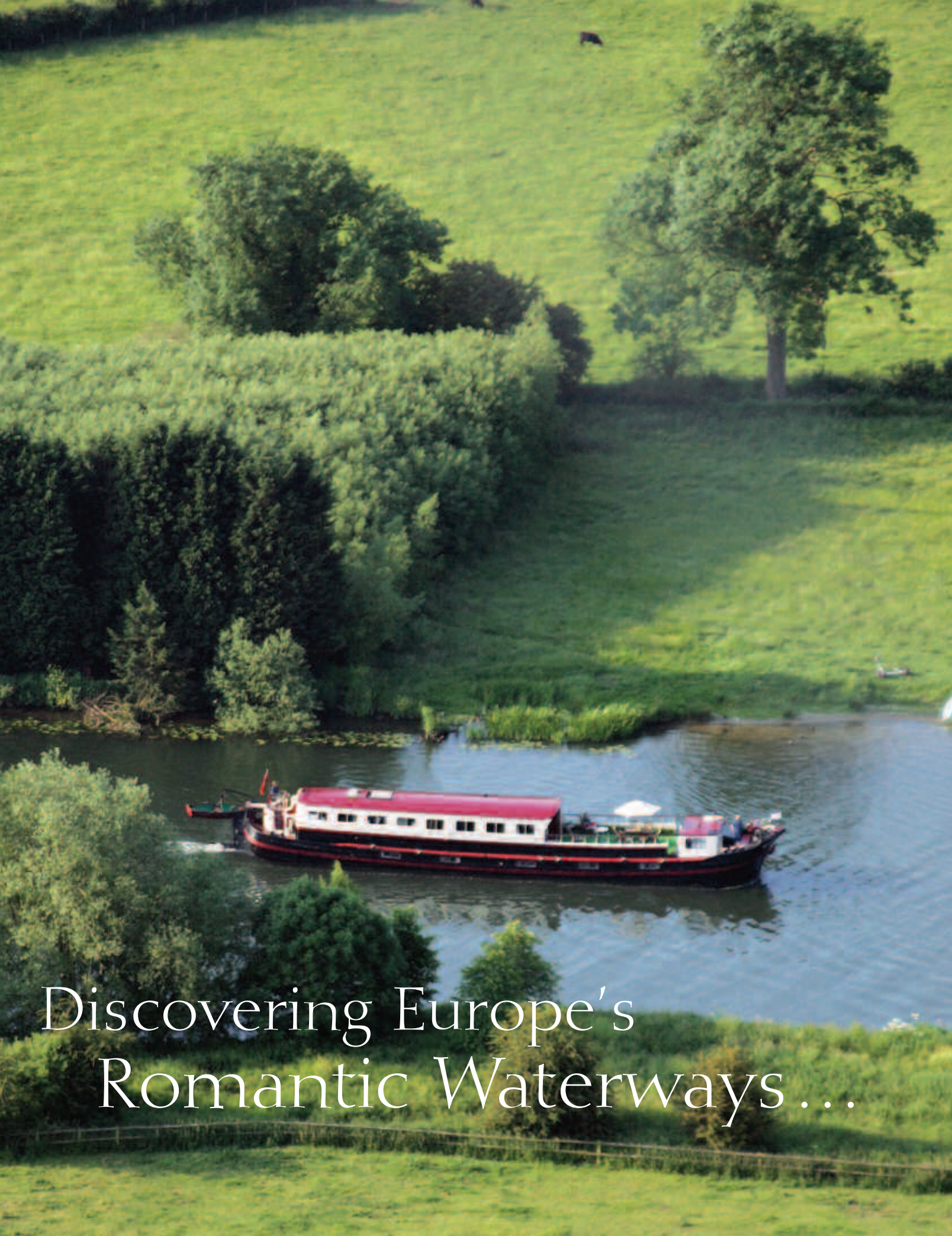
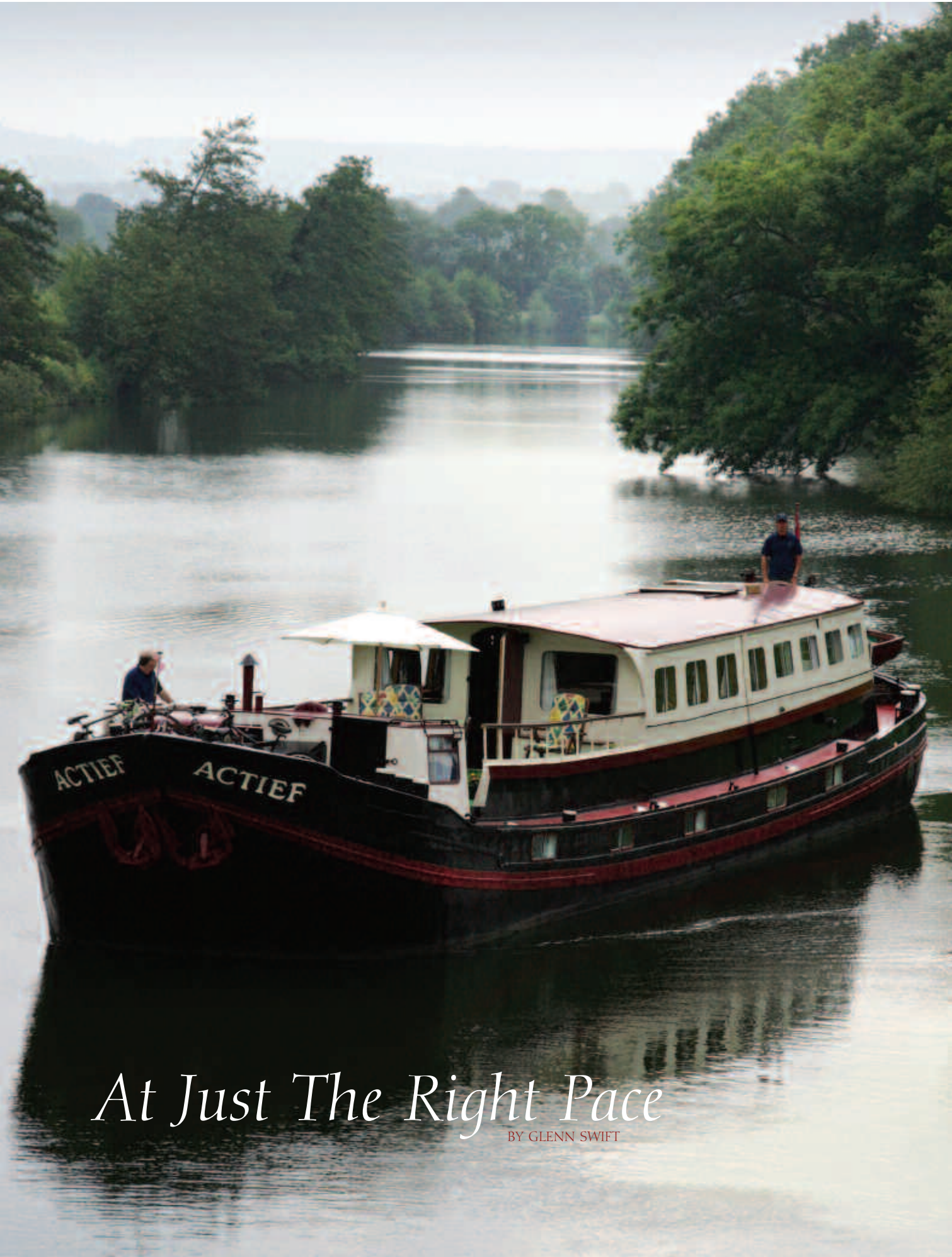


ENCOUNTER THE LAND OF SHAKESPEARE AND CHAUCER BY CRUISING THE TRANQUIL ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE.



Discovering Europe's
Romantic Waterways...



At Just The Right Pace
BY GLENN SWIFT

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF GO BARGING, EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

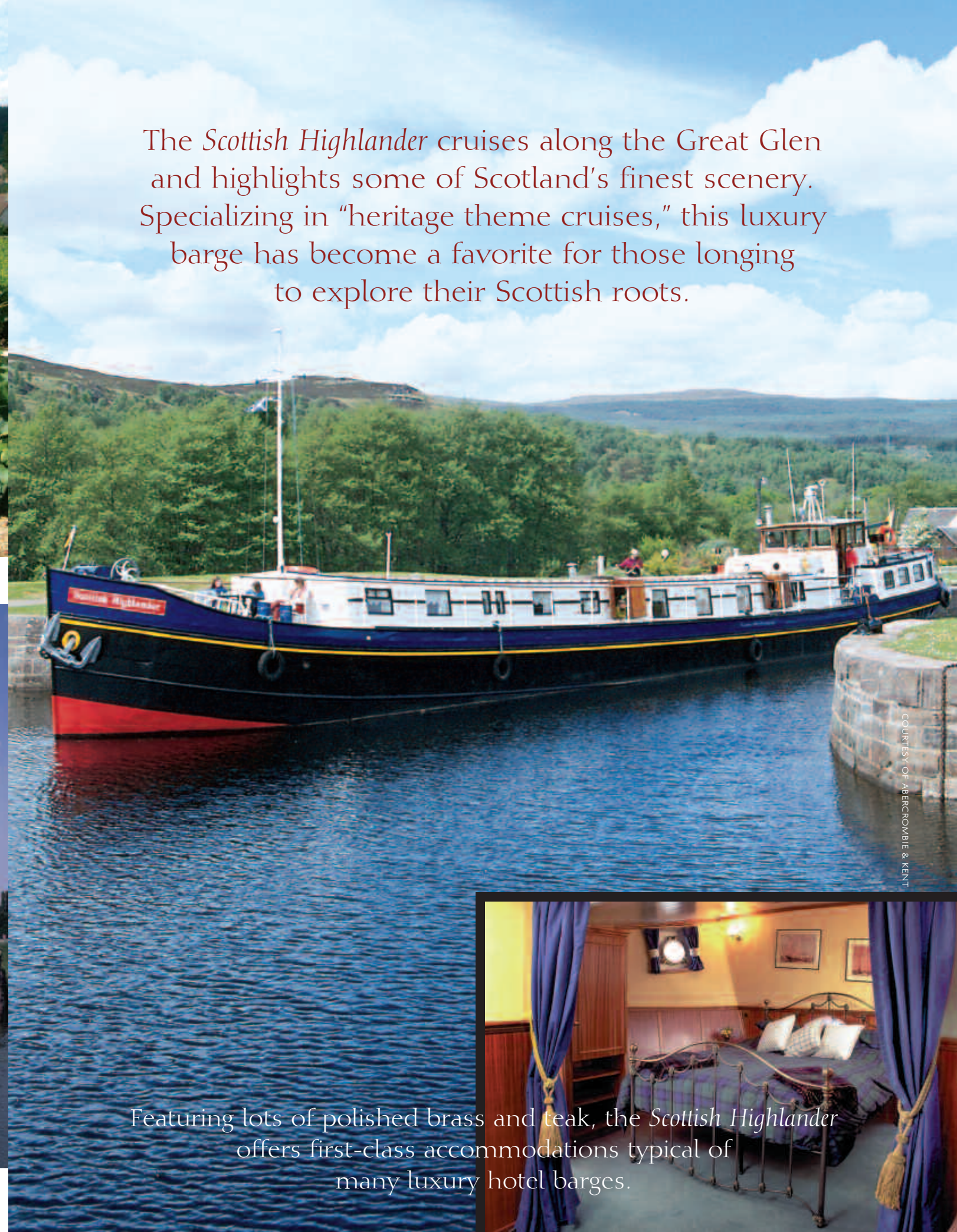


FOR THE DISCERNING WINE-TASTER, A CUSTOMIZED CRUISE TO BURGUNDY ALLOWS ONE TO ENJOY THE GLORIOUS VINEYARDS OF FRANCE FIRSTHAND.



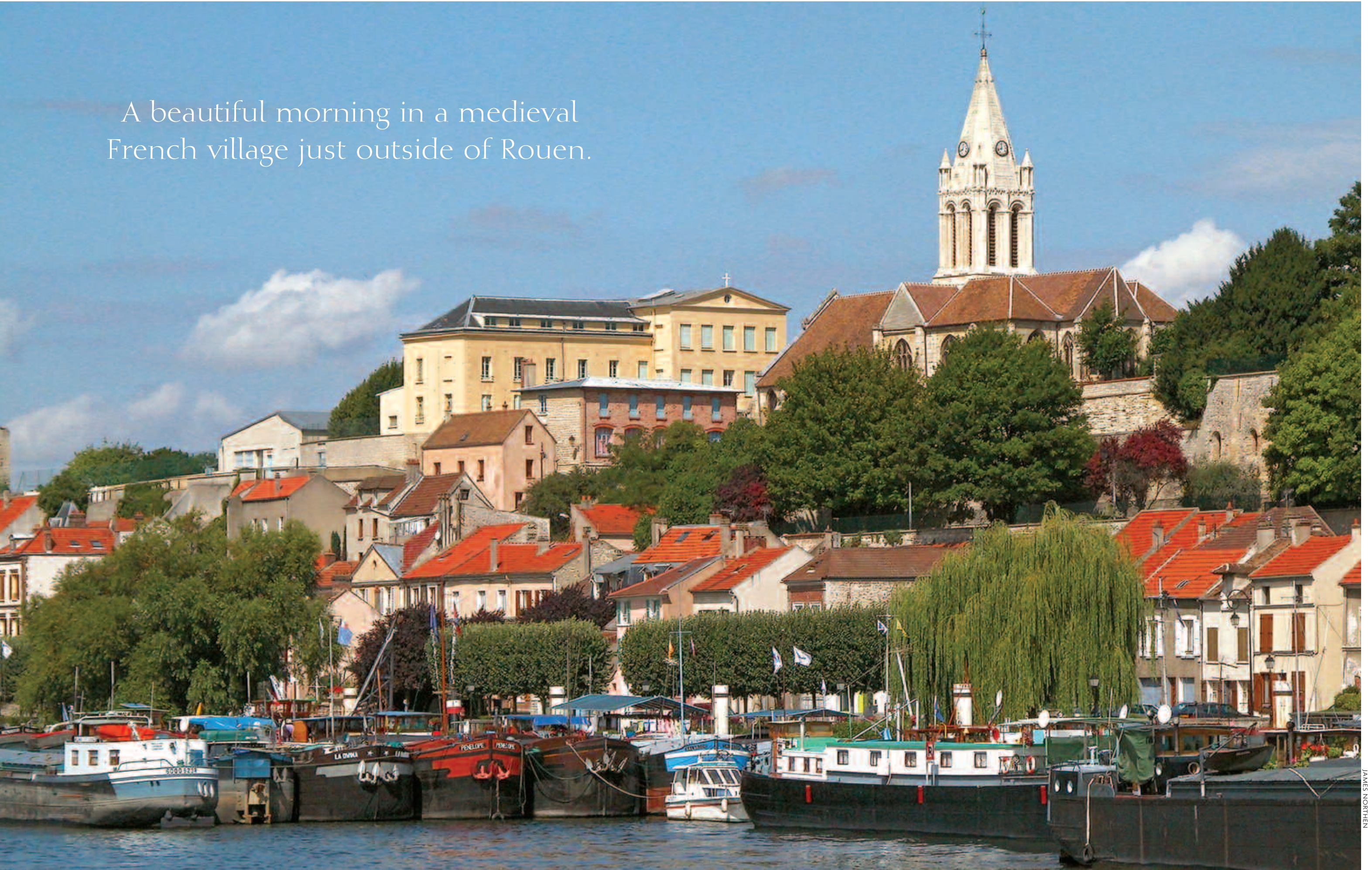
THE VILLA PISANI, ON THE BANKS OF THE BRENTA NEAR VENICE, REPRESENTS THE HEIGHTS OF 18TH-CENTURY BAROQUE ARCHITECTURE.

The *Scottish Highlander* cruises along the Great Glen and highlights some of Scotland's finest scenery. Specializing in "heritage theme cruises," this luxury barge has become a favorite for those longing to explore their Scottish roots.



Featuring lots of polished brass and teak, the *Scottish Highlander* offers first-class accommodations typical of many luxury hotel barges.

A beautiful morning in a medieval
French village just outside of Rouen.



For centuries, the winding, peaceful rivers and canals of Europe have provided majestic paths through a unique land of extraordinary beauty and culture. Today, highways and railroads provide the backbone of the European transportation network. However, these same waterways continue to provide a glimpse into the Old World for a discriminating few. Some of Europe's most fashionable and sumptuous watercraft – luxury hotel barges – can be found meandering along these centuries-old routes.

Vessels that were once laden with heavy cargo from mines, farms and factories have been transformed into floating hotels. The metamorphosis is almost unimaginable as teak and polished brass fittings are everywhere. Many barges feature staterooms with all the trimmings of a deluxe hotel – far nicer, in fact, than most cruise ships. Meals are also first-rate and are prepared with local flavor in mind, with special dishes and drinks of each region.

Typically, luxury hotel barge trips start at \$2,000 per person, per week, including meals and daily excursions. The barges are generally 75 to 129 feet long, 12 to 16 feet wide and accommodate six to 24 passengers, along with four or five crew members (including a fully licensed captain and master chef). As for how fast they go, well, if speed is your thing, this probably isn't for you. Most barge cruises cover between 30 and 50 miles in a week, at a pace frequently slower than walking.

Also available are various theme cruises, which cater to a number of specific interests: walking, biking, wine tasting and even golf. Yes, there are many faster-moving vacation packages available, but only barging allows the sophisticated, upscale traveler the necessary time to fully absorb a region's ambiance.

As far as where to go, the best-established barging routes are located in France, England, Scotland, Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Italy. In Britain alone, there are more than 4,000 miles of navigable rivers and canals. France, the Netherlands and Germany also offer extensive barging routes, with many canals and locks dating to the 16th century. Incidentally, France is the hub of European barging. Regardless of which course is chosen, you can be assured that every route is spectacular, steeped in its own history, culture and mystique.

All routes offer plenty of time to stroll the picturesque streets of nearby towns and villages, or to just relax on deck while a new scene unfolds. Because each vessel and operator has its own distinctive personality, it is especially important to work with a travel representative who has firsthand knowledge of the physical comforts each cruise offers.

For those more highly skilled in the nautical realm, and who don't require quite so much pampering, there is yet another alternative – piloting your own barge! With berths for as few as two, you can cruise at your own pace, and stop and feast in the cozy restaurants of your choice along the way. Rental prices for the "Be Your Own Captain" barge cruises are usually significantly less than the luxury variety.

So, if a luxurious, leisurely paced cruise amidst rolling vineyards and medieval villages sounds like the kind of romantic adventure you've always dreamed of, consider barging Europe's magnificent waterways. You'll see a world only a few can even imagine – and at just the right pace. ↴

Because barging is a highly specialized experience, all the more reason to utilize the talents of someone fully knowledgeable about this unique form of travel. Three companies stand out with regard to their expertise in barging Europe's waterways:

Abercrombie & Kent is another crème de la crème agency offering both luxury river and canal itineraries. Abercrombie & Kent is particularly adept with specialty departures catering to unique interests. They can be reached by calling (800) 554-7016 or visiting online at www.abercrombiekent.com.

The Barge Lady, available by calling (800) 880-0071 or visiting online at www.bargelady.com, offers top-notch assistance with everything there is to do with barging (both river and canal cruises) in Europe. When you call, make sure to ask for Ellen. (She's the "barge lady!") Although her specialty is France, Ellen's 18 years in the business has provided her with an extraordinary wealth of knowledge. If you have a question on barging and the barge lady doesn't know the answer, it's not worth knowing.

European Waterways Ltd. is a first-rate travel company that is involved in all aspects of hotel barging. Established in 1974, European Waterways specializes in top-of-the-line hotel barging packages in England, Scotland, Ireland and Germany. They can be reached at (800) 394-8630 or by e-mailing sales@gobarging.com. Their team is multilingual, experienced and enthusiastic.



Regardless of the particular route, luxury barge cruising offers an intimate opportunity to rediscover an extraordinary land steeped in history and culture.