

# Le Boat – An Iconic Canadian Holiday on the Rideau Canal

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Melody Wren

We relaxed on the top deck of a 45-ft boat, chatting, listening to music that was carried away by the soft wind off Big Rideau Lake, and marvelled at the ospreys soaring by. The sound of giggling drew our attention to two girls who were balancing carefully on opposite ends of their canoe, their sinuous dance culminating in a perfect example of “gunnel bobbing” to our appreciative applause. Their canoe dance was a perfect symbol of everything simple we were enjoying about our week on Le Boat, relaxed, whimsical, carefree and fun. The pandemic seemed far away but a bit of a balancing act all the same.



Le Boats Smith's Falls Photo Melody Wren

Big Rideau Lake is part of the majestic Rideau Canal, a waterway stretching 202 km long connecting Canada's capital city of Ottawa to Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River at Kingston, Ontario. Travelling on the Rideau Canal by boat is an ideal way to holiday,

getting out of the house while maintaining social distancing. With self-provisioning on board, its an easy scenario for a relaxing holiday with safety and health top of mind amid a pandemic.

Our home for seven days was the Horizon 3, a cabin cruiser with three cabins, three en-suites and outfitted galley kitchen. After our initial glance at the upper deck, we knew we would be living up here as there was a large table for meals, sun loungers, a grill, an extra sink and the best place for driving with a full view of the surroundings.

Tip: As it's not a hotel, bring your own shampoo and soaps. And unlike a an Airbnb or cottage rental, you will also need to bring any condiments or extras you predict you will need.

After instructions and a chat over charts of our proposed route, our Le Boat trainer jumped ship, but not before he accompanied us through our first lock, so we knew how to handle the ropes on our own (literally). Were we nervous driving on our own? Heck yes! Driving a large boat with a temporary license and little experience was daunting, but we were looking forward to seven days exploring the Rideau Canal.



Parks Canada staff Poonamalie Lock 32 Photo Melody Wren



We cautiously approached Poonamalie lock 32 on our own and got through it without a hitch. Parks Canada staff at each lock are very willing to help boaters and to answer all kinds of questions. We then motored on to Lower Beveridges Lock 33 where we tied up for our first night. Whew. Happy hour drinks were followed by a grilled dinner on the top deck sitting under the stars setting the tone for the rest of the trip.

Our first full morning, we visited Perth, a small village, and spent a good part of the day there and could easily have spent a few. Perth is part of Lanark County, known as the maple syrup capital of Ontario as the county has over 200 producers of maple syrup, more than any other county in Ontario. During the war, the soldiers survived on the military base by learning how to make maple syrup, keeping them nourished over harsh winters.

Nearby Tay Marsh hosts the Perth Wildlife Reserve, nurturing a variety of plant and animal species including deer, ducks, geese, rabbits, bluebirds and wild turkeys. A trip along the 3.5 km trail leads to the Tay Marsh with a lookout tower ideal for seeing the bird and marsh life. A newly developed butterfly meadow attracts these beautiful insects to the many wildflowers in the area. A wonderful spot for a picnic or a self-guided interpretative walk, and with 28 species of dragonflies and 13 different damselflies found in the Tay River Watershed, it is an ideal learning opportunity.



## Top Shelf Distillery Photo Melody Wren

We stopped in at Top Shelf Distillery to pick up a pre-ordered package of their Gin, orange bitters and a couple of hand sanitizers. Also makers of Whiskey, vodka and moonshine, their products are available in local LCBO's. Along the same lines, we popped into Perth Brewery to pick up a small mixed case of their craft beers to enjoy onboard in the evening.

Lunch on the patio at Crossroads Traditional Tea Room on the main street was worth the visit for traditional afternoon tea with delicious gluten-free scones. Frozen traditional British style meals are available to take back to your boat rental. While strolling through the main town, the stone buildings are noticeably built by the same Scottish stonemasons who built the Rideau Canal. When they came to build the canal, they were given parcels of land if they were serving in the military or clergy in the war of 1816. The Tay River is part of the Rideau and was used to transport goods during the war.

Children and adults are tickled by the exhibit of the mold for the world's largest cheese won during the Chicago world's fair in 1893. There are black and white photos on display of the cheese wheel being pulled by a team of horses. Sir Thomas Lipton, the British tea king, bought the cheese and shipped it to Liverpool where it stayed on display for years.



Mammoth Cheese Perth Photo Melody Wren

After leaving Perth, we headed to Colonel By Island following the suggestions of several other boaters. Knowing nothing about how to tie up mooring balls, we came up with a strategy for approaching it and tying up. An afternoon, overnight and partial next day followed of pure bliss swimming, fishing and listening to loon calls. Different than being in ports, it felt like camping, and even though there were other boats moored around us, we felt like the only ones there. We developed casual routines of relaxing activities centred around meals and happy hour. The weather was scorching in the mid-30s so any cooking was done on the top deck grill and eaten al fresco. We found that we whiled away the time watching birds, reading, chatting and just being.



Reluctantly we left Colonel By Island as we were doing a crew exchange in Westport, and after going through the straightforward Narrows Lock, we arrived at Westport 45 minutes later. A tailwind made docking tricky but the Westport Harbour masters helped by shouting instructions. We moored and enjoyed the beautiful harbour and explored the village the next morning. Three ice cream shops, a local microbrewery and delightful shops inviting browsing and gift buying would have held us longer, bar the high temperatures that were wilting us. After a crew exchange, we didn't give my brother much time to acclimatize, we just started the engine and returned to Colonel By Island where there seems to be a constant breeze. All of us were in the water within minutes of arrival.

Having my slightly older brother on board was indeed a gift as we hadn't spent a lot of time together, busy with our families while they grew up. In the evenings we reminisced about our childhood, both with entirely different memories, making it sound like different people raised us and we kept saying "where was I when you were doing that!". Next morning at breakfast, I shared black and white photos of our mother's family at Lake Joseph in the 1920s doing similar activities to what we were doing.



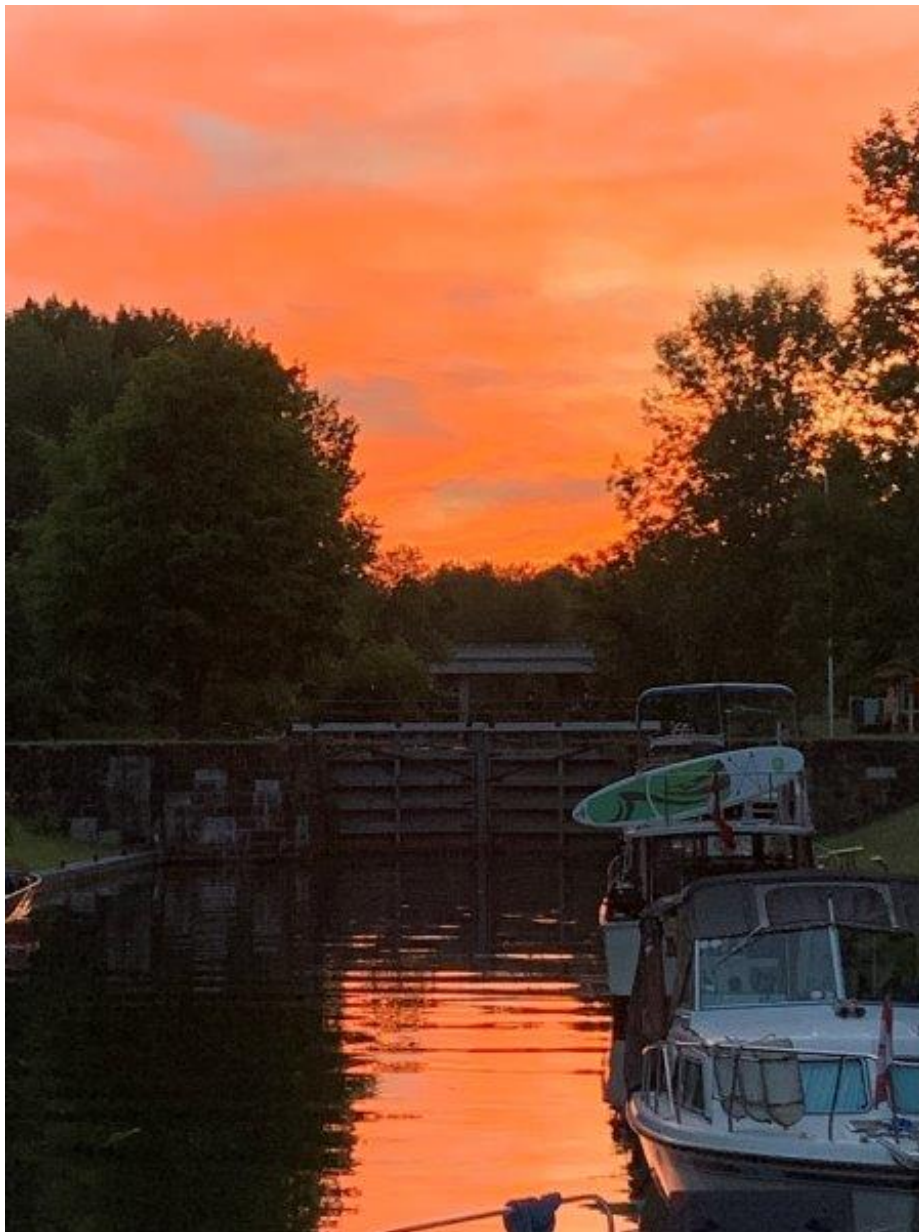
Mooring ball tie-up Colonel By Island Photo Melody Wren

Tip: Trust your thrusters. With a bow, side and rear thruster, we had no problem pulling over to dock or getting through locks even with no experience driving a larger boat.

One Le Boat family crew we kept coming across had a mother-daughter team, both having never driven a boat before, they managed beautifully. The trip was to celebrate the daughter's 21st birthday spending the time swimming, exploring villages and manoeuvring locks, every day a learning and bonding experience.

As we headed back to Smith's Falls from Colonel By Island on our final day, the four-hour journey quickly slipped by as I sat on the bow for hours sunning, watching boat traffic, looking at cottages and clouds. Not many days in regular life do we get the time to spend just being.

Routines had slipped away daily as our biggest decisions were whether to fish, swim, kayak, or float on the water mattress we brought along or simply read on the top deck and enjoy the sunshine. It was a dance routine we developed early, and after daily practise, we knew it well after seven days.



## Le Boat Facts:

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Le Boat, a fleet of European luxury boats are maintained and operated by Parks Canada on the Rideau Canal. Le Boat has the largest fleet of self-drive boats in the world and have been operating in Europe since 1969, and only started in Canada last year cruising the pristine lakes and waterways that make up the Rideau Canal and run through several small towns leading the way to the nation's capital of Ottawa.

The Rideau Canal is National Historic site opened in 1832 and runs 125 miles long. The oldest continuously operated canal system in North America, the name "Rideau" is French for curtain which was the appearance of the twin falls of the Rideau where it meets the Ottawa River which was explored by Samuel de Champlain in 1613. The Rideau Canal connects Canada's capital city of Ottawa, Kingston to Lake Ontario and the Saint Lawrence River at Kingston Ontario.

Lisa Mclean, North American Marketing Manager for Le Boat, says "Being on your own private cruiser allows you to sleep on board, set your own schedule, plan your own route and control your environment, determine where you stop and whom you interact with, while you explore the beautiful and historic Rideau waterway."

The UNESCO World Heritage site provides the perfect backdrop for people to get away safely with family or a small group of friends on their own private houseboat rental. All the boats are easy to drive, and for non-boaters, no previous boating experience or boat license is required. Their base located in Smiths Falls, Ontario has a fleet of 24 boats, ranging in size from 2-5 cabins, sleeping from 2-12 people. The boats come with a fully equipped kitchen, top deck "fun-deck" and each cabin has its own private bathroom with a private shower. The Le Boat Team teaches you everything you need to know to create the ultimate Canadian vacation.

Le Boat thoroughly cleans each vessel at the end of each use. Additionally, in preparation for when isolation restrictions are eased and for extra protection and the safety of customers and staff, they have introduced extra cleaning and social distancing measures. Le Boat has also stepped up in these uncertain times to offer booking terms that are as flexible as possible. You can book with confidence with Le Boat, knowing that you can cancel up to 48 hours prior to departure with their Go Boating With Confidence policy.

*Although we do our best to provide you with accurate information, all event details are subject to change. Please contact the facility to avoid disappointment.*

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## About The Author

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### Melody Wren

Melody is an Ontario based travel writer who believes travel stories are meant to encourage and inspire and considers her age (over 60) a gift in her journeys, bringing wisdom, experience, humour and a major 'if not now, when' attitude to her writing. A formerly nervous traveller, experiential travel has helped her conquer fears as she snorkelled through the Galapagos islands, glacier trekked in the Northwest Passage, danced around a fire in Africa, learned how to make the perfect tiramisu in Florence, kayaked amongst spawning salmon in Ontario, snow-shoed in Colorado, and sailed in the British Virgin Islands . Her work appears in Canadian Yachting Magazine, Canadian Jewish News, The Toronto Star, Kitchener Waterloo Record, Caribbean Beat Magazine, Cottage Life Magazine, Waypoints Global, Active Over 50, and Inspired Seniors.

