

# A SERENE SOJOURN ON THE CHARENTE RIVER

## *Exploring France's Charente Region with Le Boat*

In the heart of western France, the Charente River offers a journey where time slows, flavours linger, and every bend reveals a story. A week aboard a Le Boat barge turned our group of friends and family into explorers, drifting between vineyard-clad banks and medieval villages, a voyage that blended French charm, gentle adventure, and the simple joy of life on the water.

The Charente River, a tranquil ribbon weaving through western France's lush landscapes, beckoned our group of friends and family for a barging adventure (private boat rentals) with Le Boat. Promising slow-paced exploration and effortless connection, this trip required no boating expertise, just a thirst for discovery. From Jarnac to Rochefort, we cruised the Cognac region, stopping at hidden gems like Port d'Envaux, Bourg-Charente, Graves, and St. Simon, each adding charm to our journey.

We began in Jarnac, stepping aboard our Le Boat barge – a floating haven with a well-equipped kitchen, three cosy cabins, and a sundeck

perfect for morning coffees and starlit dinners. The Le Boat team's briefing gave us confidence to navigate, and soon we were gliding along the Charente, its willow-lined banks and vineyards shimmering in the sunlight.

### FROM COGNAC TO CARVINGS

Our first stop was Cognac, the spirit-soaked heart of the region. Rémy Martin's distillery was a highlight, where a tasting of smooth cognac warmed our senses and enriched our dinners on the deck for the rest of the trip. A riverside bistro lunch of paté and crisp wine set a delicious tone as we soaked in the beauty and almost tangible history of this iconic city. Just beyond Cognac, we moored at Chez Landard (PK1), where the hospitable Monsieur Babinot









welcomed us for tastings of Pineau des Charentes, a fortified wine made by blending grape juice with Cognac. A short walk to the old mill offered stunning views of the Charente valley, perfect for a reflective pause.

Next, we cruised to Port d'Envaux, a quaint village between Saintes and St. Savinien. Along Rue des Armateurs, grand residences hinted at its past prominence. We visited the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Château de Panloy, marvelling at its tapestries and hunting gallery. By the river, a sandy play area invited a picnic, with kayaks and refreshments adding to the afternoon's ease. A cycle to Les Lapidiales, an old quarry one kilometre away, revealed striking rock carvings by global sculptors.

In Chaniers, a peaceful hamlet, we moored amid meadows and stone bridges. Cycling the towpath and

picnicking with charcuterie and fresh bread felt like a scene from a painting, dragonflies skimming the water. Saintes followed, where Cathédrale Saint-Pierre's Gothic arches and stained glass captivated us. A market haul of asparagus, baguettes, and Camembert fuelled another sundeck feast, the rhythm of slow travel sinking in.

#### **VILLAGES, VINEYARDS, AND MARKETS**

Bourg-Charente (between Cognac and Châteauneuf-sur-Charente) captivated us with its 12<sup>th</sup>-century Romanesque church and its connection to Grand Marnier. At Domaine Pautier, two kilometres south, a guided vineyard and distillery tour ended with a tasting. Golf enthusiasts in our group detoured to the 18-hole Golf du Cognac, its vineyard-lined course a scenic challenge.





In Graves, we moored at the pontoon and visited Maison Brillet's cellars for free tastings of Cognac and Pineau des Charentes. Borrowing the church keys revealed a 12<sup>th</sup>-century gem overlooking the village. Nearby, St. Simon's barge-building heritage came alive at Maison des Gabarriers, detailing the lives of shipbuilders and sailors. We admired the "graffiti" carved by sailors in the church's stone and spotted La Renaissance, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century gabarre replica, at Juac's marina.

Saint-Savinien, perched on a rocky outcrop, enchanted us with cobbled lanes and a market brimming with peaches and sausages. Moules marinières at a riverside café, with our barge in sight, was a highlight, followed by a BBQ under a pink-streaked sky. Rochefort, with its naval dockyards and maritime grit, offered a vibrant market for cheeses and baguettes, setting the stage for another sunset feast.

Heading back east, Châteauneuf-sur-Charente buzzed with market stalls of figs and goat's cheese, perfect for our deck-side dinner. In Trois-Palis, Chocolaterie Letuffe's truffles and pralines were a sweet indulgence, most devoured before we left. Angoulême, our final stop, dazzled with comic-themed murals and a hilltop cathedral. A bistro lunch of coq au vin and wine overlooking the Charente capped our adventure.

Returning to Jarnac, we felt the tug of leaving our floating home. Le Boat's Charente journey blended adventure and serenity, with each village – Port d'Envaux's quarry art, Bourg-Charente's vineyards, Graves' cellars, St. Simon's gabarres, and Chez Landard's warm welcome – adding depth to our travels. Nightly deck dinners, fuelled by market finds, became cherished rituals.

*Le Boat's routes, from France's Canal du Midi to Italy's Venetian Lagoon, offer something for every wanderer.*

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