

Buying a boat in the Netherlands and touring the canals in Friesland. This is our story of the *Orka*.

Manfred Sonntag

We first had the seed of this idea thirteen years ago when a retired colleague bought a small 9.7m cruiser called the *Cygnat* with a plan to tour Europe in it. When I asked how far he got in his first season, his response was, “We didn’t even get out of Holland – it’s just too good.” Sadly he passed away before he could return to Holland but his stories stayed with me.

We had committed to some serious travel around Australia after I retired in 2017 but when I mentioned this boating option to my doctor, his response was, “Get the boat, Australia will still be here when you have finished those travels. You’re not getting any younger!” So, based on my good doctor’s advice, we decided to get on with it.

I began hunting for a boat online in October 2018, with the plan to purchase one at the start of our first-ever European holiday in 2019. What we found was that you buy them through brokers. Some brokers provide an app while others use websites.

My search was for a boat with the following requirements: Steel hull, minimum 10m, Volvo Penta motor, galley (kitchen), toilet and shower, large fuel, water and black-water tanks, and a price we could afford. Heaps of boats showed up. I also used YouTube on my TV to look at boats for sale (they show lots in usually 5 minute clips – just check the age of the clip). I also watched plenty of ‘cruising the canals of Holland and Europe’ shows. It almost became an obsession.

We searched until late April when we flew out. Many of the boats that we requested information on were sold during this time and some sold in the time of our flight to Amsterdam!

We had booked some B&Bs for our first week of searching and hired a car to get us to marinas. That alone ensured we saw places that most tours don’t take you to. Whilst it is said you can purchase a boat sight unseen online (and we know someone who has), we wanted to see it, feel it, smell it (no previous smokers please) and kick its tyres so to speak.

As happens to most people we found our boat as the last one on our paper list on a Sunday when the brokers were closed. So we had a big day Monday inspecting the boat and then getting our hire car returned and catching our pre-booked train to Germany. This boat was bigger and more expensive than we



planned but it had a coffee machine (a deal maker for me) and a separate shower/bathroom (bliss). We signed on the dotted line and had seven days to place a deposit.

We then had some banking issues which were due to Westpac security text messages combined with no longer being on a Telstra network, plus a banking app that lacks international banking details on an iPhone (but not on an iPad – which we had left at home). International banking uses different protocols to our BSB and account numbers ... but it all got fixed up and by the time we got back into Friesland (a state in the Netherlands), we had a boat. Yay!

Our boat is called the *Orka*. It is 30 years young with beautiful timbers inside. It is moored in a small town called Jirnsum (two pubs within walking distance) and we regularly shop close by in Grou (pronounce it like Arnie would) or Akkrum (again, Arnie accent). Both of these small towns have excellent facilities and fresh foods. We were very lucky to find a boat in a mooring as good as ours is.

It sounds easy but it was daunting at the time. The next challenge to overcome was driving and navigating a ten tonne steel boat around the local area. That can be another story.

Why a boat in Europe?

Once you are there you realise just how the whole of Europe is linked by canals and rivers. Not only that, but all the towns on these waterways cater for the boating traveller. You can moor outside the supermarket, or cafes, pubs and markets. It is such a joy to travel at these sedate speeds knowing you can pull up almost anywhere. It is also a shock to see major autobahns going UNDER the canal you are travelling on and to see huge railway bridges that swing to allow tall ships through. Boats take priority in so many of these areas.

In the Netherlands, you can drive a boat up to 15m in length and 20 tonnes weight without a licence (scary).

We lived on the *Orka* for six weeks in May and June of this year as we learnt about the boat and canal travel. We will be on it for four months next year as we explore into Northern France and Germany.

In 2021 we may do a one-way trip towards the Mediterranean or the Black Sea. Who knows after that??



Acknowledgements

RFU Yacht Specialists in Jirnsum for our mooring and maintenance on the *Orka*, as well as winter storage.

Useful references

The brokers include (but are definitely not limited to):

- Yachtall (app)
- [YachtFocus.com](#) (app and website)
- Boatsforsale([hwo.nl](#))
- [botentekoop.com](#)
- WhiteWhale Yacht brokers([uwjachtmakelaar.nl](#))
- [leboatbrokerage.com](#)
- [inautia.com](#).

Most of these sites have an English version and you can set search parameters such as price range, size, age, materials and so on.

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Manfred was Principal of Orara High School from 2015-2017. He has a keen interest in surf lifesaving and competing in surf boats as well as travelling both in Australia and overseas. Since retiring, Manfred and his wife Janice have towed a caravan around the base of Australia to WA, modified an ex-ambulance into a camper and travelled across the top to Broome and did the Gibb River Road. They took their dog Patch on this trip and almost lost him to a large freshwater crocodile in Lake Argyle. Almost. They have since decided to travel the canals and rivers of Europe on their own terms and in order to do so had to make the daunting decision to purchase a river cruiser to compete this dream.