

Messing About on Boats on the Murray River



“Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.” - Kenneth Grahame, ‘The Wind in the Willows’

Grahame’s wise words ring true as I laze back in my chair on a balmy summer’s day, beer in hand, on the sun-kissed upper deck of the famous Murray River paddlesteamer, PS Emmylou, and just feast on the blissful vista of sky, water and bush as we meander along the snaking river. Messing about in boats is, indeed, a worthwhile pastime we could all do more of.

In a hectic age when we’re all busy, multi-tasking, scrolling and distracted from dawn to dusk and beyond, chilling out on a romantic riverboat on the mighty Murray for five days is just what the therapist ordered!

In fact, I can’t remember the last time I was this relaxed. Gently ambling at a lazy 12km/h, the enchanting little paddlesteamer, Emmylou, perfectly defines the growing appeal of slow travel. The whistle blows, the engine hisses, the paddles splish and splash and you ever-so-gently and imperceptibly become part of the river’s blissful rhythm.

It’s the ultimate antidote to stress – a soothing, soul-calming river journey on home soil with non-stop pampering from friendly crew as well as mouth-watering cuisine and mesmerising scenery.

Our four-night cruise covered 164km and 252 bends downstream of Echuca, with various stops along the way and moorings each night. We sat back, basked in the serenity and took in the entrancing, ever-changing scenery of majestic river red gums, singing birds, roos and emus, river reflections, dancing sunlight on the water and friendly waves from shoreside campers and fishermen – and all accompanied by a constant parade of delicious cuisine from breakfast, morning tea and lunch to afternoon canapes and multi-course dinners and even a delicious campfire barbecue under the stars on the riverbank one night.

The peace, tranquility and relaxation this unique and very Australian experience offers is just magical. A trance-like feeling of joy and reverie envelops you as Emmylou unhurriedly saunters down the river. Despite the vessel’s lack of size, there are lots of little nooks where you can pull up a chair and take it all in.



My favourite times were dawn, when I got up early to watch the sun rise over the river with a coffee, exercise ashore and enjoy a dip in the river, and at dusk when the soundtrack of the bush serenaded us as we sat down to dinner with fellow guests who quickly became convivial friends, adding to the allure of the journey. And that old tale about how travel is more about the journey than the destination is abundantly clear on Emmylou as you allow the magic of the Murray to calm your nerves. Doctors should prescribe a cruise on Emmylou to any patient suffering stress and anxiety!

At journey’s end, I didn’t want to get off and return to the hustle and bustle of life. Emmylou is a little bubble of ease, harmony and calm. It’s all so addictively relaxing. I fell in love with her and everyone who sails on her feels the same.

The world’s only wood-fired paddlesteamer carrying overnight passengers and carrying just 16 guests, the famous PS Emmylou starred in the hit 1980s TV mini-series, ‘All the Rivers Run’, starring Sigrid Thornton, and is still one of the most recognisable and iconic paddlesteamers in Australia. Powered by a restored 1906 steam engine and totally refurbished with deluxe cabins and ensuites, the charm-filled riverboat today offers authentic, all-inclusive journeys along the Murray with stops to visit wineries, historic farm stations, indigenous sites, wildlife along tributaries and country towns. Each evening, PS Emmylou ties up at tranquil and remote moorings.



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The 2500km-long Murray is Australia’s longest and most famous river and the third longest navigable river in the world after the Nile and the Amazon. In the mid-1800s, Echuca – the closest town on the Murray to Melbourne – was Australia’s largest inland port, with the river busy with boats carrying fruit, wool, livestock, mail and other supplies. Today, the river is much quieter and instead of cargo there are adventure-thirsty travellers keen to ‘mess about’ on Emmylou for up to a week to soak in the history, scenery and heart-warming charm of lazy life on the river.

Of course, the experience is so terribly comfortable because Emmylou is no raffish, rudimentary riverboat from the past. Carrying just 16 passengers, Emmylou seamlessly blends the old with the new so that you’re immersed in a bygone era but with all the luxuries and comforts of today. While the engineer stokes the 1906 boiler, you can relax in your deluxe, cosy cabin which boasts a private ensuite, air-conditioning, WIFI and direct access to the paddlesteamer’s timber deck.

A riverboat holiday on the Murray sounds simple but that’s the point. Other cruises elsewhere on bigger vessels can be busy and stressful with crowds queues but there’s none of that on Emmylou. So if you need time out, Emmylou will help you slow down in no time!

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