



'Kinette' on the Spree, passing the German Parliament building

CRUISING IN GERMANY with a 22.5 mtrs barge

Text and pictures by
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Things read and heard during the last few years about cruising in Germany have not been encouraging, writes Christian Huber. He had heard, for example:

- NO MOORINGS FOR SHIPS LONGER THAN 15 MTRS EXIST,
- CURRENT PERMITS AND LICENSES ARE NOT ACCEPTED BY THE GERMAN AUTHORITIES,
- THE 'WASSERSCHUTZPOLIZEI' (WATER POLICE) ARE NOT FRIENDLY OR HELPFUL TO VISITING BOATERS

Yet, after nine years of cruising in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, their love of adventure overcame any hesitation which Charlotte and Christian Huber had about cruising Germany in their 22.5 mtrs barge *Kinette*. And so, “softly pushed by Dutch friends, the van Geijtenbeeks (*Shell V*), who had cruised in Germany shortly after the fall of the wall, and DBA member Charles Fitzhardinge (*Vrouw Anna Maria*) and others (see BF May 2011), the Hubers went to Germany.

THEY DISCOVERED, TO THEIR DELIGHT, THAT “FOR A BARGEE THERE ARE NO PROBLEMS AND NO OBSTACLES TO CRUISING GERMANY”.

ACCEPTED LICENSES

We contacted the German authorities (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung) by mail asking whether they would accept an “International Certificate For Operators Of Pleasure Craft According To Resolution No. 40 Of The UN/ECE Working Party On Inland Water Transport”, issued by Swiss authorities for a pleasure craft longer than 15 metres. The answer was “NEIN!”.

We then asked whether they would accept a Dutch ‘klein vaarbewijs’ or a French GP licence and the response was that both of these permits for pleasure craft up to 25 metres would be accepted.

No problems thus with my Dutch license.

WASSERSCHUTZPOLIZEI

In April 2011 we left the Netherlands through the newly built King Willem Alexander-Canal (we wrote about it in BF 101) and entered Germany via the Haren-Rutenbrock-Kanal, the Dortmund-Ems-Kanal, followed by the most impressive Mittellandkanal - 325.3 km of waterway from East to West with only three locks. Roger and Alison Harrington (*Lily*) described it in BF 107.

It was our third day in Germany and our third hour on the Mittellandkanal when we heard on our radio: “*Kinette* for Wasserschutzpolizei. Stay on course and keep your speed. An officer will board your vessel”.

It had arrived: the moment of truth. Would we be handcuffed and *Kinette* chained? Of course we had a valid EU Certificate, of course the gas installation, the fire extinguishers and the life jackets were checked and certified – but had we overseen something?

The expected Pitbull turned out to be a polite young officer who was pleasantly surprised when we handed him out a folder with all our documents. He carefully looked through all documents. He was disarmingly honest when he told us that leisure craft longer than 20 meters in Germany were in a kind of legal twilight zone between leisure and commercial boats.

There were simply too few vessels of our size so the police didn’t have a lot of experience with this type of craft.

He then informed us that *Kinette* with her European number would be entered in a German database as “Inspected / No shortcomings”.

And for the next 18 months we were not boarded again.



TOP TO BOTTOM:
The Mittellandkanal

Charlotte and Christian Huber

Lots of mooring space for vessels waiting to enter a lock

‘Kinette’ in Berlin’s Tempelhof harbour



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In BF 109, Brian and Pat Tadhams conjectured that they had not been bothered by the Wasserschutzpolizei because they did not do anything wrong and had a barge under 15 metres. We agree regarding the first point - respect the rules and behave correctly. But the length of the boat in our experience doesn't matter.

THE MOORINGS

It is a fact that most yachts cruising in Germany are not longer than about 12 metres. Most marinas are designed for this type of vessel. It is furthermore a fact that, unlike in France, free mooring on canal banks is forbidden by law. Nevertheless we never had a single mooring problem during the 18 months that we cruised German waterways.

Certainly, there is no problem at all on the Mittellandkanal; every 50 kilometres or so is a 2 kilometre long concrete quay for vessels longer than 20 metres – be it pleasure or commercial craft.

The land of a thousand lakes, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, offers a generous variety of marinas. Most of them will have a stage or a T-pontoon where a longer vessel can moor. Generally we recommend a call to the harbour master one day before arrival. Many of them are delighted to provide space for a real traditional barge: “You will be the attraction of the harbour!”

The harbours we visited were, with very, very few exceptions, well equipped with water and electricity, the latter without exception at 16 Amps.

Cruising in Germany mostly means cruising in the newly formed German states and this means cruising in financially deprived states. Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, for example, is not only that but also very sparsely populated: 74 inhabitants per square kilometre. Tourism is one of the area's few income sources and it bubbles up only about four months per year.

Be prepared to pay up to 1.8 Euros per metre length plus 1 Euro per 2 kilowatt hours of electricity plus 1 Euro per 100 litres of water - but often we could bargain for a discount, especially when we announced that we were going to stay for some days.

Also take into consideration that there are no vignettes or cruising fees.

And if you want to economize as much as possible: the land of a thousand lakes is a paradise for anchoring as they are so shallow, the shores woodland or reed-grown and the nature of a fantastic variety: beavers, eagles, cranes and fishes.

You will always find an anchorage where you will be on your own and can let it all hang out.

THE DOWNSIDES:

Special permits for great rivers.

Unlike in France, Belgium or the Netherlands, skippers of vessels longer than 15 metres need a special permit, the so called “Streckenzeugnis”, for the great rivers like Rhine, Elbe, Weser, Donau, Oder and Saale. This permit is a kind of commission you get after a medical check, involving a lot of paperwork, cruising up and down the



DBA's Arthur Large lent us his beautiful lakeside mooring



On the River Havel between Brandenburg and Potsdam



On the 'hammerhead' T-Pontoon at Furstenberg

river stretch in question four times accompanied by an authorized person and, finally, a half-day spent answering questions in front of a board consisting of three examiners.

I got my 'commission' for the Elbe from Lauenburg to Hamburg. How proud I was! Getting my 'commission' had been great fun and, like in the old grammar school times, a matter of cram and forget.

In short, it isn't worth it. If you need to cruise on one of the great rivers, hire a pilot at moderate cost. And the good news is you don't need a commission from voyage from The Netherlands to Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, providing you avoid the German Rhine, which is an unattractive commercial highway anyway.

CHARTS AND BOOKS

There are two German publishing houses providing excellent charts: 'Nautische Veröffentlichungen' and 'Kartenwerft'. Their charts are also available in digital form for computers and tablets.

If you read some German you will appreciate Robert Tremmel's brand-new guide of the marinas in Brandenburg and Mecklenburg: 'Hafenführer für Hausboote'.

Last but certainly not least you will find Barry Sheffield's 'Inland Waterways of Germany' in the DBA Bookshop.

SHIP MAINTENANCE/REPAIR

"We don't cruise but stumble from catastrophe to catastrophe" our Roanne friend 'Texas Bill' (as distinct from 'Fireman Bill') used to say. It could be that you might need professional support. On the Mittellandkanal we had a problem with our stuffing box. The Wasserschutzpolizei provided us with the address of a shipyard where the problem was sorted in short time and at moderate costs. In and around Berlin you will find several shipyards for bigger vessels, some of them specializing in traditional barges.

HIGHLIGHT: BERLIN

In BF 107 is the wonderful report of the Harringtons' 'Small Barge To Mecklenburg'. We share their enthusiasm for cruising in Germany and similarly recommend Germany to other DBA members. But, allow me to clear up a small misunderstanding one of their sentences may have caused. The Harringtons wrote: "During the day access on the River Spree... through the city center is restricted resulting in leisure craft only being able to make the trip early morning or late evening". In fact, on the Spree the Berlin city center extends from km 12.01 to km 17.60. Pleasure crafts may not cruise on this section from



The historic lift bridge in Plau on the Lake



Oberbaum Bridge in Berlin

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Meandering through the Havel



Once a Potsdam steam tug, now a passenger carrier



On passage to Brandenburg

9 a.m. to 7 p.m. if they are not equipped with a radio. We cruised through Berlin during the tourist boats' rush hour and loved it. There are a number of 24/7 hours moorings in the center of the city.

Cruising through the German capital is great fun but permanent VHF communication is required due to the heavy traffic, the narrow bridges, the (weak) current and the curves. You get to know a lot of friendly and helpful people. One of our acquaintances was Matthias, the professional captain of a tugboat. He accompanied us through Berlin.

To Germany or not to Germany: THAT IS THE QUESTION!

For a bargee there are no problems and no obstacles. There are challenges. But cruising in Germany is worth it.

We loved our cruising in Germany due to the fantastic landscapes, the spectacular sunsets, the crystal clear lakes rich in fish, the warm hospitality of the Germans and the well maintained waterways.

Traditional barges usually cause quite a stir. People passing by are keen to learn more about our life on the water. So we felt that we were welcome everywhere. If you have a look at the pictures on our blog www.kinette.ch you will understand our enthusiasm!