



Le Boat manages a fleet of 24 motorized cruisers on the Rideau Canal. PHOTOS: LE BOAT

## HOTEL INTEL

# BE YOUR OWN SKIPPER ON RIDEAU CANAL CHARTERS



ROCHELLE LASH

To go or not to go? Travel is opening up, with welcome changes. The establishments featured in Hotel Intel have instituted new physical distancing and sanitation protocols.

Chartering pleasure craft from Le Boat is a glorious way to get away from it all. Imagine the splendid isolation of life on the water — fresh air and balmy breezes, and the daily delights of visiting different ports. It's pure freedom.

Le Boat rents 37- to 49-foot motor yachts for multi-day cruises along the picturesque Rideau Canal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that links Ottawa and Kingston, passing through charming villages steeped in Canadian history.

These cruises are distinctly family-friendly, because travelers stay and play together for several days. And what makes this vacation a true adventure is that you can be your own captain.

### IF YOU GO

**Le Boat:** 800-734-5491; leboat.ca; 1 Jasper Ave., Smiths Falls, Ont. Boats have one bathroom per cabin (except for certain Horizon 1 craft, usually for two people).

**Sample prices (rates fluctuate and are approximate):** Horizon 3, for up to seven people, Aug. 21-28, seven nights, from \$7,009; Horizon 1, up to five people, Aug. 21-24, three nights, from \$2,924. Prices can be lower in September.

**Rideau Canal Visitor Centre:** Mon.-Fri., 888-773-8888, 613-283-5170; pc.gc.ca; 34 Beckwith St. S., Smiths Falls, Ont.

If you are a two-parent family, for example, mom can be the skipper and dad can be the first mate and chef, and the kids can be the crew. Chartering a boat means you bring your own food and beverages, but you can make stops to replenish supplies.

Le Boat's craft are like luxurious houseboats. During the journey, passengers can barbecue on the upper deck, have cocktails, or drop anchor for paddleboarding,

kayaking, cycling, hiking, fishing or swimming. Le Boat's itineraries start and finish in Smiths Falls, Ont., home to the Rideau Canal Visitor Centre, which has history exhibits and the Parks Canada Xplorers Program for youngsters. It's the perfect place to get your bearings and plan the high points of your journey.

**Itineraries:** Most clients live on the water for three to 10 days, cruising for a few hours each day. One seven-day itinerary, with a total of 27 hours of boating over 126 kilometres and 14 locks, leaves from Smiths Falls and heads south into Westport, where you can visit the Scheuermann Vineyard & Winery and the Westport Brewing Company, and enjoy the beach or hike the Foley Mountain Conservation Area. Then it's on to Newboro, known for Kilborn's general store — a great stop for local products — and Chaffey's Lock, an area popular with paddlers.

**How to cruise:** I wondered about the wisdom of tossing the keys to almost anyone who wants to be a captain. Me, for instance. I am more of a landlubber than a seafarer. Would I be a capable skipper — comfortable at the helm, exuding confidence and alert to all happenings? Do I know port



Le Boat's craft have spacious saloons and galleys with panoramic windows.

from starboard?

"Our boats are easy to use even for first-time captains — no previous experience is required," said Sandy Crothers, Le Boat's highly experienced base operations manager for Canada. "We train you to pilot the boat yourself — you'll have a steering wheel for left and right, like a car, and a throttle for forward and reverse.

"Our team sets up an orientation on the dock and an instructor accompanies each boat for a short distance to make sure the designated captain has mastered the controls, the complexities of travelling through locks and the rules of navigation. We also have 24-hour telephone service.

"Plus, our craft cruise at a maximum 10 kilometres an hour."

**Le Boat's craft:** Le Boat, a 50-year-old company, has a fleet of 950 motorized cruisers at 37 marinas in eight European countries. The company launched in Canada in 2018 and now manages a fleet of 24 on the Rideau

Canal. The pleasure craft, all fiberglass monohulls, are available in three sizes: the 37-footers accommodate four people; at 44 feet, there are models with three or four cabins for up to eight people; and the 49-foot boats can house 10 to 12. In some cases, the dining area (called a saloon) converts to a double bed.

"If you are planning on a full houseboat, you have to know each other really well, and you have to be comfortable in close quarters," Crothers said.

The luxurious Canadian fleet was custom-designed for Le Boat, with easy handling and deluxe onboard features such as a sun canopy, upper deck seating and two steering locations — one outdoors and another indoors. The galleys (that's kitchens in marine-speak) are modern, and here's an impressive perk: each cabin has its own head (bathroom), with Plexiglas separating the loo, the shower and the sink. [rochelle@rochellelash.com](mailto:rochelle@rochellelash.com)

# 'You're a cat in the window'

U.S. family in Scotland for a wedding surrounded by kindness in quarantine

KATHRYN STREETER

When the U.K. announced a 14-day quarantine requirement for international travellers, it was understandably an enormous disincentive to anyone thinking of crossing the pond — unless they were mission-driven, desperate or crazy. We — my husband, 19-year-old son and I — fell solidly into that camp.

Attending our daughter's July 4 wedding to an amazing Scot she had fallen in love with during her university years was worth the quarantine, not to mention the effort (and risk) of travelling to Scotland. It's unthinkable not to attend your child's wedding, and our absence would roughly cut the guest list in half; the others were the groom's parents and siblings.

With not a little nervousness, we planned our trip to Scotland reserving two-thirds of our time for quarantine.

As former London residents, we're familiar with U.K. travel and living, but knew this would rank as our most memorable trip, a once-in-a-lifetime wedding.

Forty-eight hours before our departure, we completed the required U.K. Visa & Immigration Public Health Locator Form providing

our quarantine address and other tracking details. Anyone without prearranged lodging would be offered government-arranged housing and be stuck with the bill.

The Dulles-Heathrow leg of the flight was aboard a roomy Airbus A350, about 10 per cent full. All passengers and flight attendants wore masks, and flight attendants also wore gloves to serve meals packed in paper bags.

But our Heathrow-Edinburgh flight was surreal: Every seat was taken, and though passengers were all wearing masks, it was impossible to socially distance.

We later realized that this single flight was an aberration: Our return flights were impeccably ordered.

We were grateful we could quarantine at our daughter's future in-laws' flat, which they rent to students during the school term, located in the quiet residential neighbourhood of Marchmont near the University of Edinburgh. The apartment is in a quintessential 1800s-era Victorian-style structure; large bay windows of the 12-foot-high ceiling flat offered a glimpse of an old castle.

We adopted a quiet-as-a-church-mouse lifestyle, readying ourselves



The author and her family became familiar with the views from the window of the Edinburgh flat where they spent a 14-day quarantine. The flat belonged to their daughter's future in-laws. KATHRYN STREETER

for an unannounced government health official's visit. Per the mandate, health authorities could drop by without warning to make sure we were all there, under threat of penalty (about \$600 per person in Scotland). We weren't permitted to leave our place of quarantine except for an emergency, which included medical attention and the much hazier category of purchasing food.

To err on the safe side, we set up an account with a supermarket for two deliveries, but to get us started, our future son-in-law stocked our refrigerator and pantry.

We never received the check from government health officials, a bit of a disappointment — we would have enjoyed the visit.

Through the back windows, besides dark stone buildings and bright green grass, we could see

a shock of red geraniums lining a windowsill, blankets airing through open windows, and in one private garden, a swing

When you can't go outside, you're a cat in the window, hungrily watching, observing even mundane neighbourhood activities.

Besides yoga, we used an exercise bike, positioned by the expansive bay windows with great views of the street, to stay active. Once my husband was using it and glanced outside only to meet the gazes of a socially distanced cluster of neighbours peering up at him.

It was an "a-ha" moment. Naturally, news had reached the neighbours of the Americans quarantining among them. Just as we could observe the neighbourhood, the neighbourhood could observe us.

Our suspicions were confirmed a

few days later when the door mail-slot clapped loudly, delivering a handwritten note from "Lyn."

Apparently, our fresh pack of sponges in the kitchen had sailed through the open window and landed in her garden, thanks to one of many hardy gusts of wind. The sponges "decided they'd had enough of being indoors so flew out and landed on the back green," Lyn wrote, and she was returning them, sanitized. She also empathized, "this is a miserable way for you to spend the pre-nuptial days" and sent "best wishes to the bride and groom."

Though quarantining far from home, we were embedded in a neighbourhood, surrounded by kind people.

Kathryn Streeter is a Washington, D.C. writer.