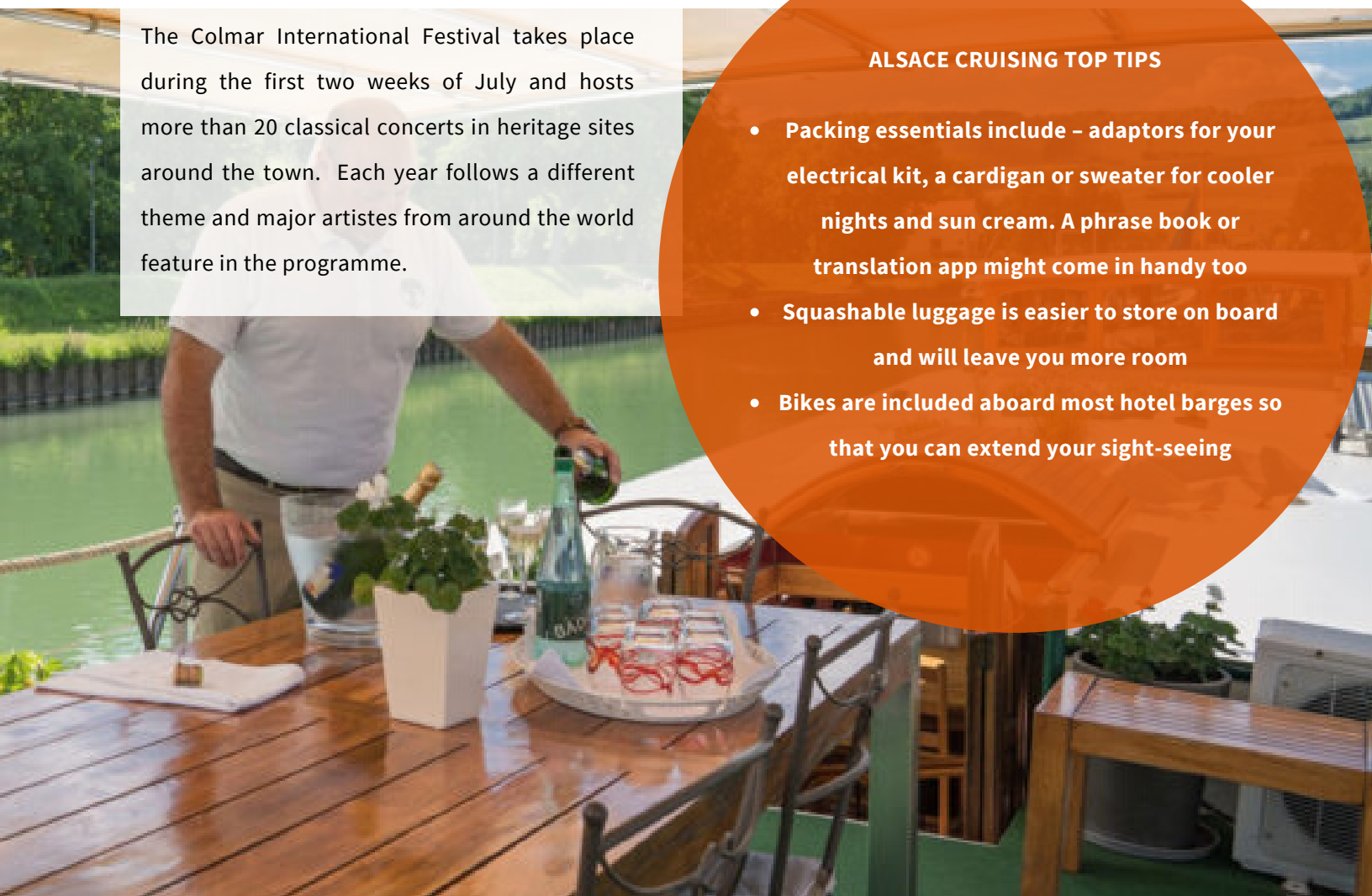
The Colmar International Festival takes place during the first two weeks of July and hosts more than 20 classical concerts in heritage sites around the town. Each year follows a different theme and major artistes from around the world feature in the programme.

Late July

Every two years the Lorraine Mondial Air Balloon festival takes off from Chambley airfield between Nancy and Metz. Said to be Europe's largest ballooning event, you are likely to see as many as 1,000 balloons during this spectacular four day fiesta.

ALSACE CRUISING TOP TIPS

- **Packing essentials include - adaptors for your electrical kit, a cardigan or sweater for cooler nights and sun cream. A phrase book or translation app might come in handy too**
- **Squashable luggage is easier to store on board and will leave you more room**
- **Bikes are included aboard most hotel barges so that you can extend your sight-seeing**



What next?

CALL THE TEAM TO GET STARTED

If you're ready to explore Alsace, then we're here to help (yes, we're literally here in France, too).

With years of experience of both self-drive boat hire and luxury hotel barging on this unique waterway, we're perfectly placed to find you your ideal cruise vacation.


Just contact Ruth and the team to get started.


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French Waterways

Cruising Inspiration and Information

