



Springtime serenity on the Llangollen

The stretch of the Llangollen Canal, from the Welsh town of the same name to the English country town of Ellesmere is one of the most attractive of the UK's inland waterways network.

It takes in areas of outstanding natural beauty along with the Chirk and Pontcysyllte Aqueducts.

These genuine features of construction form part of the Llangollen Canal UNESCO World Heritage site

ABC Boat Hire, part of the Drifters group, has a fleet of narrowboats at its Blackwater Marina near to Ellesmere that offer the chance to enjoy scenic beauty and engineering feats on the slowest of slow travel vacations.

This first of a two-part *AllWays leading to the Llangollen*, takes in the Ellesmere to the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and return.

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/canals-and-rivers/llangollen-canal>

<https://www.drifters.co.uk/bases/blackwater-meadow>

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor
AllWays traveller





Embracing the narrowboat way of life

Ann and I are becoming real narrowboat enthusiasts and if not yet true aficionados we are certainly getting there.

By Ashley Gibbins

This was our fifth trip on a narrowboat (see below) and we found the Llangollen Canal, to be one of the most alluring so far.

The waterway meanders for 46 miles from Llangollen in Denbighshire, in North Wales to Hurlston in Cheshire, via the historic market town of Ellesmere, Shropshire.

We decided to opt for the stretch from the Blackwater Meadow Marina at Ellesmere to Llangollen Basin back, some 37 miles.

It would take us through two locks, two tunnels and a lift bridge in either direction. No problems there.

And stunning countryside all the way, much of it designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

We would also get to cross over the Chirk and Pontcysyllte aqueducts, which form part of the *Pontcysyllte Aqueduct & Canal UNESCO World Heritage Site* (see below).

These are achievements in their own right.

With all that's on offer along this stretch of the Llangollen, it is inevitably very popular with boaters and can get a little congested in high season.

But go in early spring as we did, or in fall, and it offers a serenity that is absolutely beguiling.

An industrial waterway

The Llangollen was opened as a mercantile and freight waterway in the early 1800s, a time when Britain's canals formed the backbone of the Industrial Revolution.

Horse drawn narrowboats would ply the canal with cargos of coal, iron and other raw materials.

The arrival of the railways saw trade go into decline and the Llangollen ended its life as an industrial canal by the mid-1940s.

The Llangollen Canal was only kept open as a water supply, but this meant it was still there when interest in canals for leisure and recreation took off in the 1950s and 60s.

The canal's waterway and its towpaths were restored and day and holiday visitors arrived in increasing numbers.

The Canal & River Trust, a national charity, took over the management of the Llangollen Canal from British Waterways in 2012, when it was given responsibility for 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales, with the associated infrastructure.

The future of the Llangollen Canal was secured, with the Trust's ongoing programme of enhancement works ensuring this wonderful canal can be enjoyed by all.

American Black Swift is 'just the job'

For our trip we had the *American Black Swift*, a 49ft narrowboat from ABC Boat Hire's base at the Blackwater Meadow Marina.



One of their 13 strong fleet at the marina, she sleeps up to four people, was easy to navigate and was ideal for the two of us.

Before pulling out, we were given a thorough, interesting and very necessary overview of the boat and its operation by ABC's Sandra.

We talked through our plans for the trip and checked with her, where the locks, tunnels and winding (turning) holes were.

Doing this before pulling out we know what's what and where's where.

In doing so it became clear our original thinking that we would get getting to Llangollen Basin and back in four nights was 'doable' but would mean 'pushing it'.

This, of course, defeats the 'slow travel *raison d'être* for time on a narrowboat.

We decided therefore to reign in our aspirations and opted instead to turn around once we had crossed the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, an experience must for boaters on the Llangollen.

It was a wise decision.

With our *Pearsons Canal Companion* as an invaluable guide to the Llangollen, our time on the canal, with no rush or panic whatsoever.

Our four nights on the *American Black Swift* were, memorable and we were able to fully embrace this wonderful canal and its long, winding stretches of glorious countryside.

However, because we did not get to Llangollen, this is our *AllWays leading to the Llangollen Canal* (part one).

We will have to return to complete the trip to Llangollen Basin in spring of next year.

That is certainly going to be no hardship.

More information

<https://www.abcboathire.com/our-routes/featured-routes/blackwater-meadow-marina/llangollen-and-return>
<https://www.abcboathire.com>





Making the most of our time on board

We now welcome the splendid isolation that the self-sufficiency of narrowboat life offers and come evermore well prepared to wine and dine onboard.

By Ann Meador

When we first took to the canals, we planned to stop at quaint country pubs *en route* for hearty evening dining.

Our onboard provisions were therefore geared to breakfast and lunch, though this never quite worked out.

To begin with, we didn't always reach our planned destination and had to moor up for the night in the middle of nowhere.

This meant relying on our emergency rations to silence our rumbling stomachs!

There were also times when the pub we had planned to stop at wasn't serving food that night.

We usually found this out after a half hour walk along the towpath, and back again, in semi-darkness.

And, if the weather was miserable, we were reluctant to leave our cosy cabin.

Putting on waterproofs and boots and getting blasted by rain on a quick march to the pub is never an appealing prospect.

Finally, there weren't always as many pubs within easy reach as we thought and sometimes those that were did not meet our expectations.

Changing tack

We therefore began taking extra food to eat on board, and found we enjoyed this as much, if not more than going out.

You can always go to a pub, but it's not often you get the chance to eat on a narrowboat.

Sipping a chilled glass of wine in a snug, warm cabin or on deck enjoying the country scenery on a balmy evening is wonderful.

Our cooking skills aren't great, and facilities and space are naturally limited, but we work with this.

We now take 'easy to prepare' items like bread, sliced cheese, baked beans, soup, eggs, quiche, tomatoes, crumpets, teacakes and ready meals.

The fridge is stocked with wine, olives and dips and cupboards with crisps, nuts, fancy biscuits, crackers and breadsticks.

It is fun seeing what can be created from what is available.

Ashley and I really do enjoy our meals on board.

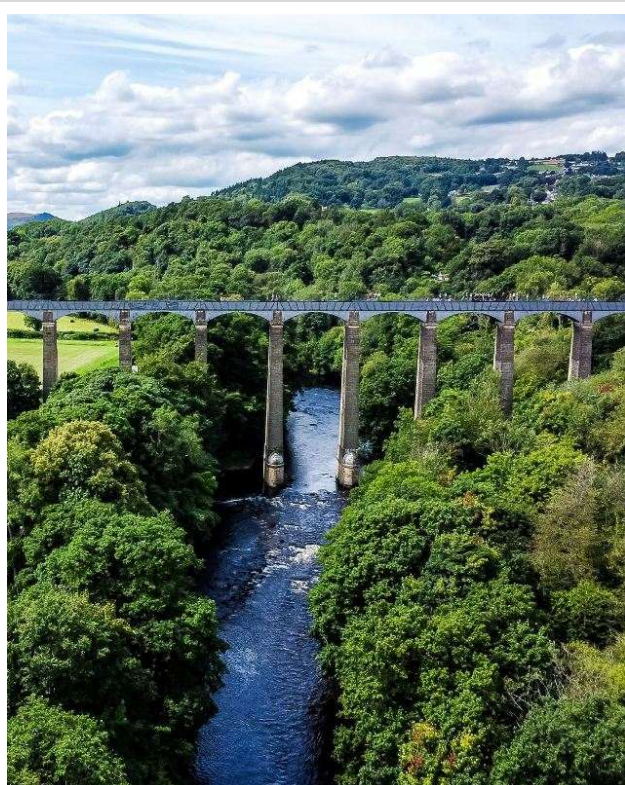
It is so relaxing, just being moored up, enjoying leisurely evenings in our comfy wear and slippers!

We also take our own glasses, for the fizz, and have fake-flame candles and our own music on Bluetooth to create atmosphere.

Books, magazines and crosswords keep us happily occupied.

On our next trip, we will be doing more of the same and may get a little more adventurous with our cuisine.

Even if this is just adding truffle flavoured crisps and smoked salmon to the menu - and mustn't forget the lemons for the G&T's!



Pontcysyllte Aqueduct



Chirk Aqueduct

A masterpiece of creative genius

The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal UNESCO World Heritage Site is an 18 kilometre long is a feat of civil engineering of the Industrial Revolution, completed in the early years of the 19th century.

By Ashley Gibbins



Pronounced *Pont-ker-sulth-tay*, the Welsh for the bridge that connects, it was completed by Thomas Telford in 1805 and features the 126-foot-high Pontcysyllte Aqueduct.

This is Britain's longest and highest navigable aqueduct.

When granting World Heritage status UNESCO explained :

It covers a difficult geographical setting, and the building of the canal required substantial, bold civil engineering solutions, especially as it was built without using locks.

As such the aqueduct is a pioneering masterpiece of engineering and monumental metal architecture.

The use of both cast and wrought iron in the aqueduct enabled the construction of arches that were light and strong, producing an overall effect that is both monumental and elegant.

The property is inscribed as a masterpiece of creative genius, and as a remarkable synthesis of expertise already acquired in Europe.

It is also recognised as an innovative ensemble that inspired many projects all over the world.

The Chirk Aqueduct

Chirk Aqueduct is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, and a scheduled ancient monument in its own right.

In addition to being canal architecture at its finest, it offers the chance to stand with one foot in Wales and the other in England.

Chirk tunnel, just along the towpath and known locally as *the Darkie* was one of the first to have a towpath.

More information :

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1303/> and <https://www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk/>

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/canals-and-rivers/places-to-visit/chirk-aqueduct> and <https://www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk/attraction/chirk-aqueduct-and-tunnel/>



Chirk Castle and Garden

As with our other narrowboat excursions, we look to bolt on a trip to a nearby National Trust property.

This time we were fortunate in being able to moor and stroll up through the 480 acres of estate parkland with sheep, cattle and veteran trees to Chirk Castle

The whole estate is located within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty also designated a *Site of Special Scientific Interest*, being a habitat for rare invertebrates, bats, fungi and wildflowers.

The castle, at its heart, was originally built around 1295 on an outcrop above the convergence of the Rivers Dee and Ceiriog.

One of a series of castles during the reign of Edward I, its role was to subdue the last princes of Wales and any rebellious inclinations they might have.

Some three hundred years later, Chirk Castle was bought by Sir Thomas Myddelton in 1595 and has passed through the Myddelton line of descendants to the present day.

Visiting today one can admire a 17th-century Long Gallery, three furnished 18th-century State Rooms, the servants' hall and the Chapel Music room.

The five acres of garden, immediately surrounding the castle, are a delight.

One can enjoy manicured lawns, yews and herbaceous borders, along with rose, shrub and rock gardens and a terrace with views over the Cheshire and Salop plains.

More information :

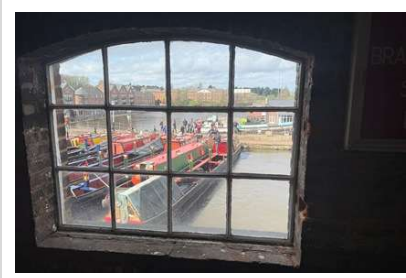
<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wales/chirk-castle>



The National Waterways Museum

As we were in the area and having said our fond farewells to the *American Black Swift*, we ended this narrowboat excursion with a short drive to the National Waterways Museum, at Ellesmere Port.

By Ashley Gibbins



Located at the Ellesmere Port Docks, in Cheshire, it was designed by Thomas Telford in the 1790s, so a fitting link to the Llangollen.

Run by Canal & River Trust, the museum preserves some of the UK's key historic boats and details the story of how canal waterways made a such vital contribution to Britain's Industrial Revolution.

It features listed Victorian warehouses, locks, and workers' cottages, showcasing the area's history as a major industrial transshipment hub.

The idea for a waterways museum was first 'floated' in the early 1970s, when a group of passionate canal enthusiasts met and formed the *North Western Museum of Inland Navigation*.

The new 'Boat Museum' was officially opened in 1976 and taken over by the Canal & River Trust, in 2012, along with 2,000 miles of inland waterways in England and Wales.

In addition to its permanent exhibitions and displays, the Museum stages an annual programme of special events including its Easter Historic Boat Gathering and Steampunk and Vintage Vehicle Weekends.

Costumed characters bring the old docks 'to life' on several Canal Town Sundays through July and August.

More information :

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/things-to-do/museums-and-attractions/national-waterways-museum-ellesmere-port>





Drifter's has canal network covered

Taking a narrowboat in England, Wales or Scotland offers the ultimate slow travel experience.

With the right provider, the standard of narrowboat is likely to be of a similar high standard, so it comes down to choosing the canal to go on.

Drifters Waterway Holidays

Drifters Waterway Holidays is 10 independent canal boat holiday operators with 500 canal boats for hire from 40 bases.

Each Drifters operator will be independently assessed and accredited by British Marine.

www.britishmarine.co.uk

Drifters also works with the Canal & River Trust in highlighting canal boat holidays.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

ABC Boat Hire

ABC Boat Hire has 16 locations across England, Wales and Scotland, as well as day boat hire, holiday cottages, caravan parks and a full range of marina services for boat owners.

www.abcboathire.com

Anglo Welsh Waterways Holidays

Anglo Welsh Waterways Holidays has more than 100 boats spread across nine locations in England and Wales.

www.anglowelsh.co.uk

Black Prince Holidays

Black Prince Holidays offers canal boat holidays from nine hire boat locations across England, Wales and Scotland.

www.black-prince.com

Countrywide Cruisers

Countrywide Cruisers is a family business offering narrowboat hire from Brewood on the Shropshire Union Canal in Staffordshire

www.countrywide-cruisers.co.uk

Foxhangers

Foxhangers is family owned and run boating holidays on the Kennet & Avon Canal at Devizes.

www.foxhangers.co.uk

Grand Union Narrowboats

Grand Union Narrowboats is a family run business offering the choice of 11 narrowboats for hire from Weedon, on the Grand Union Canal in Northamptonshire.

www.grandunionnarrowboats.co.uk

Kate Boats

Kate Boats is a family business offering boating holidays from Stockton Top Marina on the Grand Union Canal in Warwickshire.

www.kateboats.com

Napton Narrowboats

Napton Narrowboats is a family run boat hire from Napton Marina in Warwickshire and Autherley in Staffordshire.

www.napton-marina.co.uk

Shire Cruisers

Shire Cruisers operates on the Calder & Hebble Navigation, the Rochdale Canal in Yorkshire and on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

www.shirecruisers.co.uk

Union Canal Carriers

Union Canal Carriers offers canal boat holidays and day boat hire from Braunston on the Grand Union Canal in Northamptonshire.

www.unioncanalcarriers.co.uk

More information

www.drifters.co.uk

If you enjoyed the Llangollen Canal



The canal community is truly one of a kind

A unique lifestyle is thriving on and along the waterways

The UK's canal network spreads the length on breadth of England, Scotland and Wales.

Canals go into and out of towns and cities, skirt medieval villages and meander through industrial estates and historic buildings of great heritage.

Along the way one finds a wide range of stunning rural landscapes dotted with waterside pubs full of character and characters.

More than this, there is also a genuine canal fraternity that bonds those who live and or work on or besides the water.

Then there are the hundreds of volunteers, who give up their time to keep the canals and towpaths clean and a pleasure for all to enjoy.

Finally, there is an assured and warm welcome for those who take the chance to hire a narrowboat and spend a short time enjoying the ultimate slow travel vacation.

This *AllWays Traveller*, the fourth in a series on narrow boating in the UK, highlights the people one will meet during a narrowboat trip.



More information

<https://www.foxhangers.co.uk>

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/canals-and-rivers/kennet-and-avon-canal>



<https://www.allwaystraveller.com/allways-features/the-canal-community-is-truly-one-of-a-kind>



Narrowboating on the canals in Autumn

Travelling on stretches of the Trent and Mersey and Bridgewater canals in the English county of Cheshire.

While leaving the Anderton Marina we chug past a trio of coots perching on a bobbing log, while a couple of mallards were having a real set to.

We were aboard our narrowboat was the most relaxing and rewarding slow travel.

Particularly so was autumn when the waterways are less crowded, and the leaf fall season can transform overhanging trees into a blazing canopy of golden browns.

We had opted for the Grey Wren, one of ABC Boat Hire's fleet of 15 narrowboats based at its Anderton Marina in rural Cheshire.

She is a 49ft 'Semi-Trad stern narrowboat' that sleeps up to four and is well suited to couples or small families.

The Grey Wren has its living and fully equipped kitchen area in the bow, with the shower/toilet mid-boat and a double bunk at the stern.

Life on board is a 'cosy' and enjoyably rewarding experience.



More information

<https://www.abcboathire.com>



<https://www.allwaystraveller.com/allways-features-home/narrowboating-in-the-uk-autumn-on-the-grey-wren>



The Kennet & Avon Canal in winter

Although there were those who were alert to the joys of Britain's canals as early as the mid-19 Century, it was some one hundred years later that taking a canal narrowboat holiday really began to take off.

Since then, the popularity of canal boating in England, Wales and Scotland has soared, particularly during the warmer months of late spring, summer and autumn.

In more recent years, however, state-of-the-art narrowboat construction and less severe winters has offered the chance to enjoy a totally different canal boat experience during the colder, darker months of December, January and February.

With 150 narrowboats out of nine marinas throughout England, Anglo Welsh is the only company currently operating year-round, including on the Kennet & Avon Canal in Southern England.

More information

www.anglowelsh.co.uk



<https://www.allwaystraveller.com/continents/europe/plying-the-kennet-avon-canal-in-winter>



Life is good on the Grand Union Canal

A narrowboat is one designed to fit the UK's integrated network of canal waterways and locks.

These canals originally provided a nationwide transport network during the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th Centuries.

With the coming of the railways, canal use for commercial traffic gradually diminished and had virtually disappeared by the end of the 1960s, though a small number of dedicated boat owners still make a living hauling goods.

From the 1970s, the renaissance of these same canals began for leisure and recreation.

Since then the canal narrowboat holiday, the ultimate in slow travels, has become firmly established, and with it the flourishing of this wonderful natural resource.

Family run operator, Union Canal Carriers', based in Braunston, Northamptonshire, provide 10 narrowboat routes, from the relaxing nearly lock free to the more energetic with many locks and tunnels to negotiate.

They offer day trip, short break and longer hire opportunities on the Grand Union Canal and have a dedicated following of long-time guests and those new to this type of holiday



More information

www.unioncanalcarriers.co.uk

Life is good on the Grand Union Canal

A narrowboat is one designed to fit the UK's integrated network of canal waterways and locks.

These canals originally provided a nationwide transport network during the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th Centuries.

With the coming of the railways, canal use for commercial traffic gradually diminished and had virtually disappeared by the end of the 1960s, though a small number of dedicated boat owners still make a living hauling goods.

From the 1970s, the renaissance of these same canals began for leisure and recreation.

Since then the canal narrowboat holiday, the ultimate in slow travels, has become firmly established, and with it the flourishing of this wonderful natural resource.

Family run operator, Union Canal Carriers', based in Braunston, Northamptonshire, provide 10 narrowboat routes, from the relaxing nearly lock free to the more energetic with many locks and tunnels to negotiate.

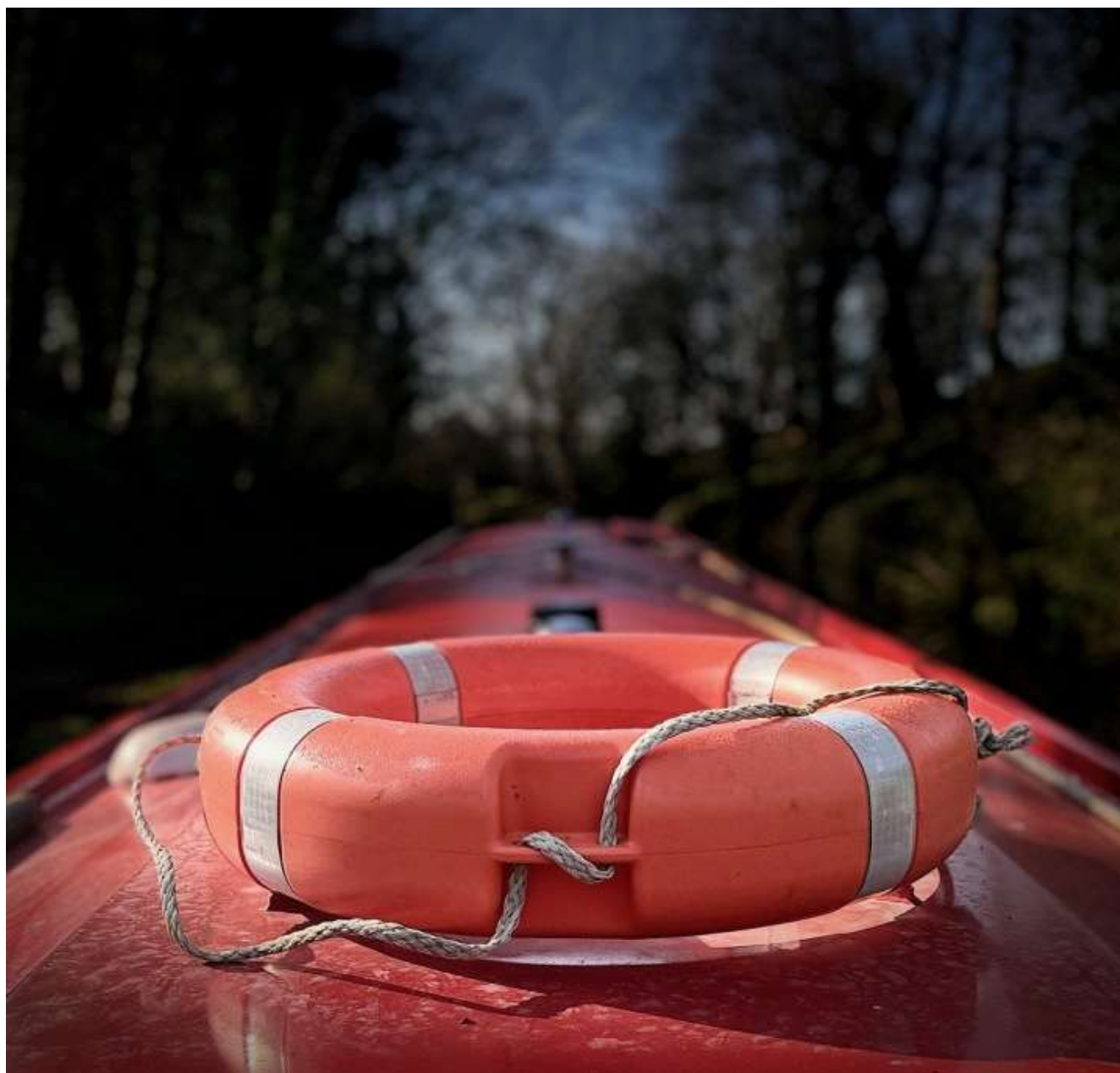
They offer day trip, short break and longer hire opportunities on the Grand Union Canal and have a dedicated following of long-time guests and those new to this type of holiday

Union Canal Carriers is a member of Allways Traveller, who independently audit holiday operators that offer access to over 200 destinations for hire from all across England, Wales and Scotland.

www.allways-traveller.co.uk or www.allways.co.uk

Allways Traveller
Continental Europe
Allways Traveller

<https://www.allways-traveller.com/continents/europe/life-is-good-on-the-grand-union-canal>



AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays traveller is the consumer travel magazine from the International Travel Writers, providing independent travellers with views of the world from Alliance travel journalists.

www.allwaystraveller.com



The International Travel Writers Alliance is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

www.itwalliance.com



Ann Meador is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Editor of *AllWays Traveller*



Ashley Gibbins is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Director of the International Travel Writers Alliance.