

PRESS RELEASE

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Alternative romantic weekend breaks for couples who crave culture, adventure and discovery

Avoid the cliché by rethinking romance this Valentine's Day. For couples who prefer discovery over predictability, active holiday operator, Le Boat, spotlights the top ten cultural and adventure-filled escapes offering fresh perspectives of Europe's most-loved destinations



In the search for active or novel experiences that disconnect couples from daily stresses to forge stronger bonds with each other, unique and immersive breaks are becoming increasingly popular across Europe.

With extensive transport connections available across the continent, beloveds can log off on a Friday and arrive at their destination in less than three hours, using their weekends to rekindle over shared discoveries – the secret to long lasting and authentic relationships.

Cheryl Brown, MD and boating holiday expert at Le Boat, says: “With travel trends continuing to reflect a growing desire for more unique, off the beaten track experiences, British/**Irish** couples are also opting for more intentional romantic escapes.

“Less is now more when it comes to distance covered, predictable backdrops or views, and over shared itinerary tick-lists. With the emphasis firmly on mindful memory making, deviating from the obvious travel and leisure experiences is key for those seeking a special Valentine's Day gift or unforgettable romantic getaway, and will bring a whole lot more fulfilment for couples looking to reconnect.

“By dodging the crowds, seeking out unique activities and exploring shared interests at popular European destinations, couples can spend quality time together and build memories through enriching and intimate experiences.”

Below, Cheryl shares her top ten alternative experiences to foster genuine connection this Valentine's Day and beyond...

1. For folklore followers - Loch Ness Kayaking Adventure

Scottish Highlands, Scotland

Explore old-age folklore with a kayaking trip on the [Loch Ness water reserve](#) in Scotland.

Home to the legend of the Loch Ness monster, Loch Ness is an area studied for its scientific history by the Inverness Field Club for 150 years in 2026 – where dramatic highland scenery, Scottish culture and an undeniably mysterious atmosphere is found.

Be inspired by everlasting days of breathtaking landscapes, complemented by cosy evenings of fulfilled exhaustion and limbs entwined by the fire.

2. For history lovers - Carcassonne City Private Guided Tour

Carcassonne, France

Travel back in time to bask in the medieval charm of Carcassonne, a historic fortress city with the iconic (and romantic!) [Canal du Midi](#) – celebrating 30 years as a UNESCO World Heritage Site this year - winding through its heart.

With fairytale scenery and rolling French countryside extending from every angle, this ancient city is an ideal destination to make unforgettable rose-tinted memories – the kind that almost don't feel real when you return.

3. For culinary adventurers - Day of the Wadden Sea Guided Hike and Wild Oyster Tasting

Friesland, The Netherlands

With Dutch, Danish and German regions bordering the UNESCO World Heritage Wadden Sea, this annual experience on 27 June is a celebration of shared heritage, dynamic ecosystems, and the great outdoors.

Enjoy a local breakfast followed by a guided mudflat hike, then gather to sample wild oysters – nature's famous aphrodisiac - from the waters of this unique [Friesland](#) landscape.

4. For those that love the water – An immersive Irish river cruise

The River Shannon, Ireland

Steeped in culture and lush green landscapes - they don't call it the Emerald Isle for no reason – the River Shannon offers a scenic journey through historic Celtic towns and rural nature, ideal for couples looking for a relaxing, intimate, shared experience.

For the ultimate peaceful alone-time, try a self-drive river cruise along the [Shannon](#) – timing your getaway between March-October when the waterways are open for boating – where public mooring docks a-plenty offer the utmost ease for cultural pit-stops.

For example, the welcoming midlands town of Athlone is home to many historic landmarks, including the oldest pub in Ireland. Sean's Bar has been known as the heart of the county for over 1,100 years, offering visitors a gleeful experience and 'timeless craic' to recount for years to come.

5. For cycling enthusiasts - The Fietsvierdaagse River Vecht Cycle

Utrecht, The Netherlands

There's nothing quite like a shared sporting achievement to strengthen the connection of likeminded souls, so for those that love to bike together, consider the scenic Weesp to Utrecht cycle route during Fietsvierdaagse - a four-day cycling celebration running from 2-5 June 2026.

Follow the River Vecht through 35km of tulip fields and green landscapes lined with renowned Golden Age mansions, finishing at the idyllic [Old Canal of Utrecht](#). Here, it's time to celebrate completing the feat of the Fietsvierdaagse together, with a refreshing toast from a sun-soaked waterside terrace.

6. For Whistledown readers - Horse and Carriage Ride at Great Windsor Park

Surrey, United Kingdom

Experience British high society at Windsor Great Park, a renowned set location of Netflix's acclaimed Bridgerton series - soon to release Part 2 of its latest season – located just off the [River Thames](#).

Until 31 March 2026, Ascot Carriages is offering a traditional horse-drawn carriage ride through the 18th century woodland that provided the backdrop for Season 2's memorable horseback riding scenes – the perfect opportunity for a spot of afternoon role-play.

7. For nature explorers - Spreewald Biosphere Reserve Tulip Festival

Brandenburg, Germany

What invokes romance more than flowers? A pocket of storybook villages and lush forests, the UNESCO World Heritage Spreewald Biosphere Reserve diverts from the River Spree into the beautiful [Brandenburg countryside](#).

Explore the reserve and time your visit with the 'Spring awakening in Northern Europe' - the region's annual tulip festival, held between April–May in Laga Park, Südpromenade.

8. For eco-conscious oenophiles – Biodynamic Wine Tasting on the Alsace Wine Route
Alsace-Lorraine, France

For an immersive masterclass in the most natural and sustainable vinification in the country, visit Alsace-Lorraine – home to the highest percentage of biodynamic vineyard area in the country. With a reputation for championing organic wine innovation, there's truly no better place to explore for a couple of curious grape nuts.

Between the picturesque Vosges Mountains and the [Marne-au-Rhin canal](#) stretches the 170km 'Alsace Wine Route', where vineyard after vineyard waits to be discovered by inquisitive palates.

Enjoy an elegant immersion into the guided tastings, scientific demonstrations and expertly paired wine and dining this romantic region has to offer.

9. For couples celebrating a three-year milestone - Glassblowing Demonstration on Murano Island
Venice, Italy

A traditional gift for couples celebrating a three-year anniversary, a glass-made present symbolises transparency and trust. To mark the romantic milestone, take a boat from the city of [Venice](#) to Murano Island - the home of the art of glass-blowing and the best place to purchase a ceremonial gift for your loved one.

Whilst on Murano, watch a live demonstration at Wave Murano Glass Factory or take an in-depth guided tour to learn the story of this traditional, venetian craft and the meaning behind your anniversary token.

10. For photography fanatics - *Point de vue du Gras* Exhibition at the Grand Palais
Burgundy, France

To mark the 200th anniversary of the first photograph ever taken – *Point de vue du Gras* by French inventor, Nicéphore Niépce – the [Burgundy region](#) is hosting a year-long celebration of the milestone in 2026.

Visit the Grand Palais for an in-depth exploration of early 'heliography' photography and learn how it has developed, then journey on to explore some of the undeniably photogenic medieval chateaux Burgundy is known for. Taking inspiration from Niépce, create an album of romantic French scenes to document this dreamy experience.

Thinking beyond the stereotypical can create the most personal of memories, bringing new depths of authenticity to couples' quality time.

With just 60 hours in a weekend, an individually tailored trip can completely revitalise a romantic connection struggling with the demands of modern adult life.

Leaving lovers with a renewed sense of intimacy and a rosy reminiscence of their time away, alternative getaways are the ultimate Valentine's showstopper.

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About Le Boat

With over 55 years of experience, leading inland waterways holiday operator, Le Boat, offers self-drive boating holidays that require no license, enabling access to the rivers, lakes and canals of the UK, Ireland, Europe & Canada.

Le Boat makes boating easy and accessible for all, guaranteeing confidence on the water for first timers and seasoned experts alike and offering peace of mind with daily assistance & technical support.

With Le Boat, travellers will discover a different way to holiday - A slow travel option that takes them off the beaten track to explore new places or experience much-loved destinations from a new perspective. Personalised itineraries and the freedom to go at your own pace provide an opportunity to slow down, unwind, (re)connect with loved ones, and create lasting memories.

Combining transport, accommodation, self-catering facilities, and allowing holidaymakers to explore multiple locations and sights in one trip, Le Boat holidays provide excellent value for money, whilst a choice of over 950 vessels, ranging from value to luxury, caters to all budgets.

The Le Boat fleet will grow by 400 boats over the next 10 years, with a focus on premium boats, Liberty & Horizon.

Le Boat holidays are available between March and October and are priced from £194pp (based on a 7-night Thames cruise in April in a Comfort (Caprice) boat, sleeping up to 6 people, priced at £1,169).

Le Boat also offers a hassle-free Ownership Programme, giving boating enthusiasts the opportunity to purchase a Horizon or Liberty model. Owners receive a guaranteed 8% annual income, plus free upkeep, mooring and maintenance, whilst enjoying up to 12 weeks of cruising each year across Le Boat's network for the full 8-year duration of the programme. At the end, owners can choose to keep their boat or sell it back to Le Boat for up to 60% (excl. VAT) of the original purchase price.

Finally, Le Boat operates one of Europe's largest brokerage networks, offering a wide selection of well maintained, pre-owned canal and river boats. All ex-fleet models have been meticulously serviced throughout their life, undergoing regular inspections, haul outs and preventive maintenance. Buyers benefit from reliable boats ready to cruise, expert guidance, and the reassurance of purchasing from a trusted operator with over 55 years of experience.

For more information or to book your self-drive river cruising holiday, visit www.leboat.com/en

About Cheryl Brown

Cheryl Brown is Managing Director for Le Boat, part of the Marine Division of Travelopia and owned by KKR.

Cheryl began her career in travel at just 16, rising quickly through the ranks to become Retail Trading Director in 2001 and Managing Director of the First Choice Retail Group in 2004.

In 2007 she joined Sunsail as Managing Director and later became COO for TUI Marine, which included The Moorings, Sunsail, Footloose and Le Boat, in Florida.

After four years in the sunshine, Cheryl returned to the UK to lead Le Boat, a role she continues to love and lead in with passion. Today, she also sits on the Board of Travelopia.

A passionate boater herself, Cheryl enjoys life on the Thames from her riverside home with her own dock and dayboat. She loves welcoming new customers and watching them grow in confidence on the water, as well as reconnecting with those who return year after year.

Under Cheryl's leadership, Le Boat has expanded across the Atlantic, opening two bases and launching 32 boats in Ontario, Canada. She also introduced the Horizon fleet in 2016 and most recently unveiled Liberty in 2025, the company's most luxurious boat to date.

Cheryl's vision inspired the new creative platform *We're on Le Boat*, which celebrates the boating community and invites newcomers to discover the freedom of the waterways.

Cheryl is proud to invite everyone to join the Le Boat community and discover the magic of boating.