

# discover

Sharing our love for France's spectacular waterways



## *Self-drive boating*

Take the helm while getting away from it all  
and discover a France beyond the guide books.



# Imagine...

## YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO SELF DRIVE HIRE BOATING IN FRANCE

Imagine a holiday with a difference. One where you get away from it all, whilst trying your hand at something new and discovering a France beyond the guide books. Imagine the views of passing scenery from the helm as you captain your private boat along the French waterways. Imagine wining and dining on deck, sharing the best of France with your friends and family.

Welcome to the world of self-drive hire boat vacations where you simply step aboard one of our excellent, reputable self-drive boats and set off on your very own journey of adventure and discovery.

**The French Waterways team has been cruising the length and breadth of France for over 15 years, so with this guide we aim to introduce you to self-drive boating holidays and guide you through the basics of this fun-on-the-water option. We hope to inspire you to book a self-drive cruise for yourself so that you too can enjoy this unique experience in France.**

*Ruth & the team*



# Introducing...

## WHAT IS SELF DRIVE BOATING?

Self-drive boating, also known as hire boating, is about leaving everyday life behind as you cruise along easily-navigable waterways aboard your private boat. This is a holiday with a difference, where time stands still. Together with your family, friends or maybe just your partner you'll make your way along the scenic canal routes in France. At your own pace and stopping on the way, whenever and wherever you fancy.

As serene as that sounds, it requires some effort too. Taking the helm isn't all glory – there are locks and bends to navigate, waterway rules to understand and wonderful sights to take in while steering straight. This isn't all sit back and relax (opt for a luxury hotel barge vacation if that's what you're after), but it is certainly a slower pace than the rat race of working life on land. You choose how far you cruise each day and where you stop, and it's all great fun.



If you're chief navigator, plan your day so that you get the right balance between steering, sightseeing and mooring up to sip a cooling glass of local vin blanc. Waterways vacations mean seeing France from a totally different perspective.

## WHY IS FRANCE SO SPECIAL?

France ranks as the world's most-visited country and its tourist attractions count among some of the best known in the world. But there's another side to this popular destination, unfamiliar to most, and well off the guide book radar – France's rivers and canals.

The 5,000 miles of inland waterways that crisscross the French countryside are one of the country's hidden secrets. These scenic waterways give you the chance to see France from your own personal viewpoint, to soak up the beauty of its landscapes and discover the stories

behind them for yourself. As you make your way along one of these meandering rivers or canals, you get an insight into a side of France that rarely features in the guide books.





## WHY TAKE A SELF DRIVE BOATING HOLIDAY?

**A real getaway:** it's a chance to step out of your busy life and into a fun adventure, discovering France on your own terms and in your own time.

**A unique experience:** this is a holiday with a difference. Pick up new skills while exploring a new destination, a world apart from the usual vacation choices. See France from an entirely new viewpoint and discover its secrets for yourself.

**Suitable for everyone:** a boating holiday is an essential family adventure, one you and your children will remember and treasure forever. Or, it's the ultimate romantic escape, one where it really is just the two of you. And it's also the perfect group get-away where you can spend quality time together, catching up and creating new memories. And on most boats pets are welcome too.



**Your choice:** everything on a hire boating holiday is up to you. How far you travel, where you go and when you go there. Which places you stop at – maybe mooring up for a spontaneous village visit or to devour some croissants (or some Chablis) – and which places you pass by. When you explore and when you just cruise the canal.

**The comfort:** a hire boat holiday offers more space and comfort than you might imagine. Below deck, hire boats are roomy with ample headroom, plenty of storage and large comfy beds. Up above, sundecks allow you to lie back and relax as you watch the world go by.

**An easy ride:** everyone's an able seaman because hire boats are easy to drive with simple controls and you don't need any previous boating experience. You'll find the French waterways a breeze to navigate and even the locks are mostly automatic. If you get stuck en route, help is at hand, only a phone call away.

**An affordable escape:** a boating holiday comes with that all-important budget-friendly price tag. Actual prices vary depending on the type of boat and when you holiday, but when you divide it by the number of people going you'll be surprised at how affordable this unique experience turns out to be.



## WHAT KIND OF BOAT CAN WE HIRE?

Through our four reputable partners, French Waterways offers a very large range of boats for you to choose from, all carefully maintained and new models with all the latest gadgets on board are added each year. Your choice depends on the size of your party and your budget:

**Capacity:** with berths for 2 guests to up to 10 guests, there's ample space above and below deck. Most boats welcome dogs on board too.

**Facilities:** think home-from-home. All our boats offer comfortable, spacious accommodation and come with a fully-equipped galley and all bedding. The cabins provide double or twin beds and the en suite bathrooms have hot and cold water, a shower and toilets. Décor is simple but stylish throughout. Heating and air-conditioning are also available. Most boats include sun decks, the perfect spot to watch the French countryside go by as you glide along the canal or for you to enjoy an afternoon rest from cruising. For extra water fun, there's the option of hiring a splash pool (can be heated), perfect for an on-board dip.

**Category:** all French Waterways boats offer comfortable accommodation providing a range of equipment and services divided into 4 categories – luxury, first-class, comfort and economy.

Between them, they cater for all needs and budgets.

**Find out more:** <https://www.french-waterways.com/boating-holidays-vacations/boating-holiday-france/>





## HIRE BOAT PROVIDERS

We partner with four reputable hire boat companies who have decades of experience in the world of self-drive boats in France, and can boast tried and trusted reputations as the best in their field. All have a great choice for boats to ensure your holiday is plain sailing.



**Le Boat:** over 40 years of history and the operators of the largest fleet of boats, based in 7 regions throughout France.



**France Afloat:** suppliers of the ever popular traditional barge-style boats with bases in northern Burgundy and Midi-Languedoc.



**Locaboat:** the second largest fleet in France includes the Penichette and Europa makes; based throughout France.



**Nicols:** builders and operators of 23 distinctive styles of luxury boats with bases across France.

Both Locaboat and France Afloat also supply the luxury Linssen range of Dutch-built steel motor cruisers, available at many bases throughout France.

# How to...

## WHAT ABOUT DRIVING THE BOAT OURSELVES?

Self-driving a hire boat is not too difficult - the controls are simple. You don't need a licence nor any previous experience, just common sense, an eye for wind and water, and courtesy towards others. When you arrive you'll receive hands-on boat handling guidance, brief driving instructions and 'rules of the road'. Then all you need to do is cast off and cruise away on your adventure.

You'll be cruising along at no more than 3-4mph - little more than a brisk walking pace. The only obstacles along your way are likely to be locks and even these make your life easy because most are automatic. A detailed navigational guide with maps is available, with information about restaurants and food stores as well as locks and moorings along the way.





## WHERE SHOULD WE GO IN FRANCE?

France is unique, having more navigable waterways than any other country in the world. They stretch from north to south, joining the English Channel with the French Riviera, and the Atlantic in the west with the Camargue and Mediterranean in the east.

Boating holidays are available in many regions and each destination is different from another, with stunning landscapes and unique culinary experiences waiting for you to discover. See a new side to France from the waterways of Aquitaine in the west, Brittany in the northwest and Alsace Lorraine to the north-east. Discover a France you never knew existed from the waterways of central Burgundy and the Loire valley, and venture south for Provence, the Camargue and the Canal du Midi. Find out more about these areas in our other downloadable guides: <https://www.french-waterways.com/guides-downloads/>





## WHAT WILL WE SEE?

Whether you're hands-on at the helm or relaxing on deck, you'll marvel as the passing landscapes unfold before you. Contemplate forests and woodland, valleys and high mountains, vineyards and orchards, lakes and tinkling streams. Moor up and visit medieval towns and picturesque villages, ancient ruins, majestic châteaux and historic castles. And as you make your way slowly along, don't forget to sample some world famous cuisine, and the renowned, and lesser known, French wines you'll come across. They're all delicious!



Spot something you like the look of as you cruise? Just pull over, secure your boat and investigate. It really is that spontaneous. You can moor virtually anywhere suitable on the canals without restriction, making it easy to step off and start exploring the towpaths that line the waterways (dogs will love these too). For extra fun and a bit of on-land speed, add bike hire to your vacation package.





## HOW LONG SHOULD WE TAKE?



Self-drive hire boat bases are spaced seven days apart so that's the average length of a cruise, meaning that you can set off from A and leave your boat at B, but shorter or longer cruises are possible, too. Longer cruises give you more time to become expert sailors and truly wind-down, and many families return year after year to explore new routes and cultures.

## HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Self-drive boat vacations are extremely affordable, especially when you divide the price by the number of people enjoying the break. The actual price depends on when you go in the season (from mid-March to end of October) and what size and category of boat you need. Naturally, the summer months command the highest price and will be busier than the 'shoulder' months.





# Next steps

## HOW DO I BOOK MY HIRE BOAT HOLIDAY?

Browse our selection of boats, decide on your date and region and send an enquiry to discover availability and price. Your enquiry form can go to one chosen company or all four, so that you can compare each one with another.

Like holiday lets and vacation rentals, you need to pay a deposit to secure your boat and the balance payment is due close to the start of your holiday. We advise purchasing cancellation insurance if your travel insurance policy doesn't already cover such an event.



You can trust French Waterways' self-drive hire boat partners to offer top quality boating vacations at competitive prices.



Our expert advice and guidance is also freely offered and always much appreciated, so don't hesitate to get in touch with your queries. We look forward to hearing from you and welcoming you aboard in beautiful France!




**Contact us**  
cruises@french-waterways.com  
www.french-waterways.com

Our regional contact numbers:

  +1 405 445 0350

  +61 3 9005 8569

  +44 7590 287178

 +33 6 09 74 00 64

**Find your hire boat:**

<https://www.french-waterways.com/boating-holidays-vacations/hire-boating-holidays/>



**French Waterways**

Cruising Inspiration and Information