

Canals and Waterways Travel!

by Victor Block, Travel Columnist, shayphred@aol.com

Until the 1820s, people in Georgia relied upon rivers for their long-distance transportation needs. But as the state's population expanded into the interior Piedmont region, those waterways became inadequate to meet the demand.



Kayaker paddling along a canal in the United States!
Photo by Victor Block

Between 1826 and 1846, four major canals were built. The Brunswick Canal and the Savannah, Ogeechee, and Altamaha Canal were designed as transport canals. The Augusta Canal and a smaller one in Columbus were designed to generate waterpower for manufacturing.

Similar waterways have wound their way through Europe for centuries. Some have similarities with those in Georgia and elsewhere in the United States, while others are starkly different.

I recently followed one of these routes, in a former working boat transformed into a luxurious floating hotel and gourmet restaurant. It carries 12 passengers along historic canals, stopping each day to allow travelers to explore an inviting variety of on-shore attractions.

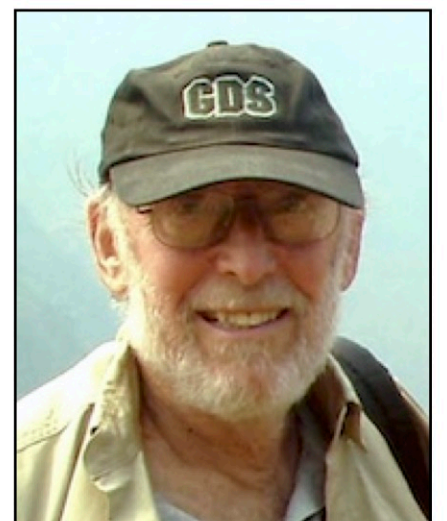
I sailed with French Country Waterways, an American-owned company that operates four luxurious passenger barges along canals in four regions of that country.

The *Nanuphar* on which I traveled rivals first-class hotels in terms of comfort and luxury. The food and wine vies for attention with the magnificent scenery through which the boat passed.

As the vessel moves slowly along canals, passengers have a welcome choice of alternatives. Relax and observe other boats pass by. Step ashore and walk, or pedal a provided bicycle.



Nanuphar going through lock in France!
Photo by Victor Block



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Travel Columnist

Because the canals climb hills and run through valleys, locks handle changes in elevation. These devices allow boats to rise up, or drop down, to the level of the next stretch of the channel.

The canals provide passengers with views of rolling vineyards and dense forests, lush farmlands and mountain vistas, along with charming villages which immerse visitors in history, culture and architectural treasures.

Day trips include an assortment of places that provide introductions to a diverse sampling of French history, life and culture.

Sancerre is an enchanting hilltop village. Houses sport ancient doors, wrought iron balconies and steeply pitched roofs. A sign on one wine shop announced that it has been in business since 1513.

Fargeau Castle, situated between the Loire and the Yonne rivers in the small historic town of Saint Fargeau, is known in part for its unusual pentagonal shape. It was built between the 10th and 13th centuries as a hunting lodge.

History-rich villages, inviting vineyards and world-class food and wines greet visitors to France with open arms. Taking in these attractions during a canal barge trip adds a welcome way to enjoy much that the popular destination has to offer. Similar, yet different, experiences are available in Idaho.

Fares for French Country Waterways cruises include on-board gourmet meals and fine wines, a memorable dinner at a starred Michelin Guide restaurant, around-the-clock snacks and open bar, shore excursions and more. For more information, log onto fcwl.com or call 800-222-1236.



Tour Boat on a canal in the United States!
Photo by Victor Block



Canal traffic in France!
Photo by Victor Block



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