



TRAVEL EDITED BY
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Out and About



Unwinding on a barge and Provençale feasts which don't break the bank

Life in the slow lane

Thanks to Daisy Leitch for the following: 'There aren't many holidays you can take at three miles an hour, but barging is one of them and in early June I went with three friends to try it out. We picked up the barge, the 55-foot *Golden Hind*, at Wootton Waven on the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. On board we had everything we needed and more: extra towels, sheets and pillows, a TV and radio, and a set of particularly fetching leather lounge-chairs. This was cruising in style and comfort. We were given a full briefing and a demo of how to turn the boat – and then we were on our own.

'Shortly after setting off, we crossed two aqueducts, and chugging along high above railway tracks and roads, with a glass of wine in hand, we started to enjoy ourselves. A little trouble with the first lock was soon overcome and we found our way to Wilmcote, the site of Shakespeare's mother's house. After dining on the barge we went for a drink in one of the friendly towpath pubs. However, we couldn't spend all night chatting, as we knew that we had a hard day to follow, with fifteen locks to negotiate on the way

to Stratford.

'With plenty of practice and some helpful tutorials from more experienced bargers en route, we quickly perfected the art of the lock, mastering new skills (such as the importance of moving the boat ahead of the cill) and new jargon (a group of locks is known as a "flight" and when a lock is emptied or filled you say it is "turned"). It was a steep learning curve and we certainly got a lot of exercise opening and closing the gates.

Barging is not the quickest way to travel – but it's the fastest way to slow down

By the time we moored at Stratford, in the gardens next to Shakespeare's Theatre, we were exhausted – but felt a real sense of achievement. That evening we strolled down the river Avon, and went out for dinner in town before returning to the boat for a well-earned rest.

'The next day it was back to base, stopping for a barbeque and enjoying reading and sunbathing from the roof. At one point we fell in behind some scouts on

a weekend break and were more than happy to let them help with the locks.

'After we dropped off the *Golden Hind* and got back into the car we saw the sign for Wilmcote, our first night's stop, and realised that our whole weekend's journey was probably only an hour's walk! Nevertheless we were pleased that we'd made the journey by canal. Barging may not be the quickest way to travel – but it's the fastest way to slow down.'

- *Holiday organised through Drifters (www.drifters.co.uk) 08457 626252 who are offering a discount to Oldie readers as follows: £50 off a part week; £100 off a full week; £250 off two weeks. Please quote Castle Wharf Promotions/Oldie (139). This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer.*
- *For information about enjoying the waterways see www.waterscape.com*

Food for thought

On a recent self-catering holiday with friends in Provence, we were interested to note how the costs of feeding twelve for the week worked out. We ate breakfast at the villa, had lunch there on most days, and divided up preparation of the evening meals between couples. One night – someone's birthday – we ate out. The food was quite good, but not sensational – not nearly as good as the delicious barbecued prawns, tuna, lamb and steaks that we ate under the stars every evening at the villa, looking out on a glorious unspoilt view of rolling woods and distant hills. The meal cost 800 euros; the total for self-catering for twelve for seven days was just 1,000 euros, including all those boring household essentials like washing powder and loo paper. On our last day, we spent the day in Nice, eating a delicious seafood lunch in the old flower market and then splashing out on a couple of sun loungers for a last afternoon on the beach. The price for two loungers, one umbrella and a towel came to 42 euros, but we thought it well worth it as the beach is pebbly and, if you like people-watching, Nice beach is hard to beat!



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