

CANAL BOATING *in luxury and style!*

Enjoy an altogether slower pace of life onboard a canal boat – a truly unforgettable experience

You can't help but hark back to times past while meandering down the historic Grand Union Canal. Stretching from Birmingham at its northern most point to London in the south, the Grand Union has a number of destination towns along its banks. Braunston and Stoke Bruerne, in Northamptonshire, are well-known to boaters going back generations, and towards Birmingham, the historic towns of Warwick and its close neighbour Leamington Spa, offer contrasting surroundings, attractions and experiences. There is no shortage of activities along the banks of the canal, whether fishing, cycling, walking, sightseeing or just sitting in one of the many pubs, watching the world go by.

ACCOMMODATION

There are a number of options when it comes to selecting a canal boat hire company that services the Grand Union Canal. Puddling Cruisers, a small family-run business, has a luxury canal boat called *Serenity* that truly lives up to its name. Offering a stylish interior featuring solid oak flooring, low-level ambient lighting and all mod cons – including a 32in TV, DVD and a Roberts DAB radio with CD player and iPod dock – relaxation and calm are easily achieved while lapping your way through the British waterways. Comfortably sleeping up to four people, *Serenity* has one double bedroom and a corner sofa in the 'saloon' that cleverly converts into a second double bed.

LOCATION

Serenity is moored at the Milton Keynes Marina, a modern city centre marina nestling in a 15 mile, lock-free stretch of the Grand Union Canal. It's easy to get to via train as it's only ten minutes from Milton Keynes mainline train station. Should you decide to travel by car, the marina is situated just 10 minutes from junction 14 of the M1 and has secure parking.



Travel log April

First impressions

Stepping on board the widebeam cruiser 'Serenity', we were really impressed with the high-end approach the family-run business has applied throughout the boat. Crisp white bed linen, freshly folded Christy towels and dressing gowns, Molton Brown toiletries, a fully-equipped luxury galley kitchen (complete with wine chiller and a complimentary bottle of wine) and a freshly cut arrangement of flowers were all there. The perfect start to our relaxing break cruising down the Grand Union Canal.

What we did

Having had no previous experience with canal boating, our friendly host, Rob, quite literally showed us the ropes and gave us a short lesson on how to drive and navigate successfully through the canal systems and locks enroute. Confidence quickly built as we travelled north to the picturesque village of Stoke Bruerne, near Towcester, traversing the locks as we went.

Highlight

Aside from the peaceful time we spent relaxing onboard 'Serenity', our highlight was the Roses & Castles painting course. We really enjoyed learning new painting skills in such pleasant company and we also got to keep our art work – a lovely memento!

More information: From £900 for one week – 15% discount available when booking two or more consecutive weeks. Milton Keynes Marina, Peartree Bridge, Waterside, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK6 3BX, 020 8123 3612, www.puddlingcruisers.co.uk.



FEATURE HELEN BLUNT PHOTOGRAPHY © MARK SIMS WWW.MARKSIMSPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

CALL FOR HELP
The Canal & River Trust are always on the look out for volunteers to protect and enhance our inland waterways. Visit www.canalrivertrust.org.uk for more information.

OUT AND ABOUT
in the locale

'ROSES & CASTLES' PAINTING COURSE

The Canal Museum of Stoke Bruerne, situated on the banks of the Grand Union Canal, hosts a wonderful 'hands-on' two-day course. Run by the ever-energetic and thoroughly friendly Terrence Edgar, a modern-day canal artist, we learnt how to paint in the traditional Roses & Castles style that has been synonymous with canal boating since the 1840s. Previous painting experience isn't required – we were able to work at our own pace, and Terrence was on hand to give one-on-one tuition throughout. On the course you will be supplied with all of the painting materials required, you need only bring an old shirt to paint in and your sandwiches, as lunch is not provided.

More information:

The course runs from 10am to 4pm each day, £85 per person. Dates for courses in 2013 are 11-12 May and 21-22 September. Space is limited on each course, so early booking is highly recommended. The Canal Museum of Stoke Bruerne, 01604 862229, www.stokebruernecanalmuseum.org.uk.



THE WALNUT TREE INN

If, like us, you fancy venturing on to dry land of an evening, we found a lovely family-run hotel, bar and restaurant, that was well worth a visit. Situated just outside the historic village of Blisworth, near Northampton, and only 400 yards from bridge 49 on the Grand Union Canal, The Walnut Tree Inn (formerly known as the Blisworth Hotel and Gardens) has a long history in the hospitality business stretching back to 1850. Catering for the railway travellers passing through on their journey on the London to Birmingham mainline, they built up a reputation for their evening entertainment, and in the more recent past for hosting artists such as Gary Moore and Deep Purple. After a full renovation in 2005, the inn maintains a welcoming and homely feel and offers an extensive menu offering food that wouldn't be out of place in a five-star restaurant.

More information:

The Walnut Tree Inn, 01604 859551, www.walnut-tree.co.uk.

