

# THE ADVERTISER TRAVEL SECTION - River Cruising in Holland

## CRUISING ON THE LUXURY HOTEL BARGE - PANACHE

*Put together 6 people from the USA, 1 from Canada and 2 from the UK on a luxury barge in Holland and what do you get? ... a fantastic time!*

David Powell cruises through Holland on the Panache operated by European Waterways.

Spring is an ideal time to visit Holland and with miles of tranquil, scenic canals to explore I was looking forward to an all inclusive week onboard this luxury hotel barge.

My journey starts at Ashford International in Kent where after a stress free check-in my wife and I catch the 7.28am London to Brussels Eurostar. Right on time with allocated and comfortable seats situated close to the buffet carriage. We're soon through the Channel Tunnel sitting back

enjoying the views as we travel through France and Belgium. I'm always impressed with the ease and efficiency of Eurostar - no lengthy check-ins, extra baggage allowances and easy transfers to your onward destination, in my case Amsterdam. I've chosen to stay overnight pre-cruise in Amsterdam and European Waterways suggested a centrally located hotel.

Arrangements had been made for my wife and I to be picked up from the hotel lobby at 4pm. At the appointed time, Ayesha, who'll be our tour guide for the week, is there to transfer us to Panache. Ayesha is friendly and professional; just time to say hello to a few other guests who've arrived in the lobby and with plenty of assistance with the loading of our luggage we're soon settled in the comfortable Mercedes mini-bus for the short drive to Alkmaar where Panache awaits!

Ayesha points out landmarks on the route and answers last minute questions that arise, although to be honest the pre-cruise information and advice sent out by European Waterways was very comprehensive.

### *Flags flying, looking rather splendid ...*

We soon arrive in Alkmaar and on the canal close to the centre of town we spot Panache for the first time ... flags flying and looking rather splendid, we're all eager to get onboard. Forget the luggage, that will soon be safely placed in our cabins, we enjoy a champagne welcome with the friendly professional English speaking crew ... Riad, the cruise manager; Arnold, the skipper; Ayesha, tour guide; Christophe the



Panache at one of her moorings

French chef, and Lizzie and Sophie the hostesses. More champagne and snacks and now a chance to get to know fellow guests, three more having arrived in the second mini-bus, bringing the total number to 3 couples and three single guests. We move from the deck to the comfortable lounge all exchanging names and personal details ... who was to know that after six days we were all to become firm friends, exchanging addresses and all sad to be saying our goodbyes.

But for now it was time to investigate our cabin before dinner.

### **CABIN FACILITIES**

Down a few flights of stairs from the lounge and there are six guest cabins of a very high standard. Our cabin was really spacious with a comfortable double bed, TV, air conditioning/heating, plenty of wardrobe space and drawer storage, writing desk and en-suite WC, twin basins and a lovely oversized shower. The cabin was traditionally decorated to a high standard with windows near ceiling level.

### **PUBLIC AREAS**

The Panache is a stylish luxury hotel barge accommodating up to twelve passengers. The lounge and adjacent dining areas are extremely comfortable with glorious panoramic windows, ideal to watch the world go by when cruising. There's a large sun deck with bicycles for guest use and a heated spa pool, which I can definitely recommend having tried it out with a fellow guest at midnight in Delft, champagne in hand - great fun!

All gourmet meals are included together with carefully selected wines, both white and red, at lunch and dinner and there's an open, well stocked bar. The barge had a small library, cd player with a wide selection of music and free WiFi connection in the lounge.



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A gentle cruise on a hotel barge was certainly very different to anything I had experienced before ... and I loved it! This is a perfect relaxed way to discover some of the most beautiful waterways of Holland and in fact throughout Europe, as European Waterways offer a lot of different cruise itineraries covering France, Italy, the UK, Ireland, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany.

The highly professional Panache crew worked together as a team providing the guests with a service that can only be described as outstanding. Nothing was too much trouble ... guests were there to be spoilt, and spoilt we were!

As we cruise along the waterways we see life from a different angle. I take the opportunity mid-cruise to join Riad and Arnold in the wheelhouse and I am amazed at how they safely guide this really long vessel into small locks and through the bridges, sometimes with just inches to spare.

### GOURMET DINING



One of the highlights of this cruise was the dining. Our chef, Christophe prepared fabulous meals throughout the week. From continental breakfasts to three course lunches served with fine regional wines and cheese admirably described by Sophie and Lizzie, through to wonderful four course candlelit dinners served with another great selection of wine and cheese.

Fine wines ... a wide and varied cheese board ... and Christophe's sensational culinary creations - the perfect combination!

### INCLUSIVE TOURS

Holland is of course mostly famous for its cheese, windmills and tulips and our cruise on Panache came with a well balanced itinerary of excursions.

We walked around quaint Alkmaar famous for its cheese market, we cruised to Wormerveer and had the option to ride a bicycle or be driven by Ayesha to Zaanse Schans an open conservation area with windmills and clog makers in action.



Fields of tulips at Keukenhof Gardens



We visited picturesque Haarlem and toured the world famous Keukenhof Gardens with more than seven million tulips, daffodils and hyacinths creating a stunning floral spectacle. We explored Leiden and cruised to Delft, our final mooring at the end of the week. Here we visited the Royal Delft factory to see how the world famous earthenware is made. We also had the opportunity to explore many fascinating shops and markets along the way. Before I knew it our six day tranquil and relaxing cruise had come to an end. We had experienced Holland like never before, enjoyed wonderful meals and fine wines and discovered beautiful canals, waterways, and navigated through the locks and bridges along the route.

### CONCLUSION

This was my first luxury hotel barge cruise and I would most certainly recommend it. My wife and I rated this as one of our best holidays. European Waterways delivered a specialised, and professional service from start to finish and this cruise experience will be remembered for many years to come. I can't wait to go barging again; a relaxing way to see more of Europe's finest scenery, experience the history and local culture on Panache or one of the other barges in the fleet.

Thank you Riad and your wonderful team for making this a special holiday and thank you to fellow guests for your company, friendliness and good humour. ... Here's to next time!

*David Powell travel & features editor*



### FACT BOX – MORE INFORMATION:

European Waterways - luxury hotel barging along the canals and waterways of Europe. Prices for a 6 night cruise aboard the 12 passenger hotel barge 'Panache' are from £3,190pp in a twin/double en suite cabin, including all meals, wines, an open bar, excursions and local transfers. Charters are also available.

**European Waterways: Tel: +44 (0)1753 598555**

**See their website [www.gobarging.com](http://www.gobarging.com)**

**[www.youtube.com/user/EuropeanWaterways](http://www.youtube.com/user/EuropeanWaterways)** also features a wide range of short video clips of barge cruises

**Eurostar** offers return fares to Amsterdam from just £99. Eurostar also offers connecting fares from more than 300 stations in the UK. For more information or to book, **visit [eurostar.com](http://eurostar.com)** or call 08432 186 186. Eurostar are due to start a direct London to Amsterdam service in December 2016.

David has produced a video review of Panache and his Holland cruise experience and this can be viewed at: **[www.YourHolidayTV.com](http://www.YourHolidayTV.com)**