

## VOYAGE



# Travel Trunks

Luxury Barge Cruising: Experience the romantic, poetic Europe of our dreams

### *Traditional Dictionary Definition*

barge n

**1:** a broad flat-bottomed boat for river or canal use moved by towing **2:** a powerboat supplied to a flagship (as for use by an admiral) **3:** a ceremonial boat, elegantly furnished

### *Ignore Above... Modern Travel Definition*

Barge n

**1:** elegant moving hotel that meanders from European village to village **2:** a luxury living and dining experience **3:** personal bliss and peel-away stress skewering

The romanticized view of Europe puts us in a blissful countryside, perhaps poking through a quaint village. Other than the chirp of a bird or the moo of a dairy cow, the sounds are muted and wonderful pastries greet us every morning.

Turn the page to a modern Europe, with cars buzzing around crowded cities and darting around each other on skinny stretches of highway. Fast food beckons. The internet has shrunk the continent (and the world for that matter) and the pulse of technology and pursuit of a united continental economy gets set to wage commercial battle with the world's markets.

Where did it all go?

You can relax. Thankfully...it hasn't moved a muscle. Simply, the methods of getting there have just evolved and taken most of us with it.

Let me suggest ....another way!

You've all heard of water and that many things float on it. This not only includes sleek cruise liners and personal powerboats. It also includes a simply amazing way to scratch the belly of Europe... luxury hotel barge cruising.

This certainly isn't what your mind's eye summons at first glance. Today's Europe is a vast network of canals, initially used to haul goods from village to village. Today, the canals have themselves evolved, to add yet another way to see the essential Europe.

Barging has become the ideal way to quietly and leisurely traverse the continent. The pace of travel is slow and one can actually take time to see the countryside – a far cry from white-knuckling it on the Autobahn! Villages pop up out of nowhere and offer the chance to see a Europe that has not changed in hundreds of years.

The barges themselves house between 6-12 passengers, with 4-6 six crew members at your beck and call. They can be fully modern in construction or elegantly preserved to display fine hardwoods and stained glass. The state rooms are stylishly decorated and the cuisine is to die for. Lazing on the top deck usually means soaking up a quiet sun or dipping your toes into a spa or pool. Sipping on your favourite beverage as the windmills go by is a required activity. Some of the barges have saunas and fitness studios. All have superb dining rooms and common gathering spots inside.

Then there are the destinations...

On any given journey our "bargists" may be rolling by the Scottish highlands, stopping by ancient castles and fields of battle, on our way to Loch Ness or the nearby heather green "9-holer". On another voyage, you may picture yourself at a timeless British riverside pub, a classic 500 year old chapel or one of many historic colleges.

France is particularly magnificent and has perfected

this type of travel. Obviously there are iconic sites such as Paris, but it's the out-of-the-way villages that make the country sparkle. Picture yourself in the Loire Valley, dining locally on the finest of foods, while sipping the delectable nectars from hundreds of years-old wine cellars. Another series of journeys takes you to the north and south Burgundy areas, where of course the wine is exquisite and the locals charming.

The Napa Valley has nothing on this, thank you very much!

Further south, we can explore the culturally rich Provence – Camargue districts. If you want deluxe, this is the area for you, where one can expect to find lavender fields, stone churches, southern delicacies and fine weather. The River Rhone and the medieval city of Avignon make for a great memory-maker of a trip, with your voyage ending at the incomparable Mediterranean seaside.

With many stops along the way and ample opportunity to do a little bit of shopping, a little bit of eating, some cycling or even balloon riding, barge cruising options are endless. Despite the optics, most say that the intimacy of the barge setting, coupled with the charm of the staff and local people are what makes these types of vacations magical.

Charter the whole boat or simply book yourself in with other new friends, who like yourself, are thirsting for a unique and very personal Europe.

The romantic Europe of our mind's eye remains and it's just a matter of finding the right way of discovering it. A lazy wander on an elegant barge will indeed give you a rich and fulfilling travel experience that will no doubt stimulate social conversations back home for years!

*Ron Taylor owns his own Communications business, Taylor Creative (TaylorCreative.ca) and does a number of design and writing projects for Departures Travel. If you wish to make a booking on any of these marvelous vessels, call (403) 262-1034 or toll free 1-888 262-1034.*