

Messing About on Narrow Boats

Given a choice of activities for a wet October weekend, how many of you would choose a sedate cruise through the canals of Staffordshire and Shropshire on a [Countrywide Cruisers](#) Narrowboat? Not many, I bet! Mind you if we hadn't done something similar ourselves a couple of years previously, then we wouldn't have been so enthusiastic either. It was cool, there was rain forecast and Friday morning had been particularly hectic work-wise, so what we needed was a good old chill-out over the weekend to recharge the batteries.

Narrow boats are not difficult to sail/drive/pilot, or whatever it is you describe it as. Everything happens very slowly and the canals are so blissfully quiet that you can take your time, relax and go at a pace a snail wouldn't even find challenging. Mrs C still can't get to grips with the fact that the tiller has to be pushed to the left for the boat to go right though. I put it down to the well-accepted inadequacies of the female right-brain. I have a simpler way of getting her to remember which way by imagine that she is pulling the stern (back – for the nautically uninitiated) to one side or the other. I personally prefer the tranquil and far more relaxing option of doing it myself.

By far the most appealing and actually quite beautiful aspect of [narrowboating](#) is that you can very easily find total peace and quiet. Yes there are visitor moorings in most of the towns and villages along the canals, offering very convenient fly-ridden bins and Elsan** disposal units, but there's always the alternative option of finding the remotest spot and just tying up as far away from the hustle and bustle of so-called civilisation as possible. As long as there's sufficient TV signal to receive the latest offering from the good old X-Factor, everything's fine and dandy.

I don't know whether any of you have ever considered a holiday on a lovely Rosie & Jim boat on a canal but we've done it a few times and it's absolutely brilliant! So relaxing.....

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Anyway to cut to the chase, Drifters have offered ALL visitors to [TheBabyWebsite](#) a discount if you book a holiday.....

DRIFTERS, have bases throughout the UK – they are a consortium of 'award winning' holiday boat companies!

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£50 off a part week

£100 off a full week

£250 off two weeks

This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.

Drifters Boating Holidays



'A week on a narrow-boat with 5 hormonally-charged teenagers? You must be out of your minds! people said. That was 18 months ago but other than the occasional sulk (you just try slamming a door on a narrow-boat – impossible!) they couldn't have been more wrong.

We had a week of glorious weather, putt-putt-putting through Cheshire – lovely tranquil scenery and no evidence whatsoever of the rat-race. We moored wherever and whenever we felt like it (funny how there often seemed to be a pub near our spontaneous stops though), the children took it in turns doing the locks, we walked on idyllic canal banks, barbequed, picnicked and revelled in a completely unpressured theme-park-free family holiday! Obviously, we still had to referee the various



siblings' arguments but that's par for the course on any holiday and certainly didn't spoil our enjoyment. In fact, we loved it!!

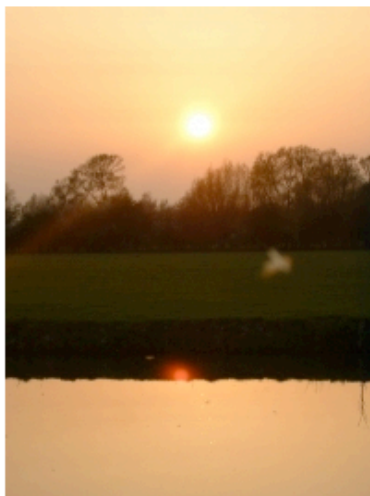
We loved it so much that we decided to try a long weekend, just the two of us, taking a narrow-boat up and down The Thames.

Now I have to confess a certain ignorance as I had no idea that the Thames was anything other than an urban river, for want of a better description. I really did not expect three days of complete and utter rural splendid isolation meandering at a gentle pace on a peaceful river snaking through beautiful spring-green fields and scenery. The only people we saw were fellow boaters and the wonderfully helpful lock-keepers – though at The Trout by Tadpole Bridge there were more than a few patrons enjoying the soporific sunshine, reading the papers, wetting their whistles and generally doing nothing in particular.

Our boat, Sun Dance, was a 4-berth cruiser with loads of nooks and crannies to keep everything uncluttered. We picked the boat up at The Anglo-Welsh Boatyard in Eynsham near Oxford. Steve, the manager, gave us what he called a 'show-around', where he explained how the water, heating, engine, loo and all that malarkey worked. I knew that Nigel was taking it all in so I felt confident in switching off from all the technical stuff and went about putting bottles of Chardonnay and jars of olives in the fridge and generally preparing for our Us-Time Fest!

He came with us up to the first lock to assure himself that the boat was in capable hands and then hopped off again. Locks are a pretty daunting prospect for narrow-boat virgins but as second-timers, we felt like old-hands. The particular stretch of river we were on has all manned locks so I suppose if you want to try this sort of holiday and feel nervous about locks, then it's as good a place as any to start.

The thing about a narrow-boat holiday is that it really is a case of completely and utterly switching off. The transition from the world of deadlines, bills and stress is seamless. One minute we were driving down the M4 along with thousands of other drivers getting wound up by idiots undertaking, faced with mile after mile of orange cones and relentlessly crawling forward in pursuit of the next traffic jam; the next, we were seemingly in a parallel universe!



Now I'm not exactly 'into' the animals thing in a big way but it really is lovely to see so much wildlife in a relatively unspoiled habitat. It was a case of... 'Ooo, look at that one over there...and that one there...and that one up there....and...oooooo!' Between us, we muddled through naming the various different birds, recalling the I-Spy books we had when we were children. There were sleek grebes doing what grebes do, industrious mallards, elegant swans, elusive trout, fussy, chattering larks, huge buzzards and let's not forget, magnificent herons swooping down to land and then posing gracefully and almost deliberately, whilst I fumbled for the camera.

Next time (and there **will** be a next time - this summer with a bit of luck!) I think we'll go for a different boat perhaps with a slightly bigger bathroom and we'll try a different route. Haven't decided which one yet as we are unsure whether to go for an exhilarating, adventurous cruise packed full of locks and lots of solid cruising or a leisurely, sedate trip like the one we've just enjoyed.

The word 'enjoyed' doesn't do it justice. We had a fantastic time and have never felt so relaxed and refreshed after a short break. A weekend, week or even more on a canal-boat really is the most relaxing type of break you could possibly hope for. I can't wait to book the next trip now!

We went with [Anglo Welsh Waterway Holidays](#) who have more than 140 boats cruising from 9 different locations. They can suggest a suitable route for whatever type of break you want whether it's a 3-night weekend break, 4-night midweek break, one week, ten days, a fortnight...a month! You get the picture...

You just tell their team what YOU want to do and they'll be more than happy to guide you to the boat, base and cruise that best suits YOUR requirements.

If you've ever thought of taking a canal holiday but wanted to know more beforehand, then take a look at the [AngloWelsh](#) site or the [Drifters](#) website.