

11 Fascinating Canal Towns Beyond Venice

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Driving or walking around any picturesque place is a treat, but floating through the city in a boat offers an entirely unique perspective. Venice is the most well-known city that uses gondolas to navigate the scenic canals across town, but several cities and towns around the world also rely on a system of channels for transportation. Here are 11 fascinating places where you can enjoy the scenery from the hull of a boat.



DAILY QUESTION

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Where are these palatial gardens?



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Leiden, The Netherlands

Credit: [Borisb17](#)/ iStock

Amsterdam receives most of the attention as the “Venice of the North,” but for a more serene atmosphere, head about 30 miles south to the charming university town of [Leiden](#). Leiden’s historic inner city is second only to Amsterdam for having the nation’s

largest number of canals, moats, and bridges. Take a cruise tour or rent an electric boat and view the stunning architecture, extraordinary bridges, beautiful parks, and cafés that line the channels.

Leiden is home to several fantastic museums, historic windmills, churches, botanical gardens, and more. If you visit in late spring, be sure to visit nearby [Keukenhof](#), one of the world's most extensive flower gardens, home to over 7 million bulbs. Numerous stunning tulip fields, for which the Netherlands are famous, also surround the city.

Fort Lauderdale, Florida, U.S.

Credit: [Art Wager](#)/ iStock

Nicknamed the “Venice of America,” this [sunny Florida city](#) boasts 165 miles of navigable waterways. Instead of medieval castles and cobblestone streets, you’ll glide past fabulous mansions and yachts, including an area known as Millionaire’s Row. Boat, jet ski, and gondola tour operators offer a variety of options for sightseeing. For a more spontaneous experience, buy an unlimited-ride day pass on the [Water Taxi](#). Large, comfortable water taxis run regularly scheduled routes between multiple stops scattered along the Intracoastal Waterway and the New River. You can hop on and off at various bars, restaurants, parks, museums, shops, beaches, and more.

Xochimilco, Mexico

Credit: [Opla](#)/ iStock

On the outskirts of Mexico City lies Xochimilco, which translates to “the place where flowers grow” in Spanish. However, many people also call the suburb the “Venice of the New World.” You won’t find elaborate Byzantine and Venetian Gothic-style architecture here, but you will see the remnants of a vast Aztecan water transport system.

A series of human-made islands (known as “chinampas”) built for agricultural purposes create a canal network in a shallow lake. Xochimilco was designated as an official [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) in 1987 for its historical and cultural significance. Locals have been cruising the canal network, ferrying goods around in flat-bottom boats called trajineras, for centuries. Today, you can book festive, scenic tours on the brightly colored trajineras. Passing boat traffic includes serenading mariachis, vendors selling tacos and trinkets, and celebrating families — especially on Sundays.

Annecy, France

Credit: [aletheia97](#)/ iStock

Many canal-laden cities are nicknamed after the City of Bridges, and Annecy is no exception with its moniker, “Venice of the Alps.” Located near the Swiss border in the snowy mountains along the banks of a crystal-clear lake, the [French city of Annecy](#) is a delight for the senses. A river flows through the city to Lake Annecy, creating several interlaced canals and islands connected by lovely arched stone bridges. A must-see is the perfectly preserved Vieille Ville (Old Town), where you’ll find magnificent pastel-colored buildings lining the canals, often creating enchanting reflections on the calm water. Blossoming flower boxes, turreted castles, meandering narrow passages, cobblestone streets, charming shops, outdoor cafés, gelaterias, and museums such as [Château d’Annecy](#) offer plenty to see and do. Many local residents own private boats, but commercial canal tours aren’t widely available. However, you can walk alongside the canals and take in the sights. Additionally, [multiple options exist for cruising](#) on breathtaking Lake Annecy.

Bruges, Belgium

Credit: [tunart](#)/ iStock

Another “Venice of the North,” the [beautiful medieval city of Bruges](#) has been home to canals winding through the city for centuries. The Belgian city was a significant European commercial port leading to the North Sea during medieval times, and the canals played a substantial role transporting goods.

You can explore this fairytale-like city via boat tours and strolls along cobblestone streets, where you’ll see romantic bridges, secret gardens, and colorful brick buildings. The [Bruges Historic Centre](#) has been on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list since 2000 for its medieval Gothic-style architecture and cultural significance.

Fenghuang, China

Credit: [4045/](#) iStock

In Chinese, [Fenghuang](#) means “phoenix,” a spectacular reborn mythical bird that rises from fire. The moniker aptly applies to this magnificent ancient city, where legend says that two resplendent phoenixes flew over the city and found it so beautiful that they hovered, reluctant to leave. Surrounded by majestic mountains, the well-preserved city sits along the banks of the brilliant green Tuo Jiang River.

Residents of the city rely on the river today, just as they have for hundreds of years, for fishing, washing clothes, preparing food, and getting across town in small, wooden boats. Visitors marvel at the impressive wooden buildings on stilts along the riverbank, ornate covered bridges, ancient gate towers, former residences of historic figures, the [Fenghuang Ancient City Museum](#), and [Longevity Palace](#).

Alappuzha, India

Credit: Christian Ouellet / iStock

The city of Alappuzha is nestled deep in the southern Indian state of Kerala. A true “water city,” Alappuzha is famous for its network of [interconnected backwater channels](#), boat races, beaches, and

maritime commerce. The region is also known for its houseboat cruises that let visitors explore the watery thoroughfares. The biggest houseboats stick to the primary river “highways” that feature the heaviest traffic and most easily accessible tourism sites. However, the smaller vessels branch out and let you go beyond the basic routes to fully explore the incredible geography the region is known for.

Saint Petersburg, Russia

Credit: [Vladislav Zolotov](#)/ iStock

Also nicknamed “Venice of the North,” [Saint Petersburg](#) feels like an elegant European city with nearly 100 rivers, tributaries, and canals that flow into the Baltic Sea. Many of this culturally significant city’s grandiose buildings and bridges line or cross the waterways, including the [Winter Palace](#), [Hermitage Museum](#), [Kunstkamera](#) museum, [Peter and Paul Fortress](#), [Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood](#), [Fabergé Museum](#), and more.

The Russian city’s waterways offer far more than gloriously scenic routes throughout the city; they are used for trade, military operations, and transportation between the many islands that comprise the metropolitan area. Booking a river cruise offers unparalleled views of the grand city.

Bangkok, Thailand

Credit: [sangkhom sangkakam](#)/ Moment via Getty Images

[Bangkok](#) has been deemed the “Venice of the East,” because the city is home to nearly 1,700 canals (also known as khlongs) used for transportation, floating markets, irrigation, and flood control. The capital’s first canals were constructed as protective moats in the late 18th century. During the 19th century, the canal and river network was vastly expanded, and the waterways served as the primary routes used for transportation. Later, as more Europeans who relied

on land transportation arrived, many khlongs were filled in and replaced by roads.

Today, several main waterways in Bangkok offer fascinating sightseeing opportunities. Two primary historic canals, the [Khlong Saen Saeb](#) and the Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem, plus the khlongs of Thon Buri on the city's west end, flow past massive Buddhist temples, floating markets, elaborate palaces, parks, museums, and more. Navigating the canal system is a bit tricky, but you have a couple of options. Most visitors take the Express Boat river taxis, long-tail boats, or private tours.

Gold Coast, Australia

Credit: [zstockphotos](#)/ iStock

This [tourist-friendly city](#) on Australia's eastern coast, near Brisbane, houses the Southern Hemisphere's largest constructed canal network, with nearly 250 miles of waterways and 135 reservoirs. Upscale waterfront living and boating is commonplace, with 550 miles of residential homes overlooking a river, canal, waterway, reservoir, or ocean. Developers used the local Nerang River to build canals and waterfront homes beginning in the 1950s, in part to elevate the once-small city's image as an attractive place to live. In the mid-1980s, the city constructed the [Gold Coast Seaway](#) to reduce beach erosion and facilitate ship passage between the Pacific and the city's inland bays. Watersport enthusiasts will never grow tired of the endless, year-round activities available, such as jet skiing, parasailing, boating, whale watching, surfing, sailing, scuba-diving, and more.

Stockholm, Sweden

Credit: [Gu](#)/ Image Source via Getty Images

You'll find no shortage of waterways and canals in Sweden's [capital](#), because the city spans 14 islands connected by more than 50

bridges. Add to that a vast archipelago of 30,000 islands and islets that extend into the Baltic Sea, and you could spend years exploring Stockholm's waterways. Residents and visitors get around via bike, car, train, and boat — plus, the city operates inner-city and regional ferries. The country is laden with a network of canals used for commerce, agriculture, and tourism, including the historic [Göta Canal](#) and the Trollhätte Canal built in the early 19th century. The two historic canals, as well as several lakes and rivers, create a 240-mile waterway connecting Stockholm and the Baltic Sea to the city of Gothenburg on the North Sea. This historic Nordic city is also home to numerous fascinating attractions, such as the [Vasa Museum](#), [Royal Palace](#), [Gamla Stan](#) (Old Town), and [ABBA Museum](#).

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