

Canal Boating the Baise River - France

Some call this type of travel 'slow' and yes it is very slow, but with a couple of canal boats and a total of ten friends on board you couldn't call it quiet! This was the perfect wind down holiday, with time to enjoy some good food and good company while cruising down the meandering Canal du Garonne and the Baise River. The only noise being the shrieks of laughter from either boat as some misfortunate member missed tossing the mooring lines or got sprayed with the river water.

Our reason for choosing the Baise River was we were informed that it was one of the quieter rivers and wouldn't be dealing with too much river traffic, with some lovely villages to stop off at. We chose the Locoboat Company to rent our 'Penichette'. They have a base in Agen which is situated about 1 hour south of Bordeaux. We had a Penichette 1500FB which has 4 cabins each with their own showers and toilets, and a smaller Penichette 1180FB with 3 cabins again with their own showers and toilets. Both of these boats had fly bridges giving us more outdoor space, where we spent most of the time.



OUR PENICHETTES IN NERAC



OUR PENICHETTES IN LAVARDAC

How to get there

Getting to Agen

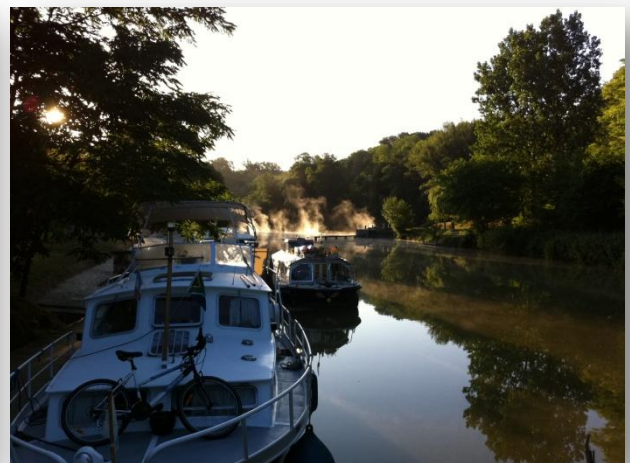
After spending a few days in Paris we took the TGV train from Paris to Agen, via Bordeaux, which took about 4 hours. You can also fly direct to Bordeaux from London. The best way to get to Agen though is by train as the station in Agen is situated next to the Canal and the Locoboat base is a 5 minute walk away.

Provisioning

We chose to provision up on some basics from the supermarket in Agen. The supermarket isn't too far away. The earliest you can get a briefing for the boat is 2.30pm (generally when the staff is back from lunch). So the morning was spent provisioning and we were able to leave all our bags in the office at the base so we could have a wander around. We had all decided that we were going to be eating breakfast and lunches on board, but all our dinners were going to be at restaurants in the villages along the way. We bought tea and coffee (although we found that there wasn't a coffee maker of any sort on board), breakfast cereals and some lovely local cheeses, meats and breads that we also purchased along the way. Of course we had a significant amount of the lovely wines from the Bordeaux region to enjoy!



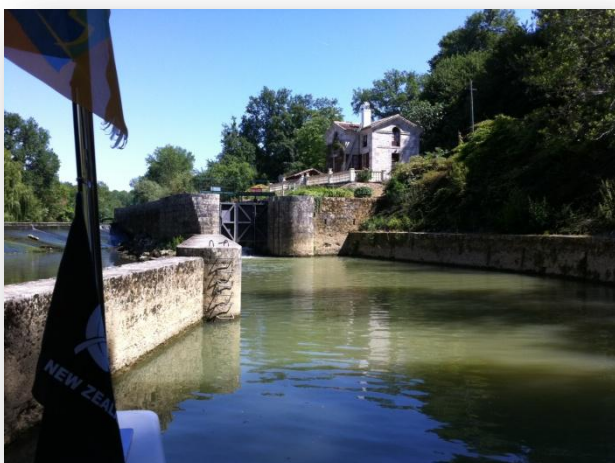
WATER SIDE RESTAURANTS IN NERAC



EARLY MORNING IN VIANNE

Highlights on the Baise

As soon as we left Agen and headed along the Garonne on our way to meet the Baise River we arrived at our first set of locks. The stress on the faces of our 'Captains' was obvious, but we managed them very well and by the time we had done three or four we considered ourselves pros and even started to become critical of others. We had to start looking good quickly as we were flying the New Zealand flag from our stern and the Silver Fern from our Bow, so we were very easily identified by the locals. With cheers of All Blacks, New Zealand and World Cup were powered through the locks and under bridges that often had people Canal boat watching.



ARRIVING AT A LOCK



FLYING THE SILVER FERN

We had 2 bikes on each of the boats and it was certainly a lot of fun taking off for rides along the edge of the river or canal and waiting for the boat to catch up at a village further along. They were also useful in the mornings for those who got up early to go and get the morning pastries, which were a must for breakfast. Even though there were ten of us the four bikes were enough. Too many on board and the boat would have been cluttered and not everyone wanted to bike anyway.

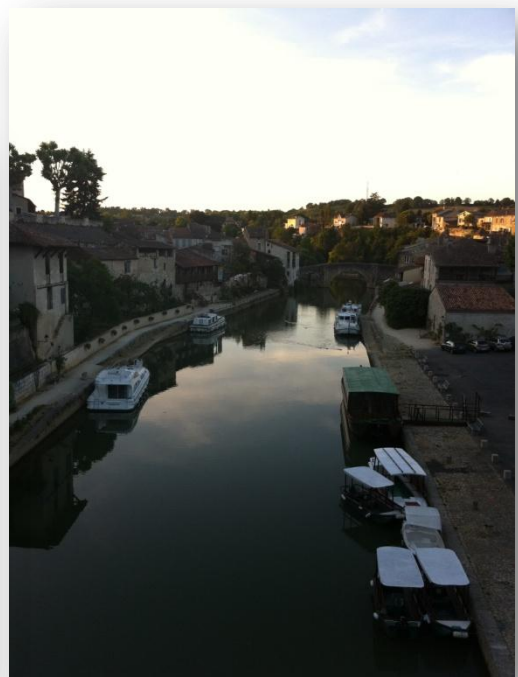


BIKES ON BOARD



ONE OF THE DEEPER AND NARROWER LOCKS

The Baise is certainly a very quiet river, we met very few other boats and the villages were very small, the town of Nerac being the exception. Nerac was originally where Henry III built his castle. It's a very beautiful town and still has many of its medieval buildings standing and in fact being lived in or converted into shops and restaurants. The villages of Vianne, Lavardac were lovely and Moncrabeau was the furthest village we got too. We were sent back towards Nerac by one of the river men as the river got too low for us to continue, with assurances that the river would rise the next day when the rains from the Pyrennes reached the Baise, and it did!



BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES ALONG THE BAISE

The food of the region is Foie Gras, Magret de Canard (duck breast) and Confit of Duck. The menus of all of the restaurants had these dishes on them, although the strangest one has got to be in Nerac called 'Le Vert Galant'. The owners Christine and Jean-Jacque are very passionate about ice cream! They are also passionate about salads and tart things made of large pieces of toasted bread. They don't stop there, they marry the ice creams with every dish. For example a lovely Salad Nicoise with a spoon of pumpkin ice cream or perhaps tomato ice cream and these are not sorbets! The dish that had us all in hysterics was the Duck Tart thingy served with a Fig Ice Cream (see picture). Le Vert Galant is situated right on the edge of the river which was handy and had a lovely terrace area.



DUCK FOIE GRAS AND CONFIT TART WITH FIG ICE CREAM



LARGE SALAD WITH TOMATO ICE CREAM

The Restaurant that we went to on our first night on the Garonne was the one we went back to on our way back to Agen as well. It is called Le Prince Noir and is in a small village about a five minute walk from the canal called Serignac sur Garonne. The food here was exceptional and we gave it a huge tick. This is also a small boutique hotel run by a young couple who were terrific hosts.



LE PRINCE NOIR

While the Baise is a slow flowing river and the villages very quiet and small, for those who want a bit more action there are many other canals and river ways in France to suit everyone. The life on the canals is loved by many as can be seen by the privately owned boats along the way. They all are very unique in their design from the long and sleek to the huge conversions that include fake lawns and sun lounges and even some with very tiny cars on the back, for doing the shopping in I suppose!

When you book a Penichette you are given a list of the things they provide, which is pretty much everything. One of the things we needed was music so we managed to get a couple of the laptops and Ipads connected to speakers. The thing that we missed the most was a coffee plunger or maker of some description. There was nothing on board and we tried to purchase one on the way without any luck. We did manage to buy good coffees at the villages though so that made up for it.

The staff at the LocoBoat Company were very helpful and accommodating. The Penichettes were very clean and the showers and toilets easy to use. We moored up every night at a village and there is power and water supplied at most of them. I would recommend this type of holiday to anyone wanting some down time or for a group who want to enjoy each other's company in a very relaxing environment.



BON VOYAGE!

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Traveller, July 2011**

Travel organised by The Private Travel Company