

THE BOAT THAT ROCKS

Intrepid seafarer *Mark Silver* enjoys a leisurely cruise along the quiet waterways of Burgundy – without a casino in sight

Before I tell you about my barge trip through northern Burgundy, let me make a grovelling apology.

When my friend Jill suggested my wife Mila and I try this six-night holiday, my first thoughts were this might not be our cup of tea. We are used to big cruise ships. Our last voyage saw us mixing with more than 4,000 passengers, choosing between some 18 or 19 restaurants and bars and sampling a Las Vegas-style casino and shows that would not be out of place in the West End.

We knew little about barges except they are popular along the Norfolk Broads. We feared it would be a little too quiet for us. The barge in question catered for just a dozen passengers, with one restaurant and bar. Instead of roulette and blackjack, there was Scrabble and Monopoly.

But what is that saying about quality, not quantity? I should never have doubted my friend's advice.

Aside from the barge, Burgundy, one of several splendid destinations offered by European Waterways, is breath-taking. In 30-odd years of trips that have involved being on water, this one left me more relaxed than any other.

Did we miss the Rod Stewart tribute act, karaoke or the casino? We did not. The pleasure we gained from speaking to our well-travelled fellow passengers, not forgetting the charming captain, Alan, more than made up for any lack of all that razzmatazz.

Mila and I travelled by Eurostar to Paris, where Alan collected us and our travelling companions from a centrally-located hotel and within a short space of time we all seemed like old friends.

La Belle Epoque is a charming and comfortable vessel. You won't find huge bedrooms, but this is not a trip for lazing in bed. The real luxury comes in the form of fantastic dining plus top-notch service. Nothing is too much trouble. And that, combined with the superb scenery, makes for a memorable experience.

Aside from the all-important captain, there is a deck-hand, two waitresses who attend to the cabins, the talented chef and, last but not least, a knowledgeable tour guide.



Above, *La Belle Epoque* and one of the comfortable cabins; right, Mark and Mila at the imposing Abbey of Fontenay

Days on board are easy-going affairs and even though it is nice to read a book as you amble along at less than three miles an hour, I struggled to get through my novel as my eyes frequently wandered to the lush countryside, spectacular castles and quaint villages.

Burgundy is a fair size, bigger than Belgium, and our trip covered a mere 50 miles. But that was just fine, as there was plenty to see. We met the barge in Tanlay, a short drive from the famous vineyards of Chablis, and finished in Venarey-les-Laumes, a stone's throw from the sight of a famous battle some 2,000 years ago in which the Romans under Julius Caesar triumphed.

During the trip we explored a couple of stunning medieval towns. My favourite was Semur en Auxois, where we strolled around the shops and enjoyed lovely views, the remains of a 13th-century castle and the church, which



dates from 1225 and is a masterpiece of architecture from the outside. Elsewhere, just outside the town of Montbard, is the Abbey of Fontenay, founded in 1118, a joy to stroll around and well worthy of its status as a World Heritage site.

A familiarly sad story is that the Jews were expelled from the duchy of Burgundy in 1306 after first settling there in the sixth century. Records dating from 1245 recall "their lord could demand from them any price for a tax he wanted. Jews were the ones responsible for odious behaviour."

There were relatively large numbers of Jews in the region at various times in history, especially in Dijon, famous for its

mustard, which boasts a synagogue dating from medieval times and left fairly unscathed during World War II. There is also a small synagogue in Chablis.

We particularly enjoyed two activities. The first was cycling along the towpaths amid the beautiful surroundings and meeting a herd of cows leaving their 'patch' to pay us a visit.

The second was one morning when Mila and I rose at around 7am to accompany Alan to the local bakery to stock up on French bread and croissants. The smell alone made up for the hour.

Nor do I want to forget the visits to the local markets, where we watched chef Selby shopping for our dinner that

evening. Now that's something you don't do on the big ships.

You may be thinking about the spa treatments available on board cruise lines. Once Alan got wind of this, he phoned a friend and next day a masseur was on board to remove a few of my knots. Now that's what I call service!

• Prices for a six-night cruise aboard the hotel barge *La Belle Epoque* start from £3,090pp in a twin/double en-suite cabin, including all meals, wines, an open bar, excursions and local transfers. Charters are also available. For more details, call European Waterways on 01753 598555 or see www.gobarging.com



JEWISH NEWS LATE TRAVEL DEALS Holiday bargains with Malcolm Ginsberg, Editor-in-Chief of BTNews.co.uk

This is the time of year when holiday operators offer attractive deals just before the school holidays in late July and August.

ISRAEL: Specialist tour operator Discover Israel has put together a seven-night 'highlights tour' taking holidaymakers on an epic journey to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee. Highlights include Masada, the Dead Sea, Jerusalem, Jericho, the Hula Valley, Safed, the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, Haifa, Mount Carmel and Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Cost £1,369 per person in July and £1,449 in August from Luton or Gatwick, including bed-

and-breakfast, accommodation and all excursions and entry fees. www.discoverisrael.co.uk

FREE JERUSALEM TOURS from Sandemans start from the Jaffa Gate and focus on the Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Armenian Old City quarters and the Western (Wailing) Wall. www.neweuropetours.eu

JERSEY: British Airways Holidays offers a range of quality hotels inclusive of bed and breakfast. The five-star Grand Jersey Hotel & Spa is from £255, the highly-recommended L'Horizon £230, and the Atlantic with its stunning views across St Ouen's

Bay from £310. www.britishairways.com/en-gb/destinations/jersey/jersey-holidays

SPAIN includes the mainland, Balearics and Canaries. First Choice offers, out of Luton, seven nights at Eurosalou Hotel & Spa, Costa Dorada £284; Aparthotel Granada Park, Tenerife £298. www.firstchoice.co.uk/last-minute-deals

BRITTANY offers a seven-night summer break costing from £240 per family staying at one of Eurocamp's toddler parcs. La Grande Météairie is one of 80 Little Eurocamper parcs

offering an array of facilities for toddlers, including a pool, mini-farm and free children's-club activities. Accommodation is a two-bedroom Espirit mobile home with decking. Ferry crossings and fly-drive packages are available at a supplement. www.eurocamp.co.uk

BARBADOS is available from Flight Centre from £899pp with seven nights at the three-star Coconut Court Beach Hotel on a room-only basis, including return direct scheduled flights from Gatwick with British Airways. www.flightcentre.co.uk

CUNARD offers QM2, which mixes

the North Atlantic with Canada/US; *Victoria*, based at Southampton, for northern Europe, and *Queen Elizabeth*, which embarks on its largest Mediterranean programme so far with Athens, Rome and Venice. Prices start at under £1,000 for seven nights. www.cunard.co.uk

P&O CRUISES offers a seven-night cruise on the adults-only *Arcadia* from £549 per person, departing Southampton. Kosher (Hermolis) available at no extra cost. For details, email diets.reservations@carnivalukgroup.com www.pocruises.co.uk

