



## *Brittany Boating with Clare and Simon.*

Simon Well this is our third year, so we started it three years ago. And why did we start it? Because we live in a lovely mill on the River Blavet, and we sit there and wonder why no boats go past. And we thought, we had no intention when we came out to Brittany, in setting up such a business, but we thought/remember all the boats that go past on all the rivers in the UK, and how popular it is there, here's a beautiful river that nobody's making the most of. We thought we'd better put some boats on the river.

Elaine And that was when, that was in about 2017 was it?

Simon 17 yeah. '17 we started with two boats and ... on the River Blavet ... and then in the following year ...

Elaine Last year.

Simon Last year, we put two boats here in Rohan, on the Nantes-Brest canal.

Elaine So you've got the two bases?

Simon We've got two bases. One in St Nicolas, St Nicolas des Eaux, on the Blavet, and here in Rohan on the Nantes-Brest canal. So we were a little naïve, perhaps, in everything that it would take to start up a business, but then it seemed like such a good opportunity and, yes, as you say, we're not completely naïve in living and operating in France. Then the really complicated bit was associated with setting up a, a business renting boats, because there's a complicated system where, because you have to have a licence, to operate a boat on a river, we have to provide that licence and the training that goes with it to all of our clients, who don't have inland waterway licences, and that's the majority of our clients. And that whole process, nobody seems to know very much about. And, and it's not available on the internet, and it's not electronic, and we eventually found out the office in Nantes that deals with all of that and it took ... it was very mysterious. But we eventually got there.

Elaine Well it ... I think it's ... when you're going down a road that hasn't been travelled before, and the legislation, such as there is, which there is a lot here, doesn't fit in, then they've got to almost go back to square one themselves, haven't they?

Clare I mean, you have to really look hard to find what you need, and ... yeah, we did it in the end, but it, but it does mean that anyone who, who rents the boats, doesn't have to have a licence, because they operate it under our ... under the licence that we have.

Elaine So it's worth it in the end.

Simon There's an interesting word called 'nollisage', which nobody's heard of ...

Clare And nobody knows what it means.



Simon We are nolliseurs, and we, we provide the training.

Elaine Not even the French. You might be the very first.

Clare It's extraordinary, isn't it? We've even asked the French, our friends, the French and ...

Simon Nobody knows what it means.

Clare Nobody knows what it means.

Simon But we are nolliseurs, accredited nolliseurs.

Elaine So how many boats do you have, and where did you find them?

Clare We've got four, so two in each base. And we went to Holland.

Elaine Were they in good condition? Or did you have much to do?

Simon They're in pretty good condition. And that's actually ... part of the reason for going to Holland is, firstly, they've got a huge number of boats available, and they're all very solidly built, so unlike most of the boats available in France, which are all fibre-glass, these are all steel, which means a bit more maintenance, but they are, if you do that maintenance, then they'll stay in very good condition. Some of our boats are very old – the hull on one of them is from 1900.

Elaine But also, if you say they're more solid, then in the hands of an amateur.... you're less likely to have, perhaps, damage.

Clare If you bash it, there's less likely to be, you know, serious damage. We might have scraped paint – well, we do have scraped paint and the odd dent, but nothing like with a fibre-glass ...

Elaine How many people do, do the boats accommodate in general, and what about children, because I know people come, they have families coming over in the summer with little ones – grandchildren I think?

Simon Well, we can accommodate between two and eight. So, all of the boats can be driven, navigated by two people, easily. They've got bow-thrusters on them, which means that actually moving them is quite easy, so in addition to the rudder, driven by the steering wheel, you've, you've got bow-thrusters, which propel the front of the boat, so it's easily navigated with a little joy-stick to get into locks and bring it alongside. So navigation's quite simple. So back to the question of how many people, we can take eight people on two of the boats, but it's very cosy. We like to talk to people in advance and find out what their requirements are and make sure they understand just how cosy it might be and the fact



that you're sharing a very small bathroom with a hand-shower, and that's going to be it. It's a little bit camping, or caravanning, but on the water in beautiful old boats. We've had a family this year of two parents with five children – a variety of ages – and they got on absolutely fine. Two types of boats are a little bit different. One the vedette type, the classic Dutch river cruiser has railings all round it, and so you can harness up a child and attach to the railings, and the child can walk along the railings and go up to the front and the back in relative security, whereas the barge-type ones are a little bit like English narrow boats, they do have walkways down the side but you have to hang on to a bar on the roofs as you go past, so if you're a small child you can't reach those.

Elaine What previous experience, if any, is needed when you, when somebody hires one of the boats? Do they need any training?

Clare No. None.

Simon So there's no, no experience is required. So we ... this is part of this process we were talking about, about the nollisage, the need to give basic instructions. The formal training to get a permit for inland waterways takes you through all the flags, and lights, and everything that you might need if you came across a tanker being towed from astern – all sorts of things. But on the waterways here, it's simply a question of ... if you meet another boat, which side so you pass? If you're going through a bridge, which archway do you go through, so that you don't hit other people or hit an archway that doesn't have enough water underneath. So there's, there's a simple bit of waterways navigation, then there's explaining all, how to navig ... how to manoeuvre the boat, and all the equipment on board, so there's the fridges and how to change the gas bottle if necessary, and all the things that they will need to know. And then I will go out with every crew and do – even if they're got full experience – and do one or more locks. Usually for people that haven't done it before, three or four locks, and when they're comfortable and I'm comfortable, then I hop off and cycle back or walk back ...

Clare Well yeah, it works for both of us really, because we're happy that they're able to do what they're doing and they're happy because that they've got confidence that Simon has shown them. But you know they've got everything on board. We do the beds, we give towels, we ... the kitchen's fully equipped, we do a welcome ... a little welcome pack, tea, coffee, you know ... so they can keep up.

Simon We do try and keep the training part down to a relatively short period because, of course, people when they arrive they want to get going and on the water.

Elaine ... want to get going. Yes.

Simon So, it takes about an hour to get on board and give enough basic instruction on the boat, and then we can do the rest under way when we're doing the first few locks.



Elaine So, not locks really then, no problem there. How far can you go each way and for how long? How long can people usually take the boats out?

Clare You know, you know all of that.

Simon In our view, a week is a perfect time for cruising. Or a minimum of a week, because in that you can spend three days and, for example, from Rohan, you can go up to Josselin and spend a night in Josselin, and then beyond that you've got Montertelau and Roc St Andre and Malestroit. If you're doing a week's holiday, that's comfortable. You're not doing too much, you're perhaps doing three hours' cruising each day, and you'll get there and do that.

Elaine So are you open all the year round or do you take some time off?

Clare No, well the, the locks are closed from the end of October till the beginning of April, so there is no, no traffic on the rivers then at all.

Elaine And what for future plans, will you get any more boats or ... is that no?

Simon I mean common sense, or the business sense, says that we need more boats to make it a commercial, properly commercial business. But actually what we want to do is to be able to provide the personal service and make it something that we can help our clients have a good holiday and add a little bit to it and help them plan it and really actually four is all we can manage.

Elaine Well thank you very much. Continue messing about on the river. And I think it's a splendid venture, and, you know, I really, really think it ... what a wonderful place ...