



## **An Insider's Guide to the Culinary Canals of the Upper Loire**

By Dana Freeman

**The chef on a barge cruise is an integral part of the dedicated team looking after you during your voyage.**

In addition to providing nourishment, he strives to share the regional specialties and traditional dishes of France with passengers.

While cruising in the Upper Loire on the barge [Meanderer](#), you will get to know Chef John on your weeklong journey between Moutbouy and Léré. Here is a little more background about what makes him a great chef.

### **CHEF JOHN'S CULINARY TRAINING**

Although Chef John didn't grow up cooking, he found that he had a real passion for it after completing three years of catering college in England. For the last 22 years, it has been a career choice that has literally taken him around the world.



He's worked as a private chef on superyachts and at ski resorts all over Europe, the Mediterranean, South America, and the Philippines. Additionally, Chef John has worked in Michelin-starred kitchens and is a formally trained pastry chef. This is his first season working on a barge.

## BARGE CUISINE



Of all the countries he has worked in, Chef John spent most of his time cooking in France (give or take seven years). Therefore, it is only natural that he is passionate about French food. When thinking about his menus for the week, he understands that most Americans traveling on a barge cruise in France wish to experience the French way of life, including regional cuisine.

To that end, you will find plenty of traditional French dishes on the menu. However, they change seasonally depending on the available produce. So while the protein may stay the same, the fruits and vegetables will vary based on what is at the market at that time of year.



You can count on tasting both French staples and Chef's favorites. For example, Chef John will serve the classic "tarte au citron" he has been baking for the last 18 years!



## MENU FLEXIBILITY

You won't hurt Chef John's feelings if you don't want to eat guinea fowl or rabbit, both French staples. He just needs to know ahead of time, so that he can have the kitchen adequately stocked to prepare equally phenomenal meals for you as he does for the other guests.

**Chef John can work with any food allergy or medical condition. So, whether you are a diabetic, gluten-free, vegetarian, or have specific food aversions, he is happy to accommodate your needs.**

When coordinating your cruise, you'll have an opportunity to state your menu preferences. You will have another opportunity to reiterate those requests during your first night onboard when you meet the [crew](#). It is a great time to let Chef John know you "really don't like mushrooms" or that you "would like to try snails while in France" so that he can make sure you have the best culinary experience onboard the Meanderer.

## CHEESE AND WINE



As crucial as the Chef's job is to create dishes that please the palate, meals are a team effort, and the wine and cheese selections fall under the responsibility of Captain Declan and Hostess Aisling. To ensure there are complimentary flavors, they continuously check in with Chef John to ensure the wine and cheese selections complement the dishes he serves that day.

Declan and Aisling have visited all of the 30+ vineyards that produce the wine they serve on the Meanderer. It is their goal to support smaller vineyards in the region. So, while you will find both a Burgundy and a Bordeaux being served onboard, they are not necessarily from the prominent, well-known winemakers. You will get to taste everything from a Grand Cru to a small Leterc.



Working with her favorite cheesemonger in Rogny les Sept Ecluses, Aisling samples all of the cheese from the region before procuring them for the cruise. Her goal is to take guests on a cheese journey during their time onboard and educate them about France's cheese producers.



You will have two kinds of cheese at lunch and three at dinner. Hostess Aisling's philosophy, especially at dinner, is to present one that everyone will like, one in between, and one that will likely encourage guests to try something new.

On the first day, she eases guests in with a familiar cheese like Brie. And towards the end of the week, you will find something like Epoisse, a gooey, sticky, stinky cheese that is absolutely delicious. If you go home discovering one or two new kinds of cheese you love, her job is done.



Guest blogger [Dana Freeman](#) is a cruise expert, freelance journalist, and the editor behind Dana Freeman Travels. As one of our original Barge Lady Cruise Correspondents, she has also sailed in Southern Burgundy aboard the 8-guest, Ultra-Deluxe barge Prosperite.

*For a regional spotlight about the Upper Loire, click [here](#). For an oenophile's overview of France's wine regions, including that of Sancerre, click [here](#). To book your own culinary cruise on the barge Meanderer, click [here](#).*