

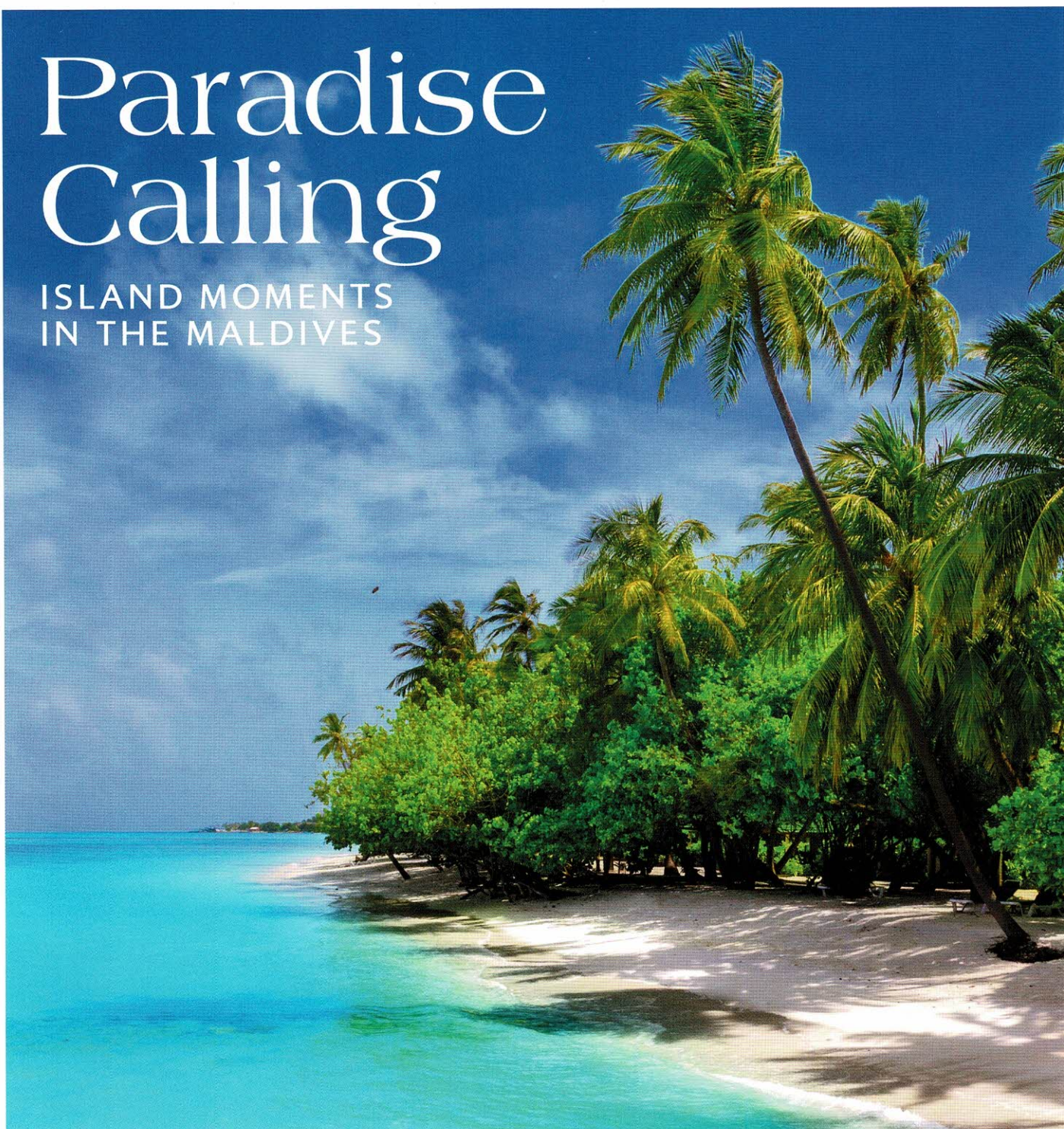
Silver Traveller

SILVER TRAVEL
ADVISOR

Winter 2022

Paradise Calling

ISLAND MOMENTS
IN THE MALDIVES



FOOD

Uncover the best of
Italy's gastronomy

CRUISE

Sail in style on board new
ship Celebrity Apex

ADVENTURE

Discover the Seven
New Wonders of the World

Dream boat

Sailing through sunflower and wine country on the Canal du Midi with Nicols is an alluring affair, discovers **Gill Haynes**

“**B**elieve me, my young friend, there is nothing – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.” So said Ratty to Mole in *The Wind in the Willows* and, after a delightful week spent messing about in a rather lovely boat on the Canal du Midi, deep in the South of France, we could only agree.

This was our second trip with France’s most popular boating specialist, Nicols, so we reckoned we knew what to expect – or did we?

TAKE A BOW

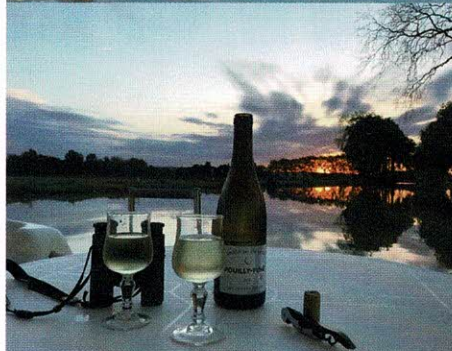
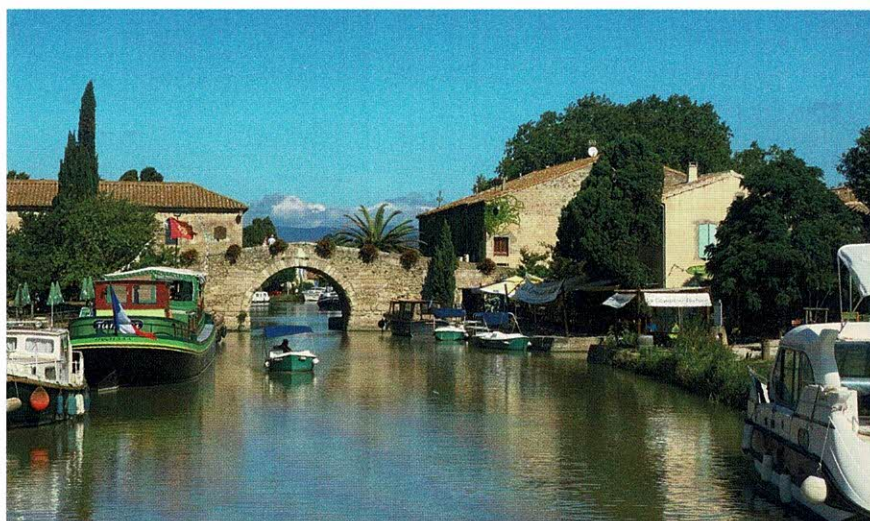
Our Estivale Quattro S boat was as sleek, squeaky clean, well laid out and well equipped as before, with a proper fridge-freezer, a full-width master cabin and en suite with an enclosed shower (no soggy shower curtains here), plus a second bedroom, which we used for luggage.

The pièce de résistance was the flying bridge, an outside upper deck from which you can steer the boat, so two of us could sit side-by-side in the sunshine and watch the glorious canal-side scenery of sunflower fields, vineyards and Scots pines scroll by.

LOCKS OF FUN

This time, the boat also came with bow-thrusters. These are like little side propulsion units that add extra manoeuvrability. Which was just as well, as we’d chosen a section of the Canal du Midi that entailed passing through 56 locks in just six days.

That is rather a lot of locks! But there really is plenty of time and no need to rush. Once we’d got into the rhythm of it, we enjoyed ticking off all the locks we passed through, some in “flights” of three or four



You can sit side-by-side in the sunshine and watch the glorious scenery scroll by

From top: Beautiful hamlet Le Somail; enjoy sundowners while sailing on the Canal du Midi

at a time. Most locks could take up to four boats at once and, with other boat crews – as well as cheery lock-keepers – on hand to help, conversations started up easily. It was all surprisingly sociable!

The locks really aren’t difficult to master and the Nicols staff at your departure point are patient and helpful, taking you out for a trial run to make sure you feel confident before you set forth on your own.

CANAL LIFE

You don’t need a licence to drive a Nicols boat, nor do you need any previous boating experience. However, if you’ve never been on a boat before, especially if there

are only two of you, you might prefer the 52km of the Canal du Midi you can travel along without encountering a single lock.

But for those happy to have a go, those 56 locks can open the door to a world of sunflower fields, winelands, sunbaked villages and boatfuls of bonhomie, which we were sorry to leave behind. ■

NEXT STEPS

Read Gill’s complete article silvertraveladvisor.com/nicols-midi. For further information, a quote or to book a Nicols self-drive boat trip, call 0800 412 5678.