

Day Cruise on the Erie Canal

By Andrew Frey

The sun breaks through the clouds and shines onto the tree-lined waterway ahead. It's a perfect day for a cruise on the Erie Canal on Gems Along the Mohawk's *Lil' Diamond III*. A daytrip on this storied channel is a journey through history. Captain Jerry Gertz narrates tales of the canal and points out landmarks, like historic Fort Herkimer Church, one of the oldest surviving churches in New York State, and birds, like herons and bald eagles.

A group of boats pass us, flying the flag of "America's Great Loop", a 6,000-mile water circuit that includes the Erie Canal. They toot their horns as they go by.

I head to the lower deck of the 100-passenger *Lil' Diamond III*. Designed and built in 2012 by Gertz, the boat has a fully-stocked bar and snack stand. After ordering a cocktail in a souvenir cup, I head to the bow for one of the highlights of our tour, Lock 18 in Jacksonburg.

As we pull into the lock, deckhands moor the boat to the walls and signal to the lockmaster. Slowly the century-old gate closes behind us as water forces its way through a small opening. Kids gather on the deck to watch our 15-minute descent inside the lock. We drop 20 feet and



then get released into the waterway again.

Rising back up is just as exciting on the return trip. Shortly after leaving Lock 18 again, I am back at the Gems Along the Mohawk dock in Herkimer. It was a 90-minute cruise through the scenic Mohawk Valley, but it sailed by. ○

To read more about day-cruising on the Erie Canal and the history of the canal in the Mohawk Valley, go to NewYorkByRail.com/Make-Lasting-Memories-on-the-Erie-Canal.

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