



AHOY THERE

More and more Londoners are discovering the joys of a home on the water. If you're keen to learn the ropes, Mary Wilson (herself a boat-dweller) has some advice

Ever woken up to the sound of ducks quacking or coot chicks demanding to be fed? It sounds like life in the country, but it's also quite normal in the heart of London – if you live on a boat. My husband and I have owned a narrow boat at Little Venice on the Regent's Canal (above) for 17 years. It's the perfect *pied à terre* and one that people from all walks of life can enjoy. "In this economic climate, a lot of people are more open to the idea of buying a boat to live on," says Patrick Boakye of River Homes (riverhomes.co.uk). "Although they might not increase in value, the mooring – if it can be passed on to a new owner – does".

There are quite a few idiosyncrasies in living on a narrow boat (so-called because they are only seven feet wide). If I put the toaster on at the same time as the kettle the electrics blow and I have to go onto the towpath to reset it. And you have to watch the level of your water tank; otherwise you

can run out of water while in the middle of a shower. Apart from that, life on a boat is very civilised with diesel central heating, a washing machine, fridge and Calor gas cooker. My husband says he loves "the feeling of the great outdoors while living in civilisation and there is a camaraderie which you would never get in a block of flats. It's cheaper and you have the advantage of being able to move your home at will."

Converted barges, meanwhile, are larger and more like floating flats. They are usually found on the Thames, which, apart from being wider than the canal, is tidal. So the water goes up and down depending on the tide, giving a changing vista throughout the day. Chris Firth of Chesterton Humberts (chestertonhumberts.co.uk) advises that when choosing a boat on the Thames, you should go and see it at different times of day and stages of tide. "You can change the boat, but you can't alter the position of the mooring," he says. "You

should also check out how well the mooring is managed and maintained. Make sure the boat has had a recent survey; if not, get one done."

Finding the right boat can be time-consuming. You will soon discover that boats have an infinite range of internal layouts and you need to trawl through sites such as Apollo Duck (apolلودuck.co.uk), which has boats for sale all over England, go to marinas and look around at what is available, or just walk up and down the tow path to see if any boat has a 'for sale' sign in its window.

The agent River Homes currently has four barges for sale on the Thames at Cheyne Pier in Chelsea, one of the iconic mooring sites in London where celebrities including Damien Hirst have lived in the past. For something luxurious, Bective Leslie Marsh (bectivelesliemarsh.co.uk) is currently marketing newly fitted-out barges (bespoke for each client) from 105 to 131 ft long at Oyster Pier in Battersea. These have up to 2,300 sq ft of living

space and the benefit of hotel concierge services from the five-star Hotel Rafayel. Prices start at £1.5m (including 60-year mooring lease and basic fit-out). They are navigable, so you could move your home to Canary Wharf to attend a concert or even take it to France for a week. Annual service charges are £7,500 with an annual London Port Authority charge of £3,000.

It's important to note that the mooring rules for each location are different. Some moorings, such as those at Riverside Quarter in Wandsworth, are sold on 60-year leases and can be assigned to a new owner. Here it costs £5,864 per annum (including the use of the development facilities) for a 74 ft boat. If you moor your boat on one of the Canal & River Trust moorings on the Regent's Canal, then it depends where it is and whether it is a residential or non-residential mooring (which means you can only stay there four nights a week). In most cases, boat owners are 'technically' not

meant to include the value of the mooring in the sale price, although most do. Vacant moorings, of which there are few, go to auction on the Canal & River Trust's website crtmoorings.com. At Poplar Dock and Limehouse Basin, both run by British Waterways Marinas Ltd (bwml.co.uk), residential moorings up to 60 ft cost £9,450 per annum.

When you've found something you're ready to call home, what's next? Most boats are bought with cash. It is possible to arrange a marine mortgage, but this will not include the value of the mooring. You need to display a cruising licence if you are using the canals, which start at £488.89 for up to 18 ft. And you also need a Boat Safety Certificate, which ensures that your boat is safe in terms of its condition and any gas or electric appliances you might have, and insurance. These have to be renewed every four years and cost about £180. After that, you're ready for life on the water. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

BOATS ON THE MARKET



RIVERSIDE QUARTER, SW18
£595,000

A 74ft long converted Thames barge complete with two bedrooms. chestertonhumberts.co.uk



BLACKWALL BASIN, E14
£295,950

Four-bedroom Dutch barge Kajaco mixes a contemporary interior with original features. foxtons.co.uk



OYSTER PIER, SW11
£1.5M

Barge Vega IV has 2,300 sq ft of living space. Price includes 60-year mooring lease. bectivelesliemarsh.co.uk

WHERE TO MOOR IN LONDON

Little Venice Restaurants, pubs and shops nearby and a private tow path. canalrivertrust.org.uk

Riverside Quarter, Wandsworth
24-hour concierge and pool included in annual fee. riversidequarter.com

Wenlock Basin, Islington
Private residential mooring with secure cycle storage. wenlockhouseboatco.com

Poplar Dock, Canary Wharf
Facilities include mains drainage, fuel, shops and laundry. bwml.co.uk