

Paris Tours By Boat - Two Ideas You'll Love!

When I was in Paris recently, I had two great Paris tours by boat which I can highly recommend.

The first was a Champagne Cruise, and the second was a Hidden Paris Barge Tour - let me tell you a little about each of them, and maybe it'll be something you choose to do when you visit the City of Love.

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Paris Tours

Champagne Cruise

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Two of my friends were arriving in Paris from different points of the globe - one from Iceland and one from New Zealand (and I'd come from Australia), so I thought it would be great fun to start our first night in Paris together on a Champagne Cruise.

We all met up in the 11th arrondissement at the Metro Voltaire, and made our way to Bir Hakeim Metro beside the Eiffel Tower. I'd booked the tickets over the internet from Australia before I left home, so we were ready to go! When we emerged out of Bir Hakeim metro, all we had to do was look UP to see the Eiffel Tower and started walking in the direction. Our Champagne Cruise was due to depart at 6pm from the steps on the River Seine closest to the Eiffel Tower. As we walked along the street, we did a bit of window shopping in the tourist shops and looked at some trinkets we might buy on our way back.

When we reached the banks of the River Seine, we headed over to the ticketing office and as I was the only one who spoke any French, I handed over the tickets (printed off the internet) to the ticket collector. My French was rusty, but I certainly understood when he said there were no Champagne Cruises tonight because it was Sunday!

Oh I felt sick in the stomach, and in my terribly shaky French I tried to find out how this could happen when I'd called and confirmed the tickets the day before. This went on for a few minutes back and forth, until the ticket collector started laughing - he was making a joke, and I was so relieved and started laughing with him. Who said the French weren't friendly? Not me :-)

We walked onto our boat and were shown through some heavy velvet curtains to the very front, where we were greeted by a delightful sommelier named Olivier who was going to tell us about Champagne for the next hour as he had us taste several different varieties.

With a glass of champagne held firmly in our hands, the boat slowly moved away from the mooring, and we were gliding on the River Seine looking at the beauty and history of Paris from our perfect spot on the boat. There were several American girls on the cruise, also enjoying the sights of Paris, as a break from their studies here. Another group was from the UK, a couple with their daughter and son-in-law, plus other passengers, and we all got on famously together.

Our sommelier Olivier was extremely knowledgeable on the topic of champagne, and has his own business specialising in champagne tours. We learnt so much and had fun along the way - before we knew it our hour was up, and it was time to disembark. We chatted with the fellow passengers on the wharf and all agreed it was well worthwhile.

I must say this was a truly delightful way to introduce Paris to my friends, and it's a very inexpensive way to see the city from the water - the beautiful historical buildings, the marvellous bridges ('ponts') and the fabulous skyline.

If you can, you really should check out the champagne cruise - I thoroughly enjoyed it!

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Paris Tours

Hidden Paris Barge Tour

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Later in the week we headed off to find the Hidden Paris Barge Tour, due to start at 2:30pm and finishing at 5pm. We stopped at a boulangerie (bakery) and bought baguette sandwiches and bottled water for our little picnic on the barge.

We took the metro and changed twice before arriving at Parc De La Villette, in the 19th arrondissement (Metro: Porte de Pantin). When we came out of the metro we were surprised to see the big open spaces and the artistic buildings - such a contrast to the centre of Paris.

We walked towards the canal and found the departure point for our barge tour. When we climbed aboard, there weren't many people, and I thought that because it was a Friday there might be fewer passengers. As we located some seats and got settled, we enjoyed the warm summer's afternoon and looked forward to our cruise. We weren't on the River Seine, we were actually on a canal on the outskirts of Paris which would wend its way to eventually meet the Seine towards the end of our two and a half hour journey.

More passengers started climbing on board, and suddenly the barge was full - it was an outing for a company's picnic and they were all set to have fun! As we were the only English speakers, it was an interesting way to get to see and meet the locals who were in party-mode.

Pretty soon our ticket collector appeared and started to talk about the surroundings - in French. When he finished, he stood in front of us and gave us the English version, which was lovely. I speak enough French to know that he tweaked the jokes to make us laugh, and it turned out he was an Englishman who'd lived in Paris for many years.

We learnt all kinds of interesting snippets about French history and politics, culture and stories. Because we were on a canal, we had to enter each 'lock' and the large floodgates were locked behind us. The water level would slowly decrease beneath us until we had dropped down a level in the landscape, and then we could proceed. This happened several times, and always drew a crowd who'd hang over the bridges above us, waving and calling out. It was great fun and so different from the typical French tourist attractions!

We ate our picnic and had a marvellous afternoon, chatting to the French locals and thoroughly enjoying ourselves. As we approached a long dark tunnel, we were advised it was 2km long - unlit - and went directly beneath the Bastille monument, which had plenty of history to hear about.

Our guide was very knowledgeable and funny, and made the day so interesting. When we were in total darkness in the underground canal, we could hear a beautiful melody ... as he came forward, his silhouette was outlined by a circular airvent above us in the tunnel, and we could see he was playing a lilting melody on a clarinet - it was haunting and beautiful.

I took lots of photos plus a quick video and have posted them on my website - if you'd like to hear the music, please visit my webpage and click the video:

<http://www.a-night-in-paris.com/paris-tours-berge-cruise.html>

When we finally came back out into the daylight, we headed onto the River Seine to finish our wonderful journey which had been chock full of interesting history, stories, people and places. The two and a half hours had flown by! We reluctantly walked away, crossed the bridge, and grabbed a bus to take us back to Metro Voltaire where we were staying.

Both of these Paris tours were great fun and showed two totally different sides of Paris - if you want to spend some quality time away from the touristic crowds and meet French people, you might want to try these for yourself.

I hope you do! And I hope you have a lot of fun! You can post comments on the websites and let me know about your own experiences in Paris.

Au revoir!

Teena

About the Author

Teena Hughes is an Australian who has lived in Paris and loves all things French. Visit Teena's website to fall in love with the city of light and love.

<http://www.a-night-in-paris.com/paris-tours-berge-cruise.html>

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