

Family life on the canal

You're probably wondering why we keep banging on about family boating holidays. Well, the answer is simple, we are totally hooked. If you have never tried it or thought it not suitable for children then I would encourage you to take a closer look

CANAL boating holidays are great for an active family break, learning new skills and sharing the fun of navigation and mooring away from the madding crowd and the madness of the digital world we now live.

The pace is set! Full stop! No faster than 8kmph. Set for the duration of the trip and how refreshing we as a family find this style of holiday. A boating holiday comes with complete freedom to sail the waterways at your own pace. This pace creates perfect quality time to spend with our loved ones. Wifi & mobile phone signal connection is not always available or weak out in the sticks (Yes! I hear you say!) and anyway, all aboard seem happy to be away from the digital world.

It's a great way to regroup and bring the family back together as a working team, everyone slowing down to the same pace with one goal in mind, to arrive at the next destination and do some more exploring.

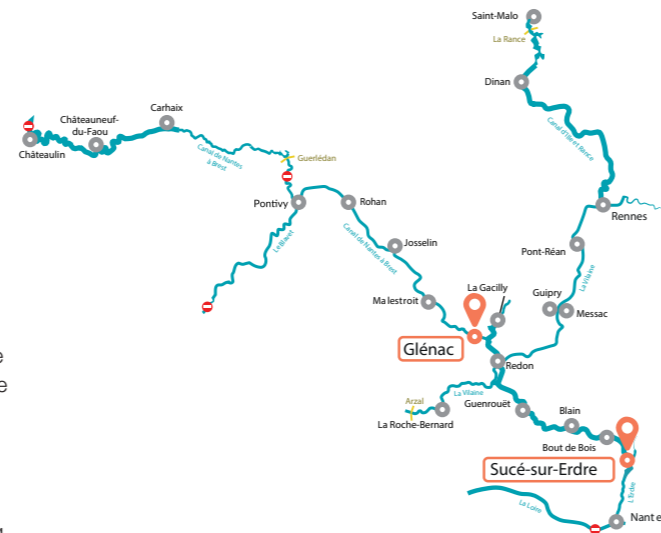
So our 3rd trip aboard a canal boat was with Nicols Boating. We have six days ahead of us to spend cruising along one of France's most picturesque canals, The Brest-Nantes Canal.

Whether you're travelling as a family, a group of friends or a couple, Nicols boating holidays offers complete freedom

with cruising itineraries not only all across France but also in Portugal, the Netherlands, Hungary and Germany. The duration of your holiday can be from weekends away and short breaks to longer holidays of a week or more.

A boating holiday offers a novel and unique experience to see a country or region from a totally new perspective and the bonus is no previous boating experience or licence is needed. Nicols boats have a great reputation for the style and layout of their boats to accommodate the whole family.

Onboard all crew can be involved in the intricate running of a boating holiday. Handling, and steering a canal boat and navigating locks are all part of the boating experience. You'll receive full instructions on arrival and buoyancy aids will always be provided for adults and children. If you're really keen to keep the family active on your boating holiday, then everyone on board can be allocated a job. Jim my youngest likes to drive the boat, in particular in and out of locks, manoeuvring her gracefully into each lock and in full control whilst giving out captains orders to the rope handlers and generally keeping the boat stable whilst the gallons of water pour in and out of each lock throwing the boat about like a plastic duck in a bath. This is quite a crucial and perhaps



most difficult part of each day and full concentration from all crew is needed to keep the boat and its crew safe. I think he would find a Brittany Ferries vessel a piece of cake to be honest as he makes handling boats look so easy. Rarely needing to use the fenders (strategically place around the boat) to bounce from the walls.

Passing the boat back to dad at the point of departure from the lock and taking this time to hop off the boat and choose to keep his fitness up by either running to the next lock or cycling carefree along the

towpath.

In the past, we have talked about our passage on board and the areas we have covered but we wanted you to get an overall feel for a family boating holiday so a typical day runs like this:

Awake and up by around 9-9.30am for breakfast prep and discussion of the day's plan/goal for arriving at the night's destination. This consists of checking the weather, the number of hours cruising, whether we need groceries and of course does our destination have mooring facilities that we will need. Ideally an electric hook up for charging up appliances and moreover the boat's batteries for showering/heating/cooking etc and facilities for topping up the on-board water tank.

Usually, about 4-5 hours actual cruising time per day is sufficient, do remember of course that these times need to include time in the locks so counting how many locks you will be passing through. The more locks the more time it takes. Ensure to allow around 20-30 minutes for each lock, more if the canal is busy as you will have to wait for other boats to pass through.

And then we hear the captain start

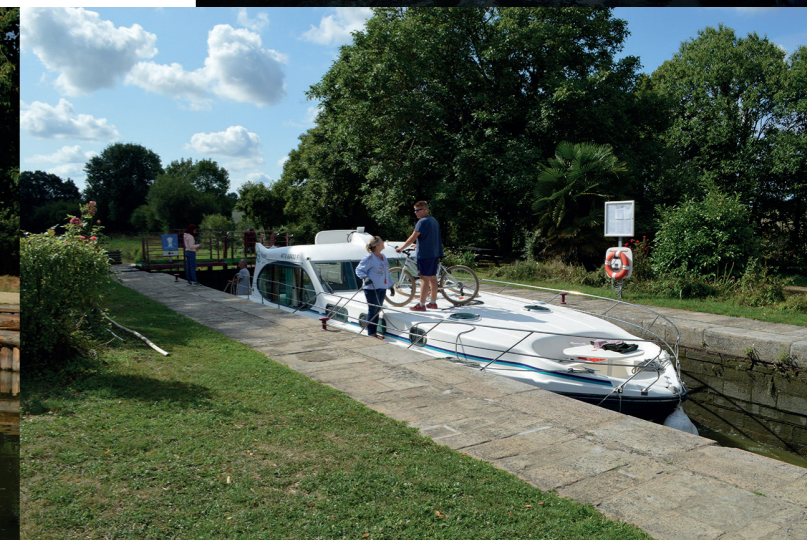
up the engine and its all hands on deck for departure. Lines off and boat clear for sailing. Once on our way the crew can step down from outdoor duties and enjoy the cruising, taking in the beautiful scenic countryside, quaint villages and watching the natural habitants of the waterways in their home environment.

Coffee break is always a good time to join our captain on deck and enjoy hot or cold drinks (depending on the season) and enjoying a biscuit or two as we cruise along.

Also, note that when cruising in France that most locks (if they are manned) close for lunch! Again another perfect reason to slow down and take a leaf out of the Frenchie's book and take 2 hours of time out mooring up and waiting for the lock-keepers to finish their baguette and lunchtime wine!

Lunchtime for us consists of chilling either lazing/nodding on the boat or a walk around the surrounding area. Whatever takes your fancy I generally choose the chilling option whilst my husband will take a wander and Jim will be happy to cast his line!

I hope you are getting the picture and pace now and can see where we are





TRAVELtalk

coming from. After lunch, we cast off and head for the final destination. Coffee/tea break and treats along the way, tackling locks and enjoying the camaraderie with other cruisers.

Arriving at our destination all crew stand down and activities can be pursued. Either discovering the village/town/city that you have arrived in, topping up on groceries, evening meal prep and general maintenance duties on board. Water top-up etc. Evening activities consists of traditional family board games, reading and chilling and the obligatory glass of local wine! Why not we are not driving again until morning! The day itself is somewhat exhausting but "good" tired and bed comes early for all. So what's not to like?

We took this holiday with some close friends of ours. One of whom had recently been hospitalised with a broken foot and in a cast for 3 months! So not an easy task for hopping (literally) on and off the boat. In practice though she found that boarding and alighting the boat was very easily managed. So we now feel happy to say that these holidays can also be accessible to disabled passengers. With a little help from a crew member access on and off the boat, either in a wheelchair or on crutches was fairly easy. Well, she made it look easy!

Why not discover the fun and flexibility of a canal boat holiday onboard a Nicols' boat!

Enjoy an unforgettable time captaining your own stylish cruiser

Memories are made on these easy to drive boats!!



We travelled on board a stylish three-cabin Sixto from the Nicols base at Sucé-sur-Erdre. Boat hire prices for the Sixto which sleeps six people start from 1172 Euros for a 2 night short break or 2343 Euros for a one week trip. Nicols offers canal holidays onboard a range of self-drive cruisers for parties of between 2-12 people and no previous boating experience is required. Boat hire prices start from 349 Euros for a 2 night short break or 698 Euros for a one week trip. In addition to Brittany, Nicols offers boating holidays in popular regions such as Alsace, Burgundy, the

Loire Valley, Franche Comte, the Canal du Midi and Camargue plus has bases in Germany, Portugal, Netherlands and Hungary. Nicols® began boat construction back in 1986 as part of a wider French industrial group that specialised in the transformation of plastic materials. In 1990 the first Nicols® base opened in Dole in Franche-Comté. The following year a reservation centre opened to take rental bookings for holidaymakers. Over 30 years later and Nicols® continue to manage the complete process: boat construction, boat hire and the managing of the

bases. Over the years, different generations of boats have been created: the Marinas, then Riviera, then the easily recognisable 'sea-yacht' shape and renowned terrace of the Sedans, the Confort range that is loved so much by couples and finally the newest Estivale range. In total there are four ranges, 28 boat models and nearly 600 craft that have been produced from the Nicols® boatyard. For more information visit www.boat-renting-nicols.co.uk or call 02392 401320.