

Travel

FOOD DRINK MOVIES MUSIC THEATRE PUB EVENTS

Setting sail for a holiday with a difference

BY NICK COLE

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Never-say-die housewife Natalia Robinson, of Burringham Road, Scunthorpe, took husband Phil and their three children on their first-ever cruise on a barge – and what an eye-opener it proved to be. It was an experience the five land-lubbers totally enjoyed and are keen to repeat again this summer. The soon to be christened “Swish Family Robinson” were booked in for a weekend short-break with Shire Cruisers aboard a grand old lady called The York.

Their starting point for their ground-breaking cruise along the Rochdale Canal was The Wharf at Sowerby Bridge, West Yorkshire – about a 90-minute drive from their home.

Soon-to-be-appointed Bosun Phil, a local heating gas engineer, and skipper Natalia were given a crash course in handling the locks and were assured that all stopping points on the canal had at least one pub serving food.

The three youngest would-be mariners were warned not to go along the gunwales – and spent the rest of the weekend trying to find them.

The family also learned that the Rochdale ran for 33 miles from Sowerby Bridge to Manchester and contained 91 locks, all dating back to 1804.

Their slow but steady voyage along the Rochdale turned into a real party, mixing with fellow barges and visiting the many canal-side attractions including for shoe-mad Natalia a bargain-laden car boot sale and a great Indian take-away.

“We are all dying to go cruising again”

Natalia Robinson

Natalia said: “As you can imagine we were quite apprehensive at first but Phil and I and the kids soon got into the swing of things.

“For years we had flown off to the hottest destinations in search of our dream holiday – totally unaware that a world like this existed.

“Our 56-foot long boat comprised of everything we needed to live in for the weekend.

“It was a simple yet compact environment cooker, fridge and shower and the beds were comfy.

“The York was by no means a



FAMILY FUN: Phil and Natalia Robinson with their children Hannah, Holly and Theo



five-star hotel but for the next three nights it was our own little haven.

“After a talk on the safety and operational drill, the kids were fitted out with life jackets which they loved. We were joined by a guide to explain the steering of the barge and how the locks operated.

“At that stage I decided to become the pilot and leave Phil to do the donkey work.

“Soon we were cruising under our own steam.

“Stood aboard the boat with miles of water way ahead we began to study and savour the fantastic views our weekend home had to offer.

“After a while you notice something far better than the views and the wildlife. That is the people you come across.

“How many times a day do ten people pass you and nine say hello? Or passers-by help you to operate a lock.

“I understand this type of holiday might not suit every one but it opened my world up to a new experience.

“We are all dying to go cruising again.”

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ALL ABOARD: The Robinson family enjoyed a weekend short-break with Shire Cruisers aboard a grand old lady called The York. Left, the interior

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