

Women's Holidays - Go Girl!!

BIKE & BARGE THE CANAL DU MIDI

South of France

20 - 27th JUNE 2018

TRIP DETAILS & INFORMATION

TRIP INFORMATION

A barge is a superb way to travel. There's no packing up each day - your gear, accommodation, deck chairs, wine and kitchen floats along with you. This is a holiday where you can really relax, sit back and watch the beautiful scenery as we serenely drift along past lush vineyards in the heart of the Languedoc wine region. Enjoy wine tasting, cycling and sightseeing at medieval villages and ancient fortress cities along the Canal Du Midi.

The Canal du Midi is steeped in history and heritage. You'll see stunning cathedrals, grand châteaux, and ancient Cathar ruins. We'll pass through the famous Fonsérannes Locks and the amazing Tunnel de Malpas. Navigating the locks is all part of the fun. Everyone who wants to, has a chance to steer, throw ropes, work the manual locks and be part of the action. In fact, the barge trip is as active a holiday as you wish. If you just want to lounge around on the top deck and serenely watch the scenery pass by, so be it!

Yvonne Jenkins will host this trip. Yvonne is a seasoned barge skipper & archaeologist – she has a wealth of knowledge about the Cathars, Knights Templar and the ancient archaeological site at Enserune (which we'll visit). Our team will prepare delicious breakfasts with warm croissants, pain au chocolat, fresh fruit and other regional produce.

Our Canal Boat: The Grand Classique is a roomy and elegant 48 foot canal boat. Our upmarket barge has every modern amenity - well equipped galley, 3 showers & toilets, two steering positions, five cabins (which can accommodate twin or double bed configuration), a large open seating area and an upper sun deck with table chairs and parasol.

The trip: Begins at Port Cassifieres on the Mediterranean Sea (near Beziers) and from there we will leisurely cruise along the Canal Du Midi to Castelnaudary (near Carcassonne and Toulouse). We have a relaxed itinerary planned. We'll take time to enjoy highlights such as the medieval walled town of Carcassonne, wine cellars and delightful villages too numerous to list. We'll visit a fascinating archaeological site perched on a hill overlooking an ancient radial irrigation system. Near Beziers you go through the 7 famous staircase locks of Fonserranes. Onlookers usually applaud our women's team as we expertly negotiate through the lock chain.

Weather: Expect temperatures around 20-22 degrees during the day. Evenings will find you dining al fresco in a scented courtyard or by the canal. The early, or latter season of the European summer is a great time to do this trip as the days and nights are mild and the traffic on the canal is not as busy.

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TOTAL TRIP PRICE

AUD \$1690 per person

Included in your holiday price:

- Barge hire, fuel & lock fees
- Bicycle hire
- All breakfasts
- Skipper & guide services
- Wi-Fi on board

Exclusions:

- Flights & transfers
- Lunch & evening meals - Savour local French cuisine in the many villages along the Canal
- Travel Insurance

AREA INFORMATION

The Canal du Midi has been in existence for more than 300 years. Constructed by Pierre Paul Riquet between 1667 and 1681, with the help of about 12,000 workers, 7,000,000m³ was dug out of the earth to connect Toulouse and Sète. The 240km (150 miles) of canal was built using only manpower during the reign of Louis XIV (the Sun King/Roi Soleil). The canal was conceived to allow the transport of goods and the French Navy troops between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean.

The canal today it is almost exclusively used by pleasure boats, but you will see the occasional working barge along the route. The Canal du Midi was recognised by UNESCO as a world heritage site in 1996.

Some of the towns we'll pass along the route are:

Port Cassafieres: A delightful little pleasure port on the Canal du Midi within walking distance of the Mediterranean and its lovely beaches. Its proximity to Spain gives it some interesting flourishes in cuisine, architecture and culture and results in it being a truly cosmopolitan spot to explore.

Béziers: This has been a city of passage for centuries. Situated on the original Herculean Way, between the

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Alps and the Pyrénées. The city owes its name to its ancient Celtic origins and its character to the combined influence of the Iberians, Phoenicians and Phocaeans who endowed the area with vineyards, olive groves and a brilliant civilization. The Romans devastated the spot, only to rebuild it into an even more beautiful city. The city survived the invasions of Vandals, Goths and Moslems.

Trèbes: This was originally a fortified town, the castle was demolished in 1420 and the ramparts during 1801. The town was an outpost for the Roman thirtieth militia, from Carcassonne. Whilst here you can visit the 12th/13th century church of St. Étienne and the aquaduct over the river Orbeil, the latter designed by Maréchal Vauban in 1684.



Carcassonne: This is one of the highlights of our trip. Standing atop the ramparts of La Cité, the walled medieval city of Carcassonne, the traveller can appreciate why the Romans chose to build an important camp on this site. The Pyrénées and the Montagne Noire come close to meeting here, and the promontory now crowned by this fairy tale castle guards the main route between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, known as "La Voie Aquitaine".

The Visigoths possessed Carcassonne after the Romans. Then Charlemagne's Francs held this hilltop, followed by the counts of Toulouse, who built the first great castle and made La Cité as prosperous and chivalrous as their own city. It is not difficult to imagine the streets filled with troubadours, tournaments, and festivals as it was during the time when Carcassonne was known as the flower of Occitan civilization.

La Cité is the third most visited place in France (behind Paris and Mont St. Michel) and is the largest walled medieval city in Europe, with more than fifty towers and three miles of walls.

SLOW FOOD DINING

On our Canal Du Midi bike and barge trip we pass through the very centre of the Languedoc-Roussillon vineyard areas. We can take advantage of the summer sunshine in the South West of France and enjoy the local village fresh food markets, and delightful slow food dining along the canal and daily wine tastings!

Some slow food dining suggestions are:

Au Lavoir is a restaurant and maison d'hôtes in Columbièrs, on the Canal du Midi west of Béziers. Owners Delphine and Louis have tastefully converted an old stone property with style and quality. The cuisine is modern classic perfectly cooked. It should be, as Louis has worked at Troisgros with Michel Guérard during his career. The menus are reasonably priced and include a glass of wine.

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Vinauberge in Poilhes, the next village west along the Canal du Midi.

Harald, an enterprising German who lives in Poilhes, bought the closed wine co-op and developed an interesting use for it - wine! The co-op acts as a link between the Languedoc-Roussillon vigneron and the international wine trade and the public, stocking hundreds of different wines on behalf of the producers. The restaurant serves tapas and simple dishes. Eating in the garden of the co-op is delightful.

Château Les Carrasses, near the village of Capestang.

The Chateau has been converted into suites, flats and houses. The Brasserie serves food with a regional accent and also supplies pizzas and picnic baskets. The wine list is made up almost entirely of well-chosen wines from the Languedoc-Roussillon. They hold regular free wine tastings by Languedoc-Roussillon producers.

LOCAL WINES

We travel through part of the Corbières and Minervois regions. These are two of France's most prolific wine producing regions and there will be plenty of opportunities to sample these local wines.

The **Corbières** are a sparsely populated, mountainous piedmont of rocky escarpments, scrubland and evergreen oak forest, windswept and relatively arid, a natural wine producing area, which is attracting an increasing number of ambitious and innovative growers. The Corbières wine Appellation (an AOC since 1985) is made up of 87 villages covering 15000 hectares of vineyards producing 600,000 hectoliters of wine per year - almost all of it red!

A typical Corbières, is characteristically spicy, while the blending with newer varieties like Syrah can add elegance, fine tannins and flowery aromas. Syrah-dominated Corbières are to be found in the northern and western terroirs, while Grenache and Mourvèdre do better in the hotter southern and eastern areas.

Minervois is an appellation for distinctive red wines from the western Languedoc. In general, they are more supple than the AOC Corbieres wines produced just to the south. The Minervois title also covers rose and white wines. The appellation takes its name from Minerve, a town 25 miles (40km) from the Mediterranean coast and surrounded by the southern French foothills. As is the case with so much of southern France, there is archaeological evidence of Roman viticulture in the area.

The Minervois appellation controlee was granted in 1985 and since then, the local wines have changed dramatically, gaining praise from critics in France and abroad. Mourvedre and Syrah are the predominant grape varieties. Grenache, Carignan and Cinsaut also play their part in the rustic character of these ancient wines. Bourboulenc, Vermentino, Roussanne, Marsanne and Grenache Blanc are the key components of the appellation's white wines, which vary considerably in quality and style.

In addition to dry red and white wines, the area has an historical sweet-wine-making tradition. Minervois Noble, as it is known, is a golden sweet wine made from the same white grapes as its dry counterparts.

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THE FINE PRINT AND PAYMENT

Payment Details:

- Trip price AUD \$1690 per person
- Secure your place with a 20 % deposit (AUD \$340)
- No refunds once full payment has been paid – see Terms & Conditions
- Ensure you have adequate travel insurance
- *Please do not book international flights until we confirm your booking*

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Join us for a relaxing holiday experiencing the old world charm of rural France and its rich heritage.

The Women's Holidays Team – Kim, Leonie and Yvonne.

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