

College Cruisers'  
Guide to

# THE OXFORD CANAL

Where to stop, what to see and  
do, and tips for a great trip





## The Oxford Canal

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A canal boat holiday is the perfect way to relax and enjoy the company of friends or family, and the waterways are a wonderful way of exploring England.

The historic Oxford Canal crosses some of England's most beautiful countryside. Cruising the canal is a gentle easy-paced break with fascinating villages, few locks and plenty of pubs.

### ABOUT US

College Cruisers is a long-established canal boat hire fleet based right in the centre of the romantic, historic City of Oxford. Our Oxford Canal boat holidays help you escape the rigours of modern living. Plot a leisurely course through the locks and bridges and enjoy the pretty towns, villages and country pubs along the way.

We have ten boats to hire for short breaks of three or four nights or holidays of a week or longer. We cater for special occasions such as birthday, hen and stag parties, and can offer bespoke canal boat holiday experiences including fully-piloted boat trips and one-way hires.

Oxford has excellent links to all major airports and our base is only a short walk or taxi journey from both rail and coach stations.

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# DISCOVER OXFORD

Oxford is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the UK. It is a small city, and the attractions of the University, historic buildings and places of interest are within easy walking distance of the centre.

College Cruisers narrowboats are an ideal base to visit Oxford's many attractions whilst enjoying comfortable canal boat holiday hire accommodation.

Here are a few ideas about places you can visit on your canal boat holiday hire around Oxford...

## **BLACKWELL'S BOOKS**

Not just any bookstore, this is the largest single room devoted to book sales in Europe.

## **BODLEIAN LIBRARY**

Unusual for not being housed in just one building but in many spread all over the city of Oxford. The oldest parts of the Bodleian being located around Radcliffe Square with the Duke Humphrey's Library (1488) and the Divinity School.

## **CARFAX TOWER**

Standing at the crossroads of St. Aldate's, Cornmarket, Queen and High Street in the centre. The tower's location makes it a perfect central point to tour the city of Oxford.



## OXFORD BOTANIC GARDENS

Founded 1621 by Henry Danvers for the study of medicinal plants.

## OXFORD UNIVERSITY COLLEGES

The Oxford University is a collection of independently founded colleges each with its own history rather than 'one campus' as with many other city universities.

## THE RADCLIFFE CAMERA

One of the most distinctive landmarks in Oxford. The Camera (meaning 'room') was built 1737-1749.

## SHELDONIAN THEATRE

In 1667 this was the first major commission by architect Christopher Wren.

## UNIVERSITY CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

Based on the High Street this was the first University library.

## JERICHO

The historic Oxford district where College Cruisers is based, Jericho is Oxford's Greenwich Village - slightly Bohemian and full of great cafés, pubs and restaurants. It's a great place to kill some time before picking up your boat, or for eating out on your last night (we recommend The Old Bookbinders or Brasserie Blanc). In fiction, Jericho was the setting for parts of Philip Pullman's Northern Lights and a location for the famous TV series Inspector Morse, and is reputed to have been the inspiration for the fictional Beersheba area featured in Thomas Hardy's Jude The Obscure.

## OXFORD MUSEUMS

A selection of some of Oxford's best museums...

**Ashmolean Museum** | Britain's first official museum.

**Bate Collection of Musical Instruments** | Based at the Faculty of Music building on St. Aldates.

**History of Science Museum** | Scientific instruments and devices throughout the ages.

**Museum of Modern Art** | Exhibits of 20th century art.

**Museum of Oxford** | Based at St. Aldates this covers the 2000 years of Oxford history.

**Pitt Rivers Museum** | Based at Park Road covering prehistory, ethnology and the arts of all cultures and periods.

**University Museum** | Based at Park Road this collection shows natural history such as gemstones, dinosaurs and other fossils.

## BEYOND OXFORD

Beyond Oxford itself lots of visitors come to Oxfordshire to visit Blenheim Palace. Oxfordshire also has delightful countryside to offer with outstanding pretty villages dotted along the banks of the Oxford Canal.

Here are a few details of what you can see on your narrow boat holiday hire around the Oxford Canal:

**Blenheim Palace** | Just a few miles north of the city of Oxford is the grand Blenheim Palace.

**Uffington White Horse** | Carved into the chalk hillside the mysterious White Horse can be seen above the village of Uffington.

**Wayland's Smithy** | Just a short distance from the White Horse is the Wayland's Smithy famous for its chambered tomb.



# THE OXFORD CANAL

The Oxford Canal is probably the UK's most delightful boating holiday route, meandering southwards from the outskirts of Coventry down to our own dreaming spires of Oxford.

The canal was originally built to transport coal from the Midlands to the South of England and was, for a time, one of the country's most important waterways. These days it is primarily used by leisure boaters and holidaymakers.

Renting one of our boats is an ideal way to escape the urban sprawl and enjoy enticing landscapes of soft gentle pastureland, passing by antique Cotswold villages. Better still, why not moor your boat and explore the villages and numerous country pubs along the way (most provide freshly cooked local produce and delicious real ales to help you on your way). Or moor up in Oxford itself and use your boat as a base to explore this wonderful, historic city.

A short break boating holiday takes you from Oxford to Aynho or Banbury and back - depending on how energetic you feel. Half of our boats are available for short breaks as we feel that this is a very good way to (literally) test the water!

A one week boating cruise takes you to Napton and back on the canal (cruising through the newly built town centre of Banbury and the super little village of Cropredy).





**Setting off on your trip...**

# OXFORD TO BANBURY

*Head North out of Oxford and into the country, through picturesque villages with lovely country pubs, towards the market town of Banbury with its museum and canal-side shopping facilities.*

## **LEAVING OXFORD...**

Leaving College Cruisers behind you will now be travelling North towards Thrupp, cruising through the hidden world of North Oxford - allowing glimpses into other people's lives and gardens as you float by. You will also travel through the heart of the resident canal community in Oxford so we ask you to take care and go slowly past these moored boats - they are people's homes!

Arriving at Wolvercote, you will come across your first lock, so it's time to get your crew into action! Just before the lock you will have seen The Plough Inn, a good place to stop for the night on your return journey as it is not far from our boatyard. (Another good last night stop is the Anchor, at bridge 240, or you can moor opposite our boatyard itself - just 15 minutes' walk from the city centre.) Lots of people come back to Oxford a day early so they can explore the famous university city.

We advise that at least one member of the crew stays off the boat after operating Wolvercote lock (this stretch is good for walking any dog members of the crew) as you will soon be opening your first lift bridge, quickly followed by another, then Dukes Lock and finally another lift bridge, it is then OK to get all the crew back on board.

After 2 more locks and approx 2 hours, passing by Kidlington and Yarnton, you will come across another canal community at Langford Lane, again we ask you to slow down and respect their homes. Once around the bend, Thrupp will be coming into sight.

## **THRUPP**

Thrupp is a very pretty canal-side village with two good places to eat, The Jolly Boatman and The Boat with visitor moorings near both pubs. There are many private boats moored here so once again care is needed when passing by. Thrupp is a very popular spot for walkers and boaters and a bus can be caught on the main road to visit nearby Blenheim Palace in Woodstock. Episodes of the popular television series Inspector Morse were filmed here in Thrupp (and at the house just outside our boatyard gates in Oxford!).

Passing under another lift bridge and along the Thrupp Wide you find yourselves in the Cherwell Valley and you will begin to see why the canal is referred to as a contour canal. You will see the church of Shipston-on-Cherwell up on the bank to your left. The canal curls its way around the church yard and under the bridge, to your right are the meadows





The next lock is Shipston Weir, a diamond shape. After this lock the canal and the River Cherwell share the same course for approximately a mile. Make sure you keep to the right in case a boat is coming from the North - it is difficult to see around the bends. This is another good dog walking opportunity up to Bakers lock, where the river leaves the canal under a pretty iron bridge but soon to return and run parallel for most of the journey to Banbury. You and the canal continue through Bakers Lock and onward to Enslow and the Rock of Gibraltar pub.

The Rock of Gibraltar has moorings and a delightful garden so is a good stopping off point for lunch or dinner. After the Rock you will pass boats moored in the marina at Enslow. Again, cruise gently past these boats, please - they are their owners' pride and joy! Past the marina you will see the winding hole (it is not at the marina!).

## **KIRTLINGTON**

The Route now becomes much more wooded and the over-hanging trees form a tunnel for you to pass through. To your left the river has now joined you on your course. The canal from here gently continues on its way taking you to Pigeons lock passing by the golf course; look out for the swans that have picked the tee as their home.

Around a few more bends you will see in front of you Pigeons Lock. From here you can leave your boat and walk into the village of Tackley about 1 mile or up the hill to Kirtlington, where there are two excellent gastro pubs - The Dashwood and The Oxford Arms - great if you have a special occasion or if you just want to enjoy a good meal.

Once through Pigeons Lock, and after passing a rather individual tea room on your right (where on a Sunday you can sit and devour a homemade cream tea), you enter a rather magical world of water and trees, like climbing into the pages of Arthur Ransome's Swallows and Amazons. Kirtlington quarry is a child's paradise, with woods and paths to explore and a huge open space for getting rid of any excess energy. It's also a great place to have an evening barbecue - you will feel a million miles from anywhere and on a clear night the sky is full of stars.

Next is Northbrook Lock, a delightful lock and the end of your hidden wooded section. You become aware of the hills around, and the river is easily accessed here. After the lock there is a very tight bend with a pretty stone bridge; be aware of boats coming from the North, so go slowly. The canal now begins to climb and the locks begin to get deeper.

From Dashwood Lock there is a glorious view of the open countryside all around. All along the next pound you get delightful glimpses of the River Cherwell with lots of interesting little mooring spots and once again you get the feeling of being the first people to discover the canal as you make your way between the reeds.

## **LOWER HEYFORD**

Your next port of call is Lower Heyford. Here you can touch the real world if only for a short time. The train station is handy if you need to drop off or collect crew. Oxfordshire Narrowboats have a good shop and Kizzies bistro for a spot of lunch. If you just fancy a walk there is a circular walk around the delightful village of Lower Heyford.

Travelling on, it is "slowly goes", while you negotiate the moored boats and a rather narrow section of canal. Once again you have the opportunity to look in on other people's back gardens, and pass an exciting, rickety tree house. There is a lift bridge to be opened and - if you need refreshment or a well cooked evening meal - you can cross the canal here and walk up to The Bell where you will be given a warm welcome.

The canal continues North through the Cherwell Valley and begins the serious business of climbing and - with the exception of Allen's - the locks are rather remote. You will be travelling through water meadows and cows may wander down to take a look at you, although the hedges along the towpath can obscure the delightful views.

After Heyford Common Lock the canal enters a short cutting and then moves out into open pastureland. This is another good place for overnight mooring and a barbecue, with space for children to let off steam. (If you do it on your return journey you can call in at Marks and Spencer in Banbury first and buy

lots of goodies to eat.) Be aware the cows can be rather nose-y but they mean no harm!

## **SOMERTON**

Between here and the next lock, look out for a series of wooden sculptures by Michael Fairfax carved from old lock timbers. They are inscribed with a poem called Lock written by James McKendrick. Somerton Lock is the deepest on the canal, you will climb 12 feet while inside and once the lock has filled and you have risen, look around you at the glorious view.

Once through Somerton Deep Lock, the canal continues its pretty way on to Aynho. Along the way the canal is flanked by the flat flood plain of the River Cherwell on one side and the railway lines on the other. You will notice the impressive viaduct. The canal is protected from winter flooding by an embankment which also gives a good viewing platform of the surrounding countryside.

## **AYNHO**

When you reach Aynho you will again be passing moored canal boats so as always, go slowly! At Aynho is the excellent Great Western Arms, another good pub/restaurant right alongside the canal. Another pub is the Duke of Cumberland; it's a bit of a walk from the canal but if you call them they may collect you from your boat.

Passing by Aynho Wharf the canal passes under another of the lift bridges peculiar to the Oxford Canal and some good overnight moorings. At Aynho Weir, another diamond shaped lock, the River Cherwell crosses the canal. Notice the difference in the colour of the water.

After only a very short distance you arrive at Nells Bridge. If you are on foot you will have to cross a very busy main road in order to work the lock. Care is required especially if cruising with children and/or animals; there is no gate between the towpath and the road. The entrance to the lock is narrow. Once through, you are on your way to Banbury.





## **BANBURY**

The canal once again becomes woody and seemingly remote but you will suddenly become conscious of the roar of traffic as you pass under the M40 motorway. Happily you are soon able to leave this behind. King's Sutton Lock is soon upon you, with its delightful lock cottage and pretty surrounding countryside, before you head through to the outskirts of Banbury, and into the hustle and bustle of the town centre. (You can moor in the town centre with shops galore just outside your window!)

Banbury is full of history and it is well worth spending time exploring and restocking the fridge for your return or onward journey. It also has a large park

with playground, plenty of dog-friendly areas and interesting conservation zones.

If you are only with us for a short break this is where we suggest you turn around and begin your journey South back to the dreaming spires of Oxford. The journey home will be every bit as interesting; you will be able to call in on the pubs you missed or even re-visit ones you enjoyed. Moor in the place where someone said "that would be a good spot to stop", but just that bit too late for you to put the brakes on. And don't forget to barbecue on the meadow at Somerton Mill. See you back in Oxford!

**Cruising further afield...**

# BANBURY TO NAPTON

*For those of you continuing your journey, the route carries on North along the Cherwell Valley through Cropredy (home of a legendary folk music festival) and on to Napton where the South Oxford Canal ends – approximately another 12 hours' cruising.*

## **CROPREDY**

Your first port of call is Cropredy. There is a useful shop by the wharf bridge and you can get rid of litter at the wharf. This sleepy village has many interesting features: a good playground a little walk from the canal – just far enough to make it an exciting surprise for younger members of your crew who need a rest from the boat; two good child-friendly pubs – the Brasenose Arms and the Red Lion (apparently a few ghosts have taken up residence here) – both a short walk from your floating home; and there is a grand sandstone church with a fine clock.

Although quiet, the village comes to life spectacularly in August with the annual Folk Festival (now one of Europe's largest). It was also the scene of an important battle in the English Civil War on 29th June 1644. Cromwell's forces under Waller attacked Cropredy Bridge in an attempt to open up a route into Oxford. The Royalists managed to capture Waller's artillery and protect Oxford. Perhaps it's not such a sleepy place after all!

On leaving the village of Cropredy you will travel through the lock, one of the prettiest along your journey. Travelling on, the canal is hidden behind a large hedge but you do get occasional views of the valley. After three locks you come to Clattercote Wharf. Please do not turn your boat around here, you may get more than you bargained for.

## **CLAYDON LOCKS**

The next locks are the Claydon Flight (the Bygones Museum here is well worth a visit for young and old alike). As with all locks it is very important to try to conserve water. Please always make sure that there is no one approaching from the opposite direction before you fill or empty a lock in order to use it, and always make sure all paddles are closed when you leave. Locks are a great way to meet people!

After Claydon Locks the canal twists and turns. Once again it becomes very obvious why it is called a contour canal. The hills begin to surround you, as the canal prepares to take you through the cutting which was the course of an old tunnel. This is narrow and thickly wooded. At the end the canal sweeps around a large bend towards Fenny Compton Wharf and The Wharf Inn, a good pub where children and dogs are welcome.





## NAPTON

From here the course of the canal is erratic and meandering travelling under many brick-arched bridges. The canal travels West, then doubles back on itself flowing East towards Stoneton Manor. Here a steep ridge sets it back on course towards Napton.

The route towards Marston Doles and Napton takes you through rolling Warwickshire countryside. On arriving at Marston Doles the landscape opens up and the windmill at Napton comes into view. From here it is downhill into Napton so you can see for miles.

At the Old Engine House Arm you can turn your boat around in preparation for your return journey back to Oxford. If you like a walk there is The Folly Pub at the bottom of the flight of locks.



# PREPARING FOR YOUR JOURNEY

Here are some top tips for what to bring for a canal boat holiday. More information about what is provided aboard College Cruisers' fleet of comfortable canal boats can be found at [www.collegecruisers.com/about-our-holidays](http://www.collegecruisers.com/about-our-holidays).

Use **soft bags** if possible: hard suitcases take up a lot of space.

Clothes.... **casual, warm, and comfortable** depending on the time of year, layers are a good idea. The boats have plenty of storage space but hanging space is limited, so leave your ball gowns at home! Along the canal are plenty of excellent pubs and restaurants where the dress code is smart casual.

We suggest **a good waterproof coat** and waterproof trousers - we do provide one set, but if you are all well equipped then the great British weather cannot spoil your holiday... and you may even enjoy the odd wet day!

**Footwear:** non slip is a must, wellies are useful

**Hats** to keep the sun off your heads

**First aid kit, lip salve, insect repellent and suncream** - the sun is stronger when you are on the water

**Torches** (you might go to the pub in daylight but come back in the dark!)

**Board games and playing cards;** canal holidays are a great way for families to spend time together

**Books and magazines;** canals are excellent places to relax with a good book

**Towels and tea towels** (these can also be rented)

If relevant, please check to make sure your boat is **child-friendly**. Reins are a good idea and a buggy is very useful at locks.

## SUPPLIES FOR CANAL HOLIDAY CRUISING

We advise you take enough food with you for a few days; there are places along the canal to buy milk and bread. The majority of our customers tend to have breakfast and lunch on board and then use one of the many pubs / restaurants along the South Oxford Canal for their evening meal.

When you get to Banbury you are able to moor outside Marks and Spencer food hall and restock for the next few days. All the kitchens on our boats have ample storage, and a good sized fridge.

Disposable barbecues are useful; there are lots of places to have a evening Barbie, just make sure it is not used on the boat and that you take away any rubbish.

## ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES

All our boats have hairdryers, TV with DVD player, Radio/ CD player. It is OK to bring with you electrical items such as laptops, chargers for phones, iPods, shavers and camera batteries, power cables for hand held computer games etc. Items such as hair straighteners, and small electrical kitchen items are NOT allowed.

## FISHING

Fishing rods are welcome at College Cruisers, you must have a valid rod licence, and live bait must always stay outside the boat!

Happy Packing!