

Barging in Burgundy – A Once in a Lifetime Travel Opportunity

Did you ever think about the perfect vacation and what that would be? Well here's your answer – barging in Burgundy on Le Papillon. This experience is the epitome of what you would expect from a hotel barge. It's an intimate setting for six lucky guests supported by a dream team staff of four. You couldn't imagine a better situation.

Our dream vacation started on July 5, 2009 arriving at the gangplank of Le Papillon from Paris chauffeured by Michael, who would be our guide for the week. Sarah, Haley and Cedric were there to greet us with champagne, show us to our berths, and then invited us to relax on deck

while the finishing touches were made to dinner. Our mooring was right across from a typical stone cottage we would find time and again on our trip down the Canal de Bourgogne, complete with climbing roses over the front door. The weather was perfect while we sipped our aperitif, and shortly Haley invited us down to the dining salon for dinner.

The table was set for six, with beautiful linens (which would change daily from meal to meal), fresh flowers on the buffet, candles, multiple wine glasses and more, making us feel as though we were royalty. Once seated, our appetizer was served, and Sarah, the chef, poked her head around the corner of the kitchen to tell us what we were having and wished us a cheery, "Bon appétit!" in her lovely British accent. Exquisite in presentation and taste, from the appetizer of Chevre chaud au salade mesclun to the entre of Carre d'agneaux, to a stupendous dessert of tarte tatin, with a sampling of two "lovely, melt in your mouth" local cheeses as described by Haley, and plenty of Chablis and Burgundy to accompany the feast, we were simply blown away by this meal, the first of a week-long sampling of some of the finest food we have had.

How could the evening get better? A digestive on the deck, then a short walk under an almost full moon to the small hamlet of Fleury sur Ouche topped off the night, before we headed to bed. In our cabins there were many thoughtful little touches, flashlights in case of emergency, fresh flowers, scented soaps,



Ferrero Rocher chocolates (which mysteriously replenished themselves every day), crisply ironed sheets, comfy pillows and warm comforter. We drifted off to sleep to the sounds of crickets and water lapping at the boat through our open portals.

Monday morning, we were awakened early by birdsong and a rather loud rooster, which was good, because it was our first full day on board and we were excited to see how the day would go. Greeted by sunshine and blue skies, we sat down to a delicious breakfast of fresh squeezed orange juice, fruit, yogurt, bread and croissants from a nearby bakery, granola and lots of café au lait. We got underway around 9:30 and made our way through the first of the forty-one locks we would travel through in the course of the week. Larry and I debarked and walked along the canal, knowing we would need to exercise to keep even with the caloric intake we expected to consume during the coming week. It was beautiful – lots of wildflowers adorned the sides of the path and we waited at each lock for Le Papillon to catch up. We hopped back on before the last lock of the morning then headed in for lunch.



Lunch was leisurely and delicious – curried chicken salad, cucumber salad with tomatoes, fennel salad with feta, lentil salad and fresh green salad. Sarah made everything fresh from local produce which was evident in the flavor of everything we tasted. Two cheeses and two wines later, we left the barge with Michael and headed to Cote d’Or for a lesson in distinguishing vineyards, wine classification and a little wine tasting. We drove through the beautiful Burgundian countryside, and stopped at the edge of a vineyard, learning the difference between grape varieties grown in the region and what identifies a particular appellation. Then we were off to Chateau du Clos de Vougeot, headquarters of Le Chevaliers du Tastevin and formerly a monastery built in the 11th century by the monks of Citeaux. We breezed back into the village to sample some local wines, working our way up to a Premier Cru and finishing with a Grand Cru.

Back to the barge in time for a little more cruising to our final destination for the day so Larry and I hopped on the bikes and forged the way. We met up with the barge at Gisse-sur-Ouche, another quaint little town along the canal. A cocktail, a shower, then dinner was served. Could Sarah possibly top what she had served the night before? Ah yes, and she did the same every night we were on the barge. Cold pea soup with mint, poached salmon with hollandaise, sautéed spinach, basmati rice and then our cheese course. We barely had room for the chocolate soufflés that came out next, but somehow we managed to eat every last scrap of the dessert. Not a crumb was left in any dish! Coffee on deck as the dusk settled in around us, listening to the sound of water running through the lock that we'll go through tomorrow – what could be more idyllic? Off to bed serenaded by birdsong. Did I mention those chocolates that kept replenishing themselves?



Tuesday was a long, lazy day and we were up early to take a trip into Dijon for the weekly market and to visit historical sites. Sarah escorted us around the market talking about local produce, meats, and cheeses, then Michael gave us a fascinating tour of the city. His knowledge of history

was extensive, and he gave us a detailed, “Cliff Notes” version of the lineage and rule of the Dukes of Burgundy. Pretty complex, a few double crosses here and there, alliances by marriage, the Bold, the Fearless, the Good and much more. We had to fall back on the guide book later to sort it all out. We walked around town with Michael noting points of interest and took turns rubbing a little carved ochuette (owl) on the side of the 13th century church for good luck and a long, healthy life as long as you used your left hand!

Back at the boat, we were greeted with a lunch repast of treats from the market – hard sausage, country pate, goose liver pate, tomato and mozzarella salad, tabouleh salad, luscious cherries, fresh bread, our requisite two cheeses and of course, a white and red wine. After lunch, we set sail and Larry and I started out walking, then switched to the bikes and rode to the next stopping point at Pont d’Ouche. We took side trips up into the villages we passed, getting a little glimpse into life in the French countryside.

Our dinner this evening was at a restaurant, La Ferme de Rol, tucked into the hillside about a 25 minute drive from our mooring. At our urging, we asked Michael to join us as he felt like a natural part of our group. We had fun trying out the specialties of the house from escargot, to a well-known ham, mixed grill and pork tenderloin. A wonderfully diverse cheese tray and various desserts topped off the meal along with a couple of bottles of wine. Ken, one of our traveling partners, rode shotgun looking for wild boar and deer on the way back to the barge as twilight settled in. Sarah, Cedric and Michael hung out with us while we chatted about the day's events. A perfect ending to another amazing day on Le Papillon!

Wednesday (how can it be Wednesday already), dawned cool with mixed clouds and sun but that didn't dampen our spirits (or our appetites). We cruised in the morning, and Larry and I walked about two hours before hopping back on board. We moored along the canal with a stupendous view of Chateauneuf – a landmark we had been seeing all morning as we made our way down the canal. Before we headed out for the afternoon trip to Beaune, we feasted on the most delicious, rich quiche of swiss chard, a fresh pea, carrot and bean salad with homemade mayonnaise (made daily), wild rice salad with cucumbers, walnuts, raisins and tomatoes, fresh artichoke hearts, and cheese, wine and bread. A little fresh flower was tucked into our napkins – just one of the many ways Haley decorated our table for each meal.



Beaune, our destination for the afternoon, was a fascinating place and our first stop was at the Hotel Dieu, a hospital for the poor built by a wealthy couple, Nicholas and Guigone Rolin, in the mid 1400's as a way to redeem their souls before leaving this earth. In addition, they bequeathed vineyards to the hospital as a means of supporting the operating expenses. The wine from the vineyards is auctioned off every year to this day, the benefits going to the hospital. The most incredible artifact of the day was a beautiful painting by

Roger Van der Weyden depicting the Last Judgment. A polyptych, painted in the 15th century, it was displayed above the altar to remind the sick of their mortality and to encourage them to repent their sins while they still had the chance. Very moving and certainly made me take notice of the difference between heaven and hell as depicted in the painting!

After touring the Hotel Dieu, we poked around Beaune, bought some wine and headed back to Le Papillon for a cocktail on deck, wondering what delectable dishes we would be having tonight. Not disappointed, Sarah served us escargots forestiere, roasted quail, celeriac and mashed potatoes, petit pois, and polenta aux herbes. We finished with two delicious cheeses (how could there be so many varieties) and a gateaux gingembre with crème anglaise with framboise. We were so full, the group decided to take a walk and we set our sights on the Chateauneuf! It was a lovely stroll, although the road up to the village was steep and we had to keep focused on the objective. We were rewarded with wonderful views, and as the sun set, the last rays of daylight lit up the chateau and surrounding country. As we headed back to the barge, we joked about the crew worrying about their guests getting lost in the dark in the French countryside. They were surprised we walked all the way to the chateau and I think relieved that we made it back in one piece. We enjoyed a cognac and then headed off to bed.

Thursday, we cruised in the morning along another beautiful stretch of the canal, with lots of Charollais cattle everywhere, neat gardens, flowers tucked in



and around quaint old houses. On foot once again, we enjoyed the abundance of wildflowers, and felt like we saw so much more by walking. Larry continued to take pictures of each “ecluse” and hopefully we can put together a poster of them when we get home. We met up with the barge at the last lock before docking, then sat down to another fantastic lunch. Poached eggs over toast with a red wine and mushroom sauce, mixed salad, and homemade peach ice cream for dessert. Cheese and wine of course, was a highlight of lunch.

Our destination after lunch was – Chateauneuf! Fortunately, we had

not gone into the village on our walk, knowing we would be visiting it today. Michael gave us an extraordinary tour of the chateau, we walked around the village, enjoyed the views and had a wonderful afternoon, swinging by one of the reservoirs that feeds the canal on the way back to the barge and driving into Pouilly, to see where the canal exits the 3 kilometer tunnel that's under the city.

We had a special treat in store for us tonight, Armel and Roland were our entertainment before dinner. They sang and played French and Belgian songs for us. Roland was an amazing piano player and had a great voice, and Armel, was sexy and sultry as she went through their repertoire of music. A perfect touch for cruising through Burgundy and we enjoyed their performance immensely.

Dinner was later because of the entertainment, and since it was John's birthday, we celebrated in style with birthday hats and balloons. Chestnut soup with croutons and duck pate, followed by fish with sauce verte and fresh tomato salsa and rice pilaf, our cheese tray, then birthday cake with crème fraiche and warm berry sauce. To end the meal we had a champagne birthday toast to John by all, including the crew – a perfect way to celebrate such an auspicious day.

Friday, and sadly our last day, we felt like we wanted to mutiny and take over the barge living on it for the rest of the summer, eating Sarah's delicious meals. But alas, we knew we couldn't do that so we tried our best to lock in every memory of that day. We started early, heading out at 6:15 am for a hot air balloon ride over the Burgundy countryside. It was our party's first ride, and Haley and Armel came along to experience one of the most amazing events any of us have had. We jumped in the basket, and with a few blasts of hot air and we were off the ground in seconds. The ground crew unhooked us and we were off! What an amazing thing to view the world from a hot air balloon. Your whole perspective



changes as all that is familiar gets smaller and smaller while you float along on the wind currents. The cows below didn't particularly like us and they would look up and bellow, then race off in a panic. We glided along for an hour until our expert pilot set us down precisely between two wheat fields on a dirt road. The farmer wasn't too happy, and he came out to tell us so, but the balloon did not damage the wheat and we all helped to pack it up and get the basket and balloon back on the trailer, celebrating afterwards with a little champagne!



When we returned to Le Papillon, we had breakfast, then launched for our final trip on the canal through the tunnel. It was a little creepy, damp and dark, but Cedric guided the barge through it without a hitch. We were glad to see daylight on the other side and we moored at our final destination –

Pouilly en Auxois. It was a little sad knowing this was our last spot, but nevertheless, we took off on one last excursion to Fontenay Abbey. Once again we were treated to an astounding setting, beautiful grounds and buildings restored at various stages in its history by the Aynard family. They have done an incredible job of restoring the abbey over the years and we spent a couple of hours wandering through the buildings. On our return trip, we stopped at Semur en Auxois to walk through the medieval city admiring the architecture and remains of the fortifications. Then we loaded up into the trusty VW van and made our way back to the barge.

Our last night was bittersweet, knowing this would be the end to a wonderful week of friendship, learning about French history and culture, enjoying gourmet meals and being spoiled as guests of Le Papillon. But we threw ourselves into the festivities, enjoying our final stupendous meal, starting with a delectable crab cake, then duck with sautéed radishes, haricot verte, patate douce, our cheese course and ending the meal with pannecotta au citron. More champagne, conversations with the crew, then we reluctantly headed off to our cabins to pack and get ready for an early departure the next morning.

Looking back on our week on the barge, we were soothed by the warm hospitality of the crew who saw to our every need. We delighted in the comforts of the barge itself, intimate and cozy with a great deck to sit on and simply watch the scenery go by. We enjoyed the walking and bike riding, spending time together without the intrusions of the everyday stresses of life – work, caring for aging parents, household chores and more. We appreciated the fresh foods we ate, and the expert way they were made into something extraordinary three times a day for us. We left Le Papillon with hugs, kisses on both cheeks and a moist eye, knowing we would miss the leisurely pace and the feeling of being truly cared for by this wonderful group of people. As the van pulled away from Le Papillon for the last time, we all fell silent, each remembering special moments that we tucked away into our memory banks for future reference when we returned to our lives back in the states.

So....if you ever dreamed of a vacation where you don't have to worry about anything, with a perfect setting, just the right amount of activities, delicious food, great companionship and the most wonderful people to care for you – Le Papillon is for you!

How can we ever adequately thank you for providing this incredible opportunity to us? We can only say thank you from the bottom of our hearts for this chance to experience the Papillon and for Larry and I to have a chance to reconnect again, spend some quality time together and remember what being in love is all about.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!
Cindy and Larry



Photo credits: Larry E. Gubb II