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01

A new tourist offer in the Marais poitevin



River tourism: the combination of land and river in the service of a destination's drawing power.

100 km
of waterways
in the Marais poitevin



River tourism: a unique excursion to discover the Marais poitevin!

This is the art of taking your time, of savouring every moment in order to better appreciate the beauty that surrounds us, an invitation to reconnect with nature, and to marvel at the landscapes that appear as you travel along the water. Navigable since the 19th century, the Sèvre Niortaise and its tributaries allow boaters to explore the natural jewel that is the Marais poitevin. In addition to private boats, trips on licence-free electric houseboats have been offered on the Sèvre Niortaise and its tributaries since the spring of 2023; an original and respectful way to explore this lush green treasure over the course of a few days.

Far from classic tourism, these cruises offer an intimate experience in which every moment becomes a precious digression. Travel along peaceful canals, be guided by the lapping of the water and the echo of the birdsong. The calm waters reflect the richness of the biodiversity that drives this exceptional and fragile ecosystem. Here, the marshes reveal themselves in all their splendour, dotted with plant life that sways in the breeze. Once your boat is moored on a pontoon, boaters are invited to enjoy a wide array of experiences on land: the charm of the villages, cultural visits, exploration of the architectural heritage, local produce, and also sports and nautical activities. With all these multiple facets, this trip becomes a truly unforgettable experience...

Between land, river and sea, river excursions in the Marais poitevin are much more than a simple tourist activity.



River tourism in France, a testimony to slowness

The Voies Navigables de France (VNF) [French Waterways] organisation defines the term "river tourism" as follows: "Any tourism or leisure activity organized on a waterway (cruise, boat trip, boat hire, private pleasure cruising, rowing, kayaking, etc.) or on the land in direct proximity to a waterway (cycling, hiking, rollerblading, horse-riding, fishing, etc.), whether these two practices are combined or independent of each other." This type of tourism is currently growing rapidly. France, with its wealth of canals, rivers and tributaries, therefore, has a huge potential for tourism. Highlighting these waterways allows the local economy to grow by enhancing leisure activities, heritage, cultural sites, etc.

In 2018, 10.6 million passengers hired pleasure cruise boats, including many foreign tourists. This figure includes both day trips and cruises over several days.



02

Explore the wonders of the Marais poitevin on board an electric boat or your own craft



100 km of river to explore

• LA ROCHELLE

On board a hired electric boat or your own craft, between Niort and Marans, the Sèvre Niortaise reveals both itself and a Marais poitevin that is unique and extraordinary. The journey lasts about five days for a return trip between Niort and Marans (approximately 60 km each way).

Boats can go as far as Maillé. Then, the Jeune Autise canal, accessible depending on the boat beam, offers a 5 km journey from Maillé to Maillezaïs. The Vieille Autise canal can be taken from Bazoïn to the port of Courdault, i.e. a return trip of about twenty km.

The Mignon canal allows navigation between Bazoïn and La Grève-sur-Mignon, also with a return trip of some twenty km. In total, there are some 100 km along which boaters can meander by making the trip out along the Sèvre Niortaise and using the tributaries for the return.

You can also get to Marans from the Atlantic Ocean and the Aiguillon Bay to enter the Sèvre Niortaise estuary and go through the Brault lock before taking the shipping canal. There is about 14 km between the mouth of the Sèvre and Marans.

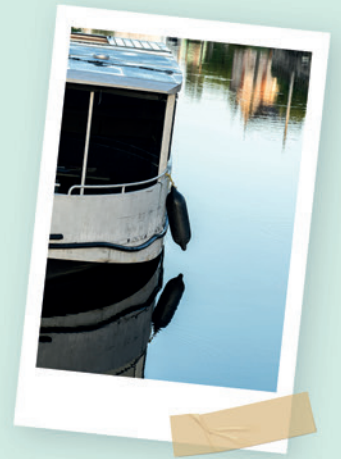


Between cruising and land-based activities, a whole new world reveals itself along the water!

DISCOVERY



03 Destination Marais poitevin



An incredible area

The Marais poitevin is a unique destination that embodies both the beauty of nature and the richness of an exceptional region. Known and famed by French and foreign tourists, it is an essential French heritage site. Every year, more than one million visitors travel and discover it.

Thanks to its multiple landscapes, it is a timeless destination. With the Regional Natural Park, Grand Site de France and Ramsar labels, it is a unique location where nature is protected. The area can be easily accessed by car or train (railway stations in Niort and La Rochelle), and many visitors make the journey to enjoy its tranquillity and beauty.

Cruising is the perfect way to observe the ecosystems, share the landscapes, discover the heritage and enjoy the tranquillity of the countryside.



The Marais poitevin extends over 200,000 hectares between Niort and the Atlantic Ocean. It is at the confluence of three departments: the Vendée, Deux-Sèvres and Charente-Maritime, and two regions: the Pays de la Loire and New Aquitaine.

The Sèvre Niortaise is the fluvial heart of this green, natural land. It meets the sea in the Aiguillon Bay. Upstream of the ocean, several tributaries flow into it: the Vendée, the Vieille Autise, the Mignon, etc. Multiple canals also feed into it and criss-cross the area, thus forming a dense network. In these lands, the water's omnipresence allows the development of a specific flora and fauna.

The Sèvre Niortaise is a coastal river. It has its source in Sepvret in the Deux-Sèvres and flows into the Atlantic Ocean in the Aiguillon Bay. In 1808, Napoleon made navigation possible by imperial decree.

While there was a houseboat rental company in existence in the 1980s, cruising on the river in these boats then almost completely ceased until the river tourism concept emerged.

As a waterway for small barges and other boats, travellers on the Sèvre Niortaise will be able to discover the Marais poitevin and its secrets from a different viewpoint. This adventure can be started at Port Boinot, an emblematic site in the town of Niort, but departures can be made from every slipway in the region between Niort and the ocean. Once the mooring ropes are slipped, new landscapes open up on board a boat, and the exploration begins. The river excursion offered is a unique nomadic tourism experience.
























Multiple activities to discover











During a river excursion on the Sèvre Niortaise, and throughout the five days cruise to make the journey between Niort and Marans, boaters will enjoy not just the journey but also the stopovers. This is one of the major benefits of river tourism: combining cruising and land-based activities in one trip. During these various stopovers, they can enjoy activities regardless of age: walking, cycling and horse riding, and also trips in rowing boats, canoes or paddleboards, and cultural, heritage or gastronomic experiences.

River tourism is a unique way of exploring an area; nomadic cruising allows for enjoying an original experience far from the noise and usual pace, while giving access to rich and varied tourist activities. With friends, as a couple or a family, thanks to land-based activities along the river, everyone will find what they need to relax, enjoy and discover.



Tourist activities by town

Niort	  
La Cale du Port et Niort	  
La Roussille	  
Magné	  
Coulon	  
	  
Arçais	  
	
Damvix	 
Bouillé-Courdault	
Maillé	
Bazoïn	 
La Grève-sur-Mignon	
Taugon - Les Combrands	
Marans	  

-  Tourist information centre
-  Railway station
-  Tourist site
-  Rowing boat or canoe hire
-  Bicycle hire
-  Equestrian leisure activities
-  Swimming pool open all year round
-  Terra Aventura
-  Baludik
-  Petite Cité de Caractère®

A rich natural & cultural heritage

Observe the biodiversity

The biodiversity is a treat for the senses. The marshland flora and fauna are abundant and being on a silent boat will offer a preferential viewpoint. Between dried-up marshes and wetlands, there is a variety of landscapes: lush green, open, etc.

Pollarded trees, angelica or irises... the flora of the Marais poitevin is incredible. 126 species in this land currently have heritage status and are thus protected at European level. These are the aquatic, meadow, coastal or riverbank plants that grow thanks to the unique properties of this natural environment.



The Marais poitevin offers exceptional environments that allow for housing a remarkable fauna. It boasts 34 species of fish, 337 birds and even 50 mammals. Slow and discreet, river tourism offers the possibility of discovering all these species, such as the avocet, heron, poitevin donkey or even the Alpine longhorn beetle... and the European otter if boaters are in luck.



Aquatic plants

White water-crowfoot
Marsh marigold
European frog-bit
Water violet

Riverbank plants

Black alder
Yellow iris
French Tamarisk
Meadowsweet

Coastal plants

Marsh samphire
Small cordgrass
Sea Aster

Meadow plants

Snake's head fritillary
Blue Iris
Adder's-tongue spearwort



Mammals

European otter
Greater horseshoe bat
Southwestern water vole

Birds

Black-winged stilt
Purple heron
Western marsh harrier
Bluethroat

Fish

Eel
Pike
Common roach

Insects

Alpine longhorn beetle

A few examples



EXPLORE

Explore the cultural riches

There is a wealth of cultural activities and amazing heritage on the Sèvre Niortaise and in its surrounding area. Beyond cruising, river explorations can be continued on foot, by bike or even on horseback... to allow for discovering the area's riches. Along the route, emblematic sites open their doors; boaters can also simply enjoy the charm of the villages and their authenticity.

Niort

the keep, market square, Bernard d'Agesci museum, the dragons, etc.

Coulon

the village with the Petite Cité de Caractère label, the Marais poitevin Centre

Arçais

the village with the Petite Cité de Caractère label

Marans

the village centre and marina

Maillezais

the abbey

Damvix et Maillé

the heart of the villages



Nomadic holidays

For this amazing adventure along the water, boaters can cruise the Sèvre Niortaise and its tributaries between Niort and the Aiguillon Bay. Easily accessible by train (2 hours from Paris, 50 minutes from Poitiers) and by car (4 hours from Paris, 2 hours from Nantes, Bordeaux or Angers), Port Boinot in Niort is a perfect cast-off point. With the passing of time and the abandonment of the factories, this location had become an industrial wasteland, recognizable by its unusual water tower. The various recent works linked to the slipway and the construction of the tourist information centre, home, amongst others, to the Comptoir des Itinérances et Randonnées [Travelling and Hiking Post], has given this area of the town a new life. It has become a pleasant country park that's a great place to take a walk. Coming from the ocean, and after passing through the Brault lock, boats can go through the Carreau d'Or lock in Marans (a village located 30 minutes from la Rochelle), which marks the boundary between the inland and seafaring parts of the river.

Cruising on the Sèvre Niortaise is currently managed by the IIBSN: Institution Interdépartementale du Bassin de la Sèvre Niortaise [International Institution for the Sèvre Niortaise Basin]. It owns the Public River Property, which groups together, amongst other things, the waterways accessible to houseboats. A partner in the entire river tourism project from the beginning, its mission is, in particular, to ensure the upkeep of the waterways, banks and navigational structures.



Try local produce

Throughout the adventure, your tastebuds will also enjoy wonderful surprises: farmed mussels, moquette beans, angelica, etc. The restaurants established along the river's edge reveal culinary specialties such as the farci poitevin [a vegetable pâté] and other delights...

For meals on board or during excursions, boaters can trust the "Valeurs Parc" [Park Values] brand established in its region by the Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park. This national brand labels the professionals and products (beer, oil, beef and lamb, honey, pulses, bread, moquette beans, etc.) that embody the values of regional roots, a human scale and environmental protection.



AMBI TION

04

The fulfilment of an unprecedented collective project



A long-standing project

2010

The project was born

2019

Partnership agreement signed

between the various stakeholders to implement this project

2022

Rental manager selected

and first boat received

2023

First season launched



Background to an ambitious project

The development of cruising on the Sèvre Niortaise and the manufacture of electric boats

There were multiple aims in developing this river tourism offer. It means offering the possibility of connecting Niort to La Rochelle via the marshes and offering the region a new and attractive tourism activity that is environmentally friendly. Thanks to the works to renovate equipment, the Sèvre Niortaise is confirming its role as the backbone of the Marais and sustainably joining the French ecotourism offer.

This river tourism offer is the result of work by an unprecedented collective of multi-structure stakeholders: the Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park, the project promoter, the Institution Interdépartementale du Bassin de la Sèvre Niortaise (IIBSN), the State, the regions of New Aquitaine and the Pays de la Loire, the departments of Charente-Maritime, Deux-Sèvres and the Vendée, the Aunis Atlantique, Vendée, and Sèvre Autise local council communities, and the Niort area conurbation committee.

At every stage and up to the creation of a discovery map and communications media (videos, articles, etc.), all these stakeholders have worked to create a mechanism serving the entire region.

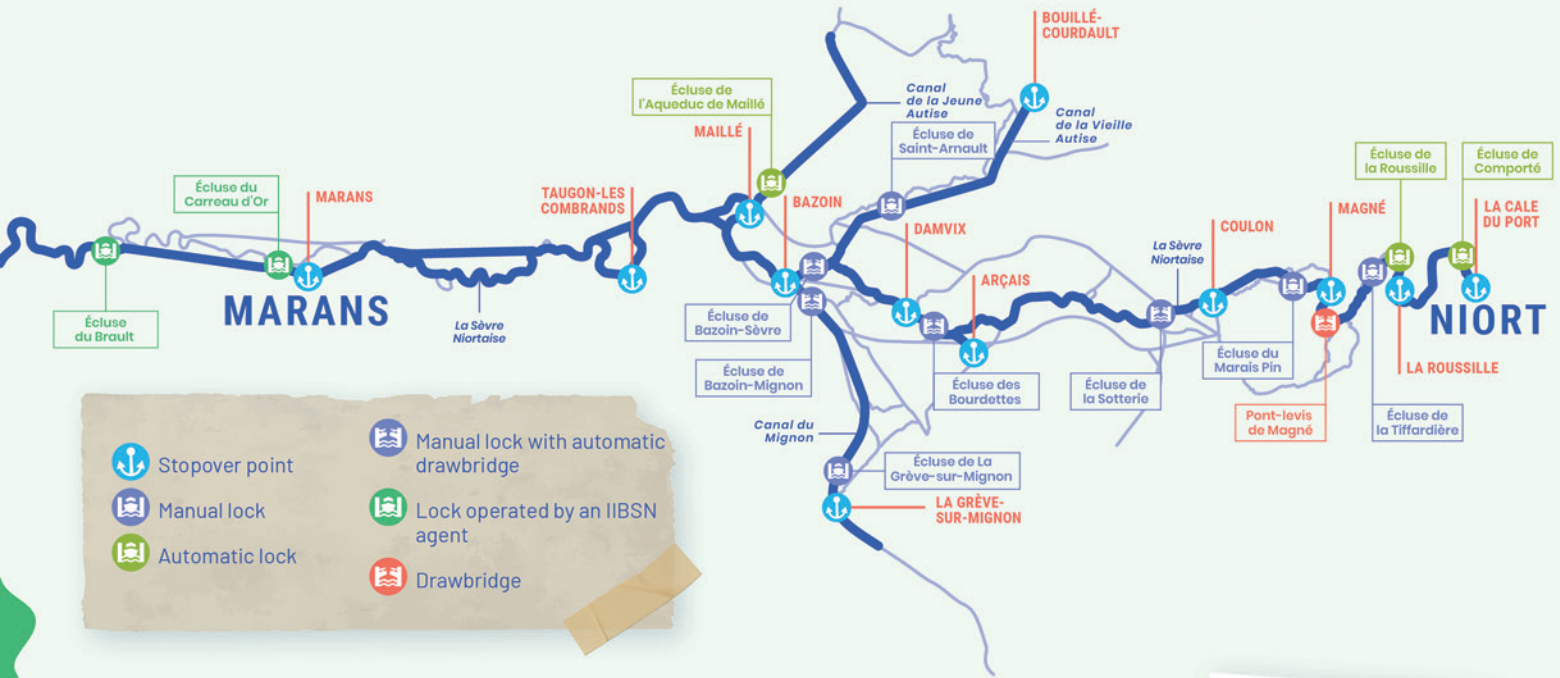
The "River Exploration" is also part of the core of the Marais poitevin Regional Natural park's charter: decentralize activity and create a link between the wetlands, the dried-up marshes and the coastline. It is the link between the various spaces and creates an economic



drawing power. Innovation and experimentation are at the heart of the Park's missions. In this vein, the Marais Poitevin Regional Natural Park has supported the design and implementation of the offer, as well as coordination of the collective and the manufacture of the electric boats, which it owns. In fact, in order to allow tourism to be deployed along the waterways, two houseboats have been designed specially for the Sèvre Niortaise. Until then, very few boats offered air and water draughts suitable for this river. Environmentally friendly, these new boats are equipped with electric drive and wastewater management.

The project involved several phases: the works to revitalize the waterways were performed by the collective and managed by the Park, another part was handled by the IIBSN. The use and hire of the boats is managed by the company "Au Bout du Marais".

With a budget of EUR 3.8 million and the combination of private and public stakeholders, this operation to install river tourism in the Marais poitevin bears the hallmark of the perseverance and fruitful collaboration between these various stakeholders.



Stopover point equipment

Site name	Networks
Niort - La Roussille	1 electricity/ water access point
Magné	1 electricity/ water access point
Coulon	2 electricity/ water access points
Arçais	1 electricity/ water access point
Damvix	1 electricity/ water access point + 1 wastewater pump
Bouillé-Courdault	1 electricity/ water access point
Maillé	1 electricity/ water access point + 1 wastewater pump
Bazoin	2 electricity/ water access points
La Grève-sur-Mignon	1 electricity/ water access point
Taugon - Les Combrands	
Marans	3 electricity/ water access points

Constructions specific for cruising

Renovated locks, pontoons, access points available to all

The renovation of this equipment required multiple work phases by the Institution Interdépartementale du Bassin de la Sèvre Niortaise (IIBSN) and the Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park. All the signalling has been replaced along the navigable 100 km. The various structures have benefitted from works to bring them up to standard and from maintenance. The locks were operational, but mechanisms, machinery, gates and internal masonry were restored. For access to these, waiting pontoons were installed up- and downstream of the locks. These wooden pontoons make transitions between river and land easier. Between the locks, 11 stopover point pontoons with recharging stations and drinking water access points have been built. Some of these also allow for emptying wastewater.

All the structures were designed in sustainable, environmentally friendly materials. False acacia (a tree that is a "cousin" of the acacia) was chosen for its solidity, rot-resistant nature and its geographic proximity rather than turning to exotic hardwoods. Only two, which had suffered the effects of tidal range, were built in floating aluminium: Marans and Taugon.

To ensure the passage of all boats, the waterways are maintained by the IIBSN all year round. The specific attention paid, and improvements made play a major role in protecting river heritage. The stopovers are accessible to all, both hire boats and private craft.





A collective project

Each of the structures in the collective is naturally committed to this ambitious action, in line with a virtuous development strategy in the region. Sustainable construction, economic drawing power, promotion of tourism, innovation, awareness raising, preservation, etc. A host of directions and choices that guided this project for a Marais poitevin revealed with nuances and respect in this new, collectively created formula.

The members of the collective:



Boats designed and manufactured for the Sèvre Niortaise

Craft for enjoying exceptional moments

The two rental boats available for these river explorations are identical. Christened Kifanlo and Hélios (ZenRiver boats), they were considered and designed by the company Naviwatt specifically for the Sèvre Niortaise and left the Alubat dockyard in 2022. Cruising on this river is restricted by specific water and air draughts. With aluminium hulls, solar panels and 100%-electric drive, these are the perfect boats for a trip in the heart of the countryside.

Measuring 13.1 m long by 4.1 m wide, they offer 4 fixed berths and 2 supplementary berths. They can carry up to 12 people.

Each small barge has a lounge area, a kitchen fitted with high quality equipment (refrigerator, oven and ENO hob, etc.), two cabins and a roof terrace, toilets and a bathroom. A heating system is also available for off-season use. To make activities easier once the boat is moored, they can carry bikes for the entire crew. It's really a little house on the water.

Electric and licence-free, these boats can be piloted by everyone. A two-hour training course is provided on every hire. They are equipped with thrusters to make manoeuvring easier. Their maximum speed is 10 kph, which ensures easy steering while being environmentally friendly. The cockpit is also equipped with a rear-view camera.

The boats are powered by lithium batteries that can be recharged on the quay and that are connected to the solar panels installed on the roof.

Specifically equipped stopover points allow for filling up with water and charging batteries.

The boats in figures

Length
13.1 m

Width
4.1 m

Water draught
0.80 m
(loaded)

Air draught
2.40 m

Range
Approximately
10 hours'
cruising

Power
10 kWh

Max. speed
10 kph

Berths
4 to 6



Boats can be piloted without a licence.

A 2-hour training course is given at the time of hiring, before departure.



05 Practical info

Cruising information

For further information
on cruising

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To hire a boat

Rent a licence-free
boat here



HIRE PERIOD
From 1 to 7 nights - the recommended period for
a return trip between Niort and Marais is 5 days.

Toolbox available



THE "RIVER
EXPLORATION"
MAP in PDF format,
available in a
paper version from
tourist information
centres



A PHOTO AND
VIDEO GALLERY



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EXPLORATION **RIVER**

IN THE MARAIS
POITEVIN
ALONG THE SÈVRE NIORTAISE



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