

Serendipity Travels

Log of the Gey

The administrative region that occupies the southeastern portion of France is called Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Having had a brief view of the Côte d'Azur, we leave the Mediterranean for a trip into the heart of Provence.

23 September 2014

When traveling from hither to yon, the curious traveler will try to find a “thither” en route. Somewhat between Marseille and Avignon are two interesting sites: Les Baux-de-Provence and the Pont du Gard, and we managed to visit both on our journey.

Les Baux-de-Provence is a hill-top town and fortress dating from the middle ages. The château is now in ruins, but a model in the visitor center and several interpretive signs on the property make for an interesting visit. Those with a curiosity about medieval warfare will be fascinated by the several restored weapons on display. Below the château, the town has interesting shops and several places where one can find a meal – which we did.



The Pont du Gard is a Roman aqueduct that crosses the Gard River, supplying water to Nîmes. Built in the first century AD, this is the highest of all Roman aqueducts. Visitors to the site can learn more in a visitor center; they can also walk across the structure (there is a road at the level of the top of the

To see pictures of our visit to Les Baux-de-Provence, overlaid on a map, click: [Les Baux-de-Provence](#)

To see pictures of our visit to The Pont du Gard, overlaid on a map, click: [The Pont du Gard](#)

lower set of arches) or swim in the river. We elected to walk, but not to swim.

Leaving the Pont, we drove on to Avignon. Our lodging for the next three nights is the Apart'Hôtel Sainte-Marthe, a building designed to house students at the University of Avignon, which was across the street.

For dinner, we walked inside the city walls to *Le Bistro Lyonnais* and were treated to an excellent meal, accompanied by the wit and charm of the proprietor, Chef Yves, who speaks excellent English as a result of having lived in Canada for several years.

24 September 2014

The day dawned with a drizzly rain, which would persist most of the day. We planned to explore the city, expecting to find shelter in and around the buildings, especially the Palace of the Popes, one of the main attractions of Avignon.

The medieval ramparts surrounding the town are still largely intact, which makes driving into the center a bit challenging. We decided to walk the kilometer or so to the palace.

In 1309, Pope Clement V chose Avignon, instead of Rome, as his residence. For the next 68 years, the Papacy resided in Avignon. The Palais des Papes was built, and fortified, to provide a suitable residence. It is an interesting structure to tour, containing exhibits from its time as a residence, and also concerning other facets of the history of Avignon.

Beyond the Palace, another site worth visiting is the remains of the Pont Saint-Bénézet, a bridge which once spanned the Rhône. On a sunny day (but not the day we were there), you would have a very nice view of the city, ramparts, and palace.

Finished touring for the day, we returned to our quarters. The clouds and rain cleared enough to provide a very dramatic sunset,



To see pictures of our visit to Avignon, overlaid on a map, click: [Avignon](#)

which I was able to capture from the balcony of our hotel.

25 September 2014

Much of the charm of Provence lies in the region's small towns. Rick Steves' *France* provides a nice driving tour of several of the towns, and today's mission is to follow much of his route.



Our first stop was in Séguret, which, like most of the towns in this region, is perched on a hillside. Cobblestone walkways take you through the village, with shops selling wine, souvenirs, and other necessities. Views into the valley below are quite impressive.

From Séguret, we followed Rick's suggested route to a winery in the hills. Domaine de Mourchon combines modern techniques with an appreciation of the craft handed down through generations of vintners. The current proprietor, an ex-pat from Scotland, provides a great wine-tasting experience. A tour of the facility and grounds is available by prior arrangement. We skipped the tour, but did purchase two bottles of wine that we brought home for special occasions.

Next on the tour is Le Crestet. I think we may have strayed from the prescribed route; we ended up driving through vineyards on a very narrow and somewhat rugged gravel road. At one point, we had to drive off the road to make way for a large truck (see pictures in the associated map tour). Fortunately our Fiat was up to the task, and we arrived in Le Crestet in time for lunch. Another of Rick's suggestions is Le Panoramic, a restaurant with a view. Neither Rick, nor any signs in the town, tell you how to find the place. If you go, park, and walk up, and up, and up some more. When you are at the level of the top of the church steeple, you are close.

After lunch, we continued the tour through Suzette and on to Gigondas. The latter is the best organized of these towns for commercial purposes, with a wine commune right off the central square and parking area. We tasted, and bought a few more bottles to provision our boat for the upcoming trip.

To see pictures of our visit to Provençal Wine Towns, overlaid on a map, click: [Provençal Wine Towns](#)

After a walking tour of Gigondas, we drove back to Avignon.

26 September 2014

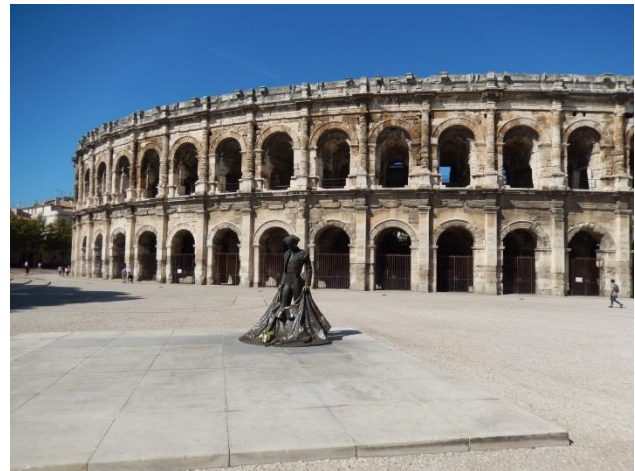
Today we must travel back toward the coast – we will spend the night near where we will take possession of our canal boat. But on the way, we can take a quick peek at two more well-known towns in the area: Arles and Nîmes.



Both cities have Roman arenas, and both are still intact and have been restored to the point where they can be used for events. Our first stop was Arles. We found convenient parking just inside the city walls, and walked a short distance to the arena. A small fee gains admission, where you can explore both the ramparts as well as look into the arena itself (pictured to the left). The stone seats of yore have been replaced

by modern metal bleachers. Leaving Les Arènes d'Arles, we walked into the town square and had lunch.

We drove on to Nîmes. There, we walked to the arena but did not enter. After a quick look at the center of this town, we drove on to Lattes, the Locaboat base, and the nearby town of Mauguio, site of our last hotel room for a couple of weeks, the Inter-Hotel Le Sud.



We found a local market and purchased some provisions for the boat. Then to dinner and back to the hotel, where we made use of the internet connection (last for some time!) to upload pictures and check our social and financial networks.

To see pictures of our visit to Arles and Nîmes, overlaid on a map, click: [Arles and Nîmes](#)

27 September 2014

We would not be able to take possession of the boat until after noon, but we were able to drive to the base and drop off our luggage and provisions. This area of France is called the Camargue. Rather than use boat days to explore, we used our car this morning to get a sense of the area. We drove to the town of Aigues-Mortes, fortified since the Middle Ages and an important point for those embarking on Crusades. If you can only visit one fortified town in southern France, this might be your best choice. Parking is easy, the town is accessible, and the fortifications are well preserved. One can find food, souvenirs, and plenty to see.



We left Aigues-Mortes and drove along the canal toward Le Grau-de-Roi. There were many people standing on both sides of the canal, which was filled with boats. Before we could enter the town, we were stopped in a traffic jam. Something must be happening...



We parked beside the road and got out to watch. Soon, we saw several riders on horses across the canal, and the people on that side were quite excited. We watched the procession as it came closer, and then passed our vantage point. Only then did we realize that we were watching the delivery of several bulls to the arena in Le Grau-de-Roi, for entertainment later that day. Bullfights in southern France are not as brutal, for

either man or beast, as those in Spain, but we did not take the time to watch.

Once the congestion cleared, we drove to the regional airport, dropped off our car, and took a taxi to the Locaboat base in Lattes. The next phase of our trip was about to begin.

*To see pictures of our visit to the
Camargue, overlaid on a map,
click: [Camargue](#)*