

TRAVEL

Seasoned traveler takes to leisurely French barge

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Jean Long of West Bloomfield likes to joke that she's been everywhere twice. So when she rates her recent trip to France in her personal top 10, you know it was something special.

Long, a charter member of the Nomads Club, joined other club members for a 15-day combination river barge/chateau vacation. The passengers on the Nomads' flying clubhouse split into two groups, one taking barges down the Yonne and Seine rivers, the other going to luxury chateaux and then changing places.

Long began her trip on the barge Anacoluthie in Joigny.

"The barge is a low boat, very quiet, which is the thing I enjoyed most," she said. "You move very slowly down the river."

Long and roommate Lyn Balman shared "an ample room" air-conditioned with twin beds, two desks and bed length storage drawers.

"In the head was a full stall shower with a door," Long said.

For a week, the barge made its way down the Yonne, into the Seine on its way from Joigny to Paris, traveling through 32 locks with each station having "beautiful flowers and a friendly dog." "I liked to sit on deck, sailing along looking at France. Red poppies all along the shore symbolized the beauty of the place," Long said. "You could see the medieval towns in the distance."

A highlight of the trip was the meals served on board, complete with an explanation by the chef.

"Ronald, our chef, would prepare and give a detailed description of each meal, with an eye for taste and presentation," Long wrote in notes she prepared to remember her trip. "Our lunches were a three course buffet. Our dinners, four course, served elegantly and were delicious from appetizer to the scrumptious desserts. One thing we found different was the salad (greens and small slices of cheese) always served after the entree."

A wine steward, Hugh, would give similar expert information on



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEAN LONG

French barge: Jean Long stands dockside of the Anacoluthie, her home away from home on two French rivers.

his wine selections for the lunch and dinner.

Each morning after breakfast, Long and her companions would go on tours of the surrounding area including Auxerre, Sens, Barbizon. At Barbizon, Long bought a silk scarf with a Monet print and at Giverny, she walked through Monet's garden, the inspiration for many of his famous paintings.

"That was the best part of the trip. It was so beautiful. I can't think of the adjectives to describe the flowers," Long said.

Afternoons would often be filled with card games on deck, passengers ever mindful of approaching bridges when they would be told to duck their heads. The barge docked at night and passengers could take optional strolls through town.

Passengers could also pass up bus tours for bicycle touring as Long's roommate did in Burgundy, cycling to a palace festival. Long opted for another means of

transportation, taking her second balloon trip.

"It was a misty morning and we probably shouldn't have gone up but they gave it to us for half price," Long said. "Pierre, my balloon pilot, looks like Mel Gibson. We had a happy landing with champagne."

The barge moved from the Yonne to the Seine as it approached Paris, the city of lights.

"We sailed past Notre Dame with all our group topside taking pictures in the beautiful Paris sunshine, under the great bridges with our guide, Severina, pointing out all points of interest," Long writes. "We all stood there in awe of the historic lives and times these landmarks had seen."

"Then at dusk, after the captain's dinner, we had champagne topside under the twinkling stars, we started our cruise again, along the Seine viewing the lights of Paris. We docked our barge at the foot of Tower Eiffel for the

rest of the night." Large numbers on the tower signaled a countdown to the millennium.

After a night at the Paris Hilton, near the tower, the group went on to the second part of the trip, stays at two chateaux and several side adventures.

Chateau St. Sabine is a large estate with a deer herd, a peacock and a church with a ghost. One night the group stayed up late drinking wine and telling ghost stories in the medieval setting.

Day trips included all day visits to Dijon (one traveler said it "really cut the mustard"), Beaune and Nezeley.

At Chateau Chissay the travelers celebrated the 47th anniversary of fellow travelers Rosie and Dick Meyer, who treated everyone to champagne.

"In the whole trip, I must applaud the camaraderie of our Nomad group, the friendliness of



Eiffel Tower: The famous Paris landmark counts down to the millennium. Jean Long's Paris accommodations were in the tower's neighborhood.

our French hosts and, of course, the French food," Long writes.

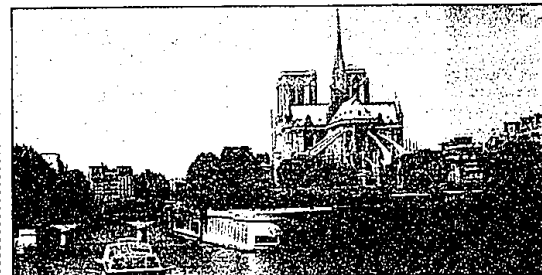
Long and her late husband joined the Nomads a week before the group bought its first plane in 1965. She has traveled more than 700,000 miles with the Nomads, as a passenger, flight attendant and trip director.

She's been to Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Scotland, England and many other locations. Long is currently the president of the

Nomads Solos group for singles, which holds a quarterly luncheon to discuss Nomads activities.

The trip to France including air, ground accommodations, barge trip and many meals cost \$4,995 based on double occupancy.

"The slow, quiet trip allowed friendships to flourish," Long writes. "The comfort of the boat, the thoughtfulness of all brought on a great camaraderie while seeing all the greatness of France."



Notre Dame: The barge up the Seine affords a dramatic view of the famous Paris cathedral.

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