

Sunny side up...

**Sailing in Dutch and Belgian Limburg.
A feast for all the senses.**



Text: Peter Linssen. Photos: Zebra Fotostudio's. Map: Transmanche Publications

It started promisingly right away and the water was quickly up to temperature. We even had tropical moments, but there were also refreshing periods of cooling weather. In short, this was another fantastic summer. You know that feeling: when the weather is nice, you only want one thing and that is to go travelling! To pack your things and go. To experience the charm of the strange and the distant, of anonymity and tranquillity. Unfortunately, it isn't always possible to just jump on a plane. It's just as well that such experiences are perfectly possible here too, yes, here, in our own back yard! Just get aboard your boat. Every weekend if you want. And the stress seems very far away as soon as you take the first turn out of the harbour. It's like you've left on a long voyage...

Beautiful Limburg

Limburg's beautiful Meuse Valley is a unique lifeline in a remarkably sunny, warm and dry microclimate. The Meuse and the Meuse Lakes form and connect a vast, continuous network of large and small lakes, created by thousands of years of Meuse water flowing through and by decades of gravel extraction, after which the landscape and the remaining gravel pits have been beautifully redesigned. It's still not well enough known – or is it just a well-kept secret? – that the Meuse Lakes, with a surface area of over 3,000 hectares, form the largest continuous water sports area in Benelux. To get an impression of the size and

beauty of the Meuse and its lakes, you are recommended to take an introductory tour on one of the beautiful tour vessels of the Limburg shipping companies.

This water sports area with its excellent water quality is diverse and therefore a Mecca for anyone who wants to stay on or near the water. You can go boating, sailing, surfing, rowing, canoeing, swimming or diving. But there is also room for young, dynamic water sports such as water-skiing, flyboarding and wakeboarding. As well as cycling, hiking, playing sports and horse-riding on well-maintained roads alongside

the water. In the summer months, the lovely, clean beaches and trendy beach clubs are the places to be. In other words, everyone is covered. Young and old alike.

The Meuse and its lakes are a particularly pleasant and varied sailing area for larger motor or sailing boats. You can comfortably sail to and from a lake or to a harbour, village or city, navigating green, meandering waterways. Boat owners and charterers can moor and spend the night in the many atmospheric marinas, which are equipped with all the latest facilities and where the friendliest of harbour masters give you a warm welcome. Or maybe you'd prefer to be in the middle of the city, in the passer-by harbour, surrounded by nice boutiques, shops, pubs and restaurants? Or would you rather be in the middle of the countryside enjoying a BBQ? Then look for a nice spot on one of the well-constructed landing stages. Limburg has it all.

If you don't own an open sloop, motorboat or sailboat (yet) but are passionate about sailing, then chartering is definitely an option, possibly in combination with a short training or sailing course.

Living like God in France? Better yet.

You are in the Limburgs!

Over the centuries, Flemish, French, Dutch and also German cultural aspects have influenced the development of the Dutch and Belgian provinces of Limburg

and the Limburgers. This gives them their work ethic, their pleasant manner and their natural sense of savoir-vivre.

Beautiful historic towns and lovely villages on the lake shores await you. You can soak up the rich history, the unique cultural mix and great variety wherever you go or stay. Figuratively, but also literally.

In the heart of the Meuse Valley, for example, you will find Europe's northernmost pinot vineyards, on a sunny south-eastern slope in the picturesque village of Aldeneik – just a stone's throw from the town of Maaseik with its many outdoor cafés and cultural venues. It's another well-kept secret that we're only too happy to reveal.

Karel and Tine Henckens-Linssen grow excellent wines with passion on their 10 hectare Aldeneyck Wine Estate, including: Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir and a sparkling Pinot Brut.

Blessed with the warm and dry microclimate in the stony Meuse Valley and the unique mineral-rich Meuse gravel terroir, they grow wines with an incomparably elegant, fruity and mineral taste. The pinot wines produced by the Aldeneyck Wine Estate have been voted Best Belgian Wine several times.

When cruising through Limburg, a visit to the tasting room on the beautiful domain is a must!
 (www.wijndomein-aldeneyck.be)

Enjoying the Meuse Valley...

Dream away and imagine ... you moor up with your brand new Linssen at the Aldeneyck vineyard and enjoy a delicious meal and a prize-winning Pinot Gris Barrique there with family and friends, sitting among the vines...

Slow down... and start living!



The Zuid-Willemsvaart. The Canal du Midi of the two Limburgs?

In 1821, the visionary 'Canal King', King William I, approved the plans for a new canal to be constructed, the Zuid-Willemsvaart. In doing so, he was continuing Napoleon Bonaparte's ambitious plan for the construction of the 'Grand Canal du Nord', some sections of which were actually completed (1803-1810) and put into use. The Neuss-Neersen section was used until 1840, as well as the Nederweert-Beringen section (Noordervaart) and the Nederweert-Lozen-Maastricht section, which later became part of the Zuid-Willemsvaart. Most of the section built in Belgium became the Kempen Canal.

On 11 November 1822, Governor De Brouckère of Limburg laid the first cornerstone at lock 1 in 's-Hertogenbosch for the Zuid-Willemsvaart, as we know it today.*

The Zuid-Willemsvaart initially became an economically and strategically important north-south waterway connection between Maastricht and 's-Hertogenbosch, and later took on a more historically important role. The canal passes through the provinces of Dutch Limburg, Belgian Limburg and Noord-Brabant. On the 123 km long route, the Zuid-Willemsvaart takes you

past wonderful natural (and hiking and cycling) areas, through one of the greenest regions of Flanders, with the Hoge Kempen National Park, Meuse Valley River Park and the Kempen-Broek Border Park as its top attractions. It is definitely worth mooring there and exploring by bike, on foot or with the dog. You are sure to be surprised by the hospitality, the local products and the varied landscape you find there. You can also visit many cities or villages, often steeped in history. Striking examples include 's-Hertogenbosch, Helmond, Weert, Bocholt, Bree, Maaseik, Neeroeteren, Dilsen-Stokkem, Maasmechelen, Lanaken and Maastricht.

The canal still has enormous economic potential in 2019. It offers great opportunities for tourism. The rich history (the mines, the wars, even a newspaper 'De Zuidwillemsvaart' was published in 1881), the beer museum in Bocholt, attractive locations such as Rekem ('Most beautiful village in Flanders'), Neeroeteren, the restaurants 't Eilandje and Oud Oteren, the Maasmechelen Village outlet centre, excellent gastronomy and much more besides, are still waiting to be discovered.

The fact that it crosses the border twice makes the canal even more exciting and unique.

Around the Limburgs. The Willems Route...



This illustrates the great historical significance of Canal King William I. A bronze statue of King William I was unveiled on 20 October 2018 on the Bisdomkaai in Ghent. Remarkable. King William I was the founder of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, which then also included Ghent. William I took important decisions that still define Ghent today. He is regarded as the founder of Ghent University in 1817, the man who commissioned the Ghent-Terneuzen canal, an important artery of Ghent's economy, and the man who made Ghent the textile capital of the continent.

Sailing without borders in Dutch and Belgian Limburg: Meuse Lakes – Border Meuse – Zuid-Willemsvaart
 In 2010, the Dutch Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management (RWS) launched the campaign ‘The Willems Route: an attractive alternative for recreational shipping’, with the aim of relieving the pressure on the Juliana Canal to allow the extensive renovation work for the four-layer container shipping industry. The Willems Route was promoted as an alternative route for getting from Roermond to ‘s-Hertogenbosch or to Maastricht and vice versa. The recommended route (from Maasbracht-Roermond) runs via the Wessem-Nederweert Canal to the Zuid-Willemsvaart. There are several convenient mooring facilities.

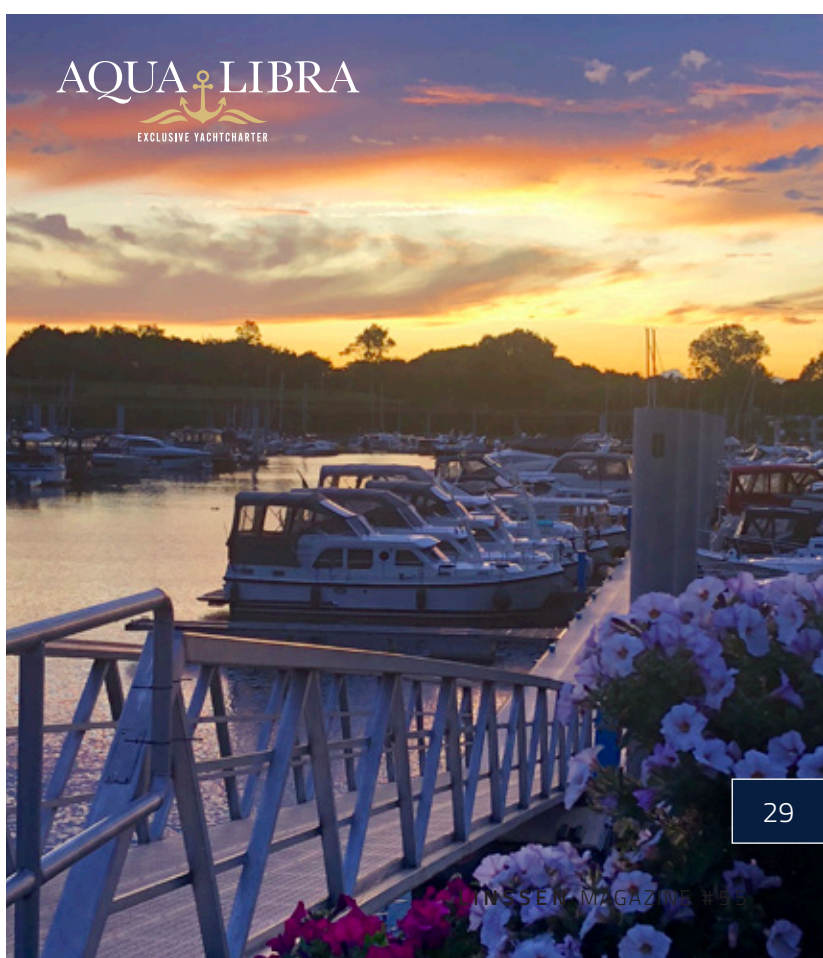
It is a beautiful route for recreational sailing, easy to navigate and quiet. The maximum clearance height on the Willems Route is five metres. The only exception to this is the historic route through Maastricht via lock 19, directly to the Bassin, with a clearance height of approximately 3.30 metres. There is an alternative route via Bosscherveld lock to get to the beautiful Bassin via a short stretch of Meuse and lock 20.

Shall we reveal another well-kept secret? A special recommendation is the ‘detour’ through a beautiful part of Flanders: the Bocholt-Herentals Canal and the Canal to Beverlo heading towards Lommel and Leopoldsburg.

The RWS campaign was remarkably successful and to this day this is borne out by the many enthusiastic sounds of crews who have actually sailed the Zuid-Willemsvaart.

Experience the Limburgs with Aqua Libra Yachtcharter

Aqua Libra, run by Arlette and Luc Vanthoor, is one of the few professional yacht charter companies in Limburg. Their base and home port is the De Spaanjer Marina in Kinrooi (B). Aqua Libra is a proud member of the international Linssen Boating Holidays® (LBH) network, which was created in 2006 to support the Linssen charter companies in Europe by providing an umbrella marketing label. Now, season 2019/20, fifteen LBH partners in ten countries are offering around 85 Linssen motor yachts.



AQUA LIBRA
 EXCLUSIVE YACHTCHARTER

Special holidays are 'in'. Sailing with your 'own' motor yacht is still, increasingly, a tempting option. Aqua Libra aims to offer its customers an impeccable and unforgettable 'boating experience' and to let them enjoy all that the Limburgs have to offer. In addition, they provide bespoke packages for companies and groups, focusing on the region's highlights in a special way.

The positive word of mouth advertising is a natural consequence of the experience their customers have had. For Arlette and Luc, the concept of hospitality is embedded in all their actions. Their number one priority is to keep their customers satisfied. They invite them to become 'members of the family' and sincerely embrace 'Mother' Linssen's slogan 'We take your pleasure seriously!®'. That is why many regular customers are convinced: 'Once Limburg. Always Limburg!'

In view of the expansion of their fleet to feature ten of the latest yachts from the Linssen range and the number of customers from distant continents and almost all European countries, Aqua Libra proves

every day that the experienced water-borne tourist has a great interest in and appreciation of Limburg as a sailing area.

Epilogue

Limburg as a water sports destination is actually still 'a well-kept secret'. It's almost impossible to list all the facilities, providers and destinations in full. This article has only mentioned a few specific examples and we don't want to leave anything or anyone out. All the stakeholders in the region's hospitality and tourism industry stand shoulder to shoulder to make guests feel at home. With a fantastic product: Limburg. Come sailing here, and experience...

Sources:

**De geschiedenis van de Zuid-Willemsvaart, Cees Verhagen, ISBN 90-9014-027-1*

Waterway maps (ANWB, 'De Willemsroute', Waterway map of Dutch and Belgian Limburg). The Maasplassen Magazine of VVV Midden-Limburg and information about activities on and around the Meuse Lakes can be obtained from the Tourist offices in Central Limburg www.middenlimburg.nl

Book your boating holiday now!

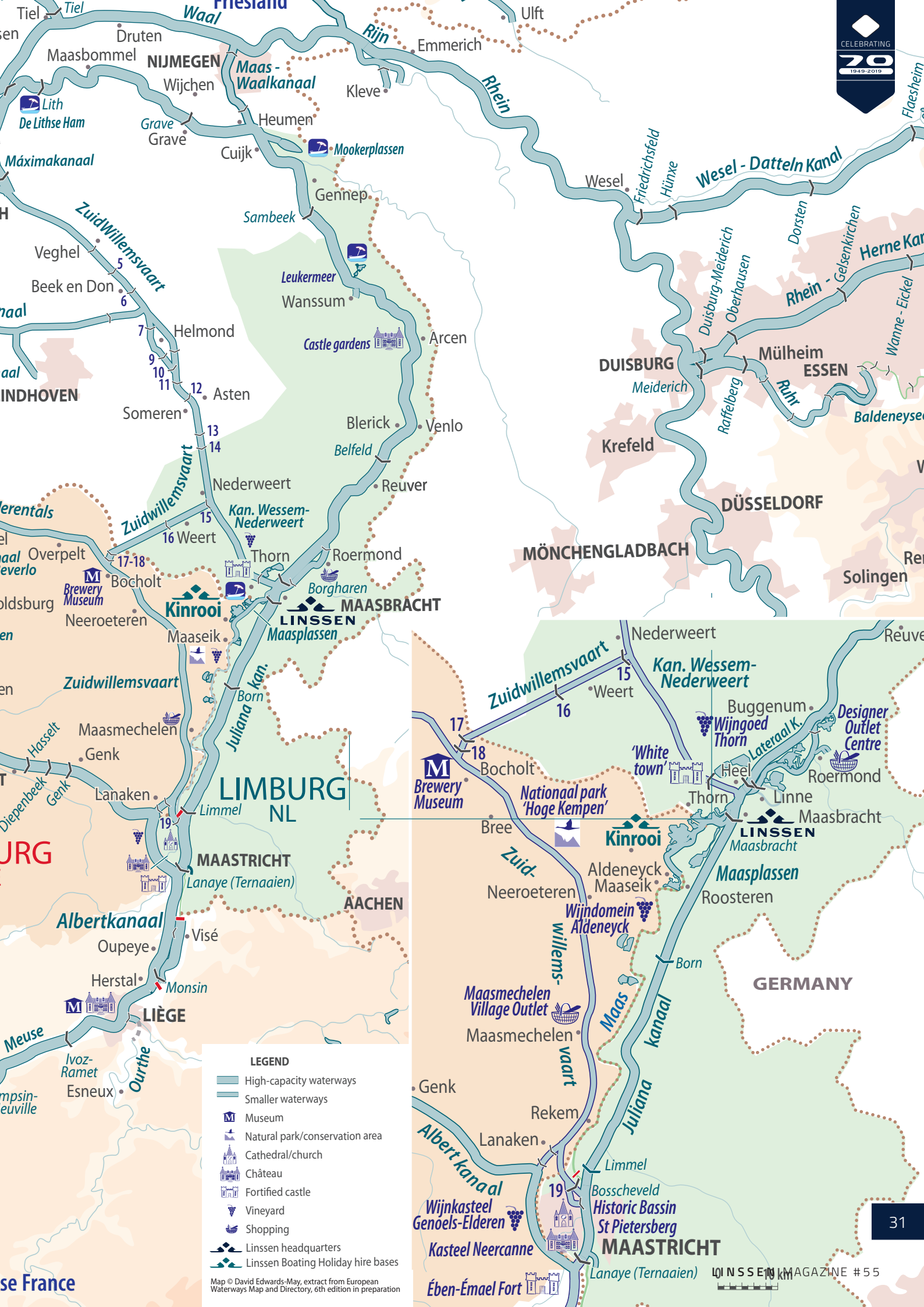
Receive a free wine package from the Aldeneyck wine estate on board when you book a boat from the Aqua Libra fleet for the 2020 season.

AQUA LIBRA
EXCLUSIVE YACHTCHARTER

Valid for bookings of at least 1 week made before 15 January 2020.

To take advantage of this offer, please mention "Pinot Gris" in your booking request.

For more information, please contact Aqua Libra Yachtcharter at www.aqua-libra.be



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 - Smaller waterways
 - Museum
 - Natural park/conservation area
 - Cathedral/church
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Map © David Edwards-May, extract from European Waterways Map and Directory, 6th edition in preparation