

France trip October 2005

Globus itinerary

Saturday 1 October (day 2 of a nine-day tour)

Seine cruise and bus ride to Montmartre after dark.

Sunday 2 October

Paris city tour, including Eiffel tower, Notre Dame, and optional tour to Giverny, home of Claude Monet.

Monday 3 October

Paris–Caen, with stop at Rouen, with the square where Joan of Arc was burned in 1431. In Caen, Memorial Museum for Peace.

Tuesday 4 October

Caen–Mont St. Michel. Stops at Juno Beach, Omaha Beach, Normandy American Cemetery, Rangers Memorial at Point du Hoc. Then to Bayeux for Queen Matilda's Tapestry, detail of William the Conqueror's conquest of England. In the afternoon, the Abbey of Mont St. Michel.

Wednesday 5 October

Travel across Brittany, with a stop at Chateaubriant's market, and a stop at Angers for a look at the 13th-century castle. During the lunch break we walked to the train station and stood in line for about 40 minutes to make a reservation on the train to Avignon for the coming Monday. A pit stop at Saumur, and a drive-past for the allegedly famous cavalry school there, and then to Blois.

Thursday 6 October

Visit to Château Chambord at Blois, and Chenonceau, the 16th-century chateau of Catherine de Medici.

At Amboise, we see its fortress castle (I don't remember), and then to Clos Lucé to visit a collection of models of Leonardo da Vinci's inventions, constructed from his drawings.

Friday 7 October

Saw the 13th-century Gothic cathedral at Chartres ('a jewel of medieval architecture') and the Palace and Gardens of Versailles, 'the retreat of French royalty at the height of absolutistic power'.

Most of the tour participants (about 29 out of 42) left for home this morning, and 13 of us stayed on for the extra two days.

Globus hotel list

Paris	Mercure Tour Eiffel Suffren
Caen	Mercure Centre
Mont St. Michel	Mercure Mont St. Michel
Blois	Holiday Inn Garden Court
Paris	Holiday Inn La Villette
Paris, 16 Oct	Holiday Inn Roissy (at CDG Airport)

Friday 30 September

Left home by taxi with Wilco and Audrey at 10:00 am, to the airport for our flight to Toronto. Flight left late but we got to Toronto in time to change terminals, by bus, and to meet up with Bob and Mary VanderVennen and George and Pat Hiemstra by the departure gate.

Saturday 1 October

Arrived Paris around 9:30 am local time after a good flight. We had slept a bit along the way and had a fair breakfast on the plane. Plane was very full. We had some fun collecting our luggage because we went out the 'Sortie' prematurely and had to talk our way back in via a probably frustrated security man.

Then the fun began. There was some unattended luggage near where we were supposed to meet the Globus contact, which prompted a 'bomb scare' and the police would not let us near the place. The sidewalks were wall-to-wall people but we managed to get to another meeting point that the Globus people, unfortunately, did not seem to know about. We waited there for about 45 minutes, and then saw a Globus bus in the distance, parked. Another 20 minutes or so later, George decided to walk over to the bus, and then we were picked up promptly. The Hotel Mercure was near the Eiffel tower, nice location.

After unpacking and resting a bit, we met Philippe, our tour leader, at around 4 pm, along with the other tour members (total 42), heard some introductions, then got back on the bus towards the Seine for a river boat cruise and then a trip to Montmartre, after dark. It was 'nuit blanche', with a large band on the steps of the Sacre Coeur church, and zillions of people on the streets nearby. The concert was to start at around 10 pm but we left to go back to the hotel before it began. In the square nearby, in the meantime, most of the artists had packed up and gone home. We did have something to eat (a crepe) in one of the cafés. Back in the hotel we had some more to eat before going to bed. It had been a long day.

Sunday 2 October

Philippe took us on a city tour, starting early (8 am) with very little traffic on the road (Sunday morning), with one stop at the *Notre Dame* cathedral, and the last stop at the Eiffel tower, where we went up to the first and then the second *étage*. Still an impressive structure, with a nice view of the city from about a third of the way to the top.

We learned about Baron Hausman, the man who reorganized Paris at the request of Napoleon III, with wide streets and streetlights, from the cobblestone narrow-street city it had been until then, to become the City of Light.

In the afternoon we traveled to Giverny, about 40 km north and a bit west of Paris, the home of Claude Monet for many years, and the gardens and lily pond where many of his paintings originated. A very good afternoon (one of the extra options we were offered, at a price). Dinner for us was in the dining room at the hotel. Others went down the street for a five-course meal. Some others went to a concert at Sacre Coeur, later said to be very good.

Monday 3 October

We visited the World War II memorial at Caen (*Le Mémorial de Caen*). The museum-type memorial had a lot of history material on the time from about 1930 to 1940, and also an impressive side-by-side movie of the D-day landings, Allied forces on one side of the screen, Germans on the other side. Then on to Rouen, for the Jeanne d'Arc memorial and

the modern church built on the site. Lunch consisted of an *oignon tarte* and a *tarte* with *jambon et champignons*. Both were very good. We stayed at a hotel in Caen, another Mercure place.

Tuesday 4 October

Our first brief stop was at Juno beach, in honour of the ten Canadians on the tour (probably in response to a request made by Bob VanderVennen).

Centre Juno Beach at Courselles-sur-Mer

We stopped near the centre briefly, and some people walked to the beach nearby. We did not visit the centre itself. The stop was an unscheduled one, and graciously arranged by tour guide Philippe, out of respect to the ten Canadians on the tour. Then on to Pt. Hoc, where there are lots of ruins of German bunkers, along with bomb craters, as mute testimony to the battles in June 1944.

Pointe du Hoc Federal Monument

On a cliff 8 miles west of the cemetery, erected by France to honour elements of the 2nd Ranger Battalion under the command of LTC James Rudder which scaled the 100-foot cliff. The 30-acre battle-scarred area remains much as it was left on 8 June 1944.

Also a stop at the US military cemetery nearby, kept meticulously clean and neat.

Normandy American Cemetery

One of fourteen American WW II cemeteries on foreign soil. It is 172.5 acres in size and contains ten grave areas with the remains of 9387 servicemen and women. Of these, 307 are 'unknown'.

In Bayeux we saw a 900-year-old tapestry, some 200 meters long (?) describing the story of William the Bastard who became William the Conqueror. (I need to check this history).

Then on to Mont St. Michel, the monastery built on a rock at the Atlantic coast. We climbed 300 steps (Dixie managed it also), and then had a fascinating and humorous description of the history and construction by local tour guide Alain.

According to him the concept of 'dozen' came from twelve digits on four fingers, countable with the thumb. Who knows.

Similarly, he suggested that the word 'barbecue' came from the French *de la barbe a la queue*, from beard to butt, as a pig was cooked on a spit. Again, who knows.

Mont St. Michel Abbey

Its history is thought to date back to 708, when Aubert, Bishop of Avranches, had a sanctuary built on Mont-Tombe in honour of the Archangel. The mount soon became a major focus of pilgrimage.

In the 10th century, the Benedictines settled in the abbey, while a village grew up below its walls. It was an impregnable stronghold during the Hundred Years War, and resisted all the English assaults. As a result it became a symbol of national identity. Following the Revolution and until 1863 the abbey was used as a prison. In 1874, it was named a historic monument.

The entire structure is built on and around a pyramid-shaped rock. The abbey church was built in the early decades of the year 1000, on top of the rock, 80 meters above sea level, on a platform 80 meters long.

Had a glass of wine courtesy Bob VanderVennen in honour of his birthday (77th). Their wedding date was 17 April 1953.

Wednesday 5 October

Some information about France, recited by Philippe during our drive through Brittany: Population about 62 million. Average salary 1950 euros per month. Minimum salary 1200 euros per month.

This morning we visit the market at Chateaubriant. I took a bunch of pictures, including *choux Romanosco*, an interesting type of broccoli.

Lots of cows and apples in Brittany, though we did not see very many of them.

In Angers, capital of Anjou province, we made train reservations for 10 October, from Paris to Avignon, after standing in line for about 40 minutes. Later in the day a pit stop at Saumur. Yellow-orange berries are said to be myrtle (by Mike from Pennsylvania). More likely *Pyrrocantha*.

Thursday 6 October

Message from Missy, asking us to buy a Huguenot cross, gold or silver, and to find brochures on Margaux. We were successful with the former, but not with the latter.

Domaine National de Chambord

The central building was begun in 1519. In the centre there is the famous double-helix spiral staircase, one of the masterpieces of the French Renaissance. There are two interlocking spirals around a hollow core. From one of the flights it is possible to see people on the other flight, without ever meeting them. Various changes and additions were made during the 17th and 18th century.

Chenonceau, le Château des Dames

Built in the 16th century on the River Cher.

One of the *dames* was Catherine de Médicis (1519-1589), widow of Henri II and the mother of François II, Charles IX, and Henri III. The other was Diane de Poitiers (1499-1566), wife of Louis de Brézé, lady-in-waiting to the Queen, and intimate friend of the dauphin, the future King Henri II. She was a rival to Catherine.

One of the gardens (the left) is Catherine's, and the other one is Diane's.

We had lunch at Chenonceau (country retreat?) where the food was bad as well as expensive. Later in the day we visited Notre Dame cathedral at Chartres. Impressive.

Notre Dame de Chartres

Built in less than 30 years, starting in 1194, on the foundations of the Roman cathedral of Bishop Fulbert (circa 960-1028) that burned down in 1194.

Embedded in the pavement of the nave is a circular design with a diameter of 12.85 m, a labyrinth (maze) dating from about 1200. It is the largest and best preserved in France. 'The path runs for 261.5 m. Labyrinths are how the church 'christianized' an ancient pagan myth (Theseus and the Minotaur). The Christian labyrinth is first and foremost a spiritual exercise. We can see in it the journey of a pilgrim to Jerusalem, the path of a sinner towards salvation or the road toward the heavenly Jerusalem. Here it leads towards the altar. Unlike the old mazes where people risked becoming lost, you always get out of Christian labyrinths.'

Le Clos Lucé

Leonardo da Vinci settled here in 1516, at the invitation of François I, and lived here until his death in 1519, at the age of 67. François gave Leonardo the Château de Cloux, 'asking nothing in return but the pleasure of listening to him converse, a pleasure which he indulged in practically every day.'

Leonardo worked for the king as engineer and architect. Many of his manuscripts, dating from 1517, bear the address 'at the Palace de Cloux d'Amboise'.
Dinner at a local *bistro* was excellent (I had duck).

Friday 7 October

Philippe collected a credit card commitment of US \$434 for the optional excursion to Giverny (\$62 each), a dinner and 'Paris light' tour (\$68 each) at the end of the week, and what else (\$87 each)? Probably dinner at the bistro.

Chateau Versailles

The State Apartments of the King and Queen. Used by Louis XIV, Louis XV, Louis XVI, and Marie-Antoinette. Built in the 1670s and 1680s.

The Hall of Mirrors is 73 m long, 10.5 m wide, and 12.3 m high. The king would pass through here every day on his way to the Chapel. The hall was used for large receptions, royal weddings, and ambassadorial presentations.

We returned to Paris around 5 o'clock, and a number of us went out for the optional dinner and city-light bus ride. The dinner was OK but the bus ride, unfortunately, was a waste of time and money.

Saturday 8 October

The tour is officially over, and most of the participants go home this morning. Not the ten Canadians and the three American relatives.

I felt poorly because of a sinus infection that had been bothering me since Tuesday already. Not much energy for doing a lot of walking.

Nevertheless, we took the Metro to Musée d'Orsay and spent about four hours there, including lunch. Stood in line for about 30 minutes before getting in. The museum is still nice. Wilco and Audrey's walkie-talkies came in very handy here and later in the next week. Dixie and I then went back to the hotel, and Wilco and Audrey charged around to a bunch of other places, including the Arc de Triomphe and Napoleon's Tomb, while Dixie and I spent some more time at the museum and then took the Metro back to our hotel. At supper in the pizzeria near the Holiday Inn La Villette, neither of my credit cards worked, and Wilco paid cash for our supper. The VanderVennens joined us there.

Sunday 9 October

The excitement of the day was that after breakfast Wilco and Audrey, Bob and Mary, and Dixie and I were stuck in the elevator for about twenty minutes. It got very warm in there, and it took several minutes before we were able to contact hotel staff. When someone spoke to us in English from outside the elevator door we began to feel better about it. In the evening, the security manager came by while we were sitting around, and got us all a free 'Kir' *apéritif*, which was very nice, and in keeping with his apology for the inconvenience.

In the meantime, we went back to Montmartre and spent time looking around, including the church and the artist square, not to mention the zillions of people. Dixie tried to sit at a table that was partly occupied by some snotty people who did not like our presence. Besides, I had not given her enough money to pay for a cup of tea (4.50 while she had only 3 euros!).

Later we toured the very rich-looking and impressive opera house and then headed back to the hotel to get ready for next day's travels on our own. The hotel staff graciously

ordered a 'grand car' taxi for next morning to take us to Gare de Lyon and the TGV train to Avignon.

Opéra National de Paris, Le Palais Garnier

It is the 13th theatre to house the Paris opera since it was founded by Louis XIV in 1669. It was built on the the orders of Napoleon III as part of the great Parisian reconstruction project carried out by Baron Hausmann. Charles Garnier, an unknown 35-year-old architect, won the competition. Building took 15 years, from 1860 to 1875. The Grand Staircase, 30 m high, 173 m long, and 125 m wide at its widest point, is one the most famous features, built in marble of various colours. The main façade was completely renovated in 2000, and the Grand Foyer was restored in 2004.

The auditorium has 1900 red velvet seats, an 8-tonne chandelier, and a ceiling painted by Marc Chagall.

Monday 10 October

The 'grand car' taxi was right on time, took us and our luggage to Gare de Lyon in about 30 minutes, for 26.5 euros (21.5 on the meter, plus extras for people and luggage), and we easily found our way to the train. We were able to switch to four seats with a table in between, on the upper of two levels, and settled in for the comfortable 2.5 hour trip to Avignon. A fine way to travel. We had bought some lunch in the station, and Wilco and Audrey had a bottle of wine, so we were well fixed for lunch on board.

The train left on the dot at 11:20, and flew non-stop to Avignon where we arrived at 2:00 pm. We only just managed to get ourselves 'detrained' in the three-minute stop, a bit shorter than we had counted on. In any case, it worked, and it prepared us for the next time we had to do it.

The car rental place was close by, and there we spent something over an hour trying to decide what car would suit our needs. The first one we were offered, a Citroen C8 7-passenger van, did not do it, with two seats blocking the luggage space, and no cover for the luggage. We tried a Volvo, but the trunk was too small. Then we located a Citroen Xsara 'Picasso', a five-seater hatchback that could take all our luggage, under cover, and had more legroom in both front and back than the C8. Five-speed manual diesel.

After a bit of a glitch getting out of the parking lot, with Wilco driving, he being the youngest of the two males in the party, we headed over to our hotel (Express by Holiday Inn, close by, and pre-booked by Wilco), we checked in, rested a bit, and headed out for a look around. We had supper that night at a café across from the visitor centre.

In the hotel lobby later that night we played some '500' and learned to play 'zilch' with six dice.

Tuesday 11 October

We took a taxi to the market in downtown Avignon, and later headed to the Tourist Office where we signed up for a two-hour walking tour of Avignon and the Palace des Papes. Turned out very interesting. A young couple from Barrie also was on the tour. They had stayed at a B&B in Aix-en-Provence that was very nice, so Wilco took down the information.

First we visited the flea market at Les Halles, and wandered about the large indoor produce market. Lots of interesting stuff there. At the flea market Dixie found out what a Huguenot cross looks like, and she found a nice piece of turquoise for a necklace.

We decided to stay at the hotel one more night, since it was new, clean, and relatively cheap and nearly empty. Took the shuttle bus back. Later had an interesting supper at a restaurant near the Rhône. *Oeufs* for Audrey and Dixie!

Steves page 138

Romans invaded Provence 125 BC. Hill-towners descended *en masse* to the Roman cities (such as Arles, Orange, Nîmes, Vaison la Romaine). There they enjoyed theaters, fresh water from aqueducts, and commercial goods brought via the Roman road that stretched from Spain to Italy, passing along the northern edge of the Luberon.

When Rome fell in AD 476, barbarians swept in to rape and pillage, forcing locals back up into the hills, where they would remain for about a thousand years. During that period many of the villages we see today were established. Most grew up around castles, as peasants depended on their lord for security.

Just when they thought the coast was clear to relocate down below, France's religious wars (1500s) chased the hill-towners back up.

Little Séguret (100 today) had almost 1000 residents. The turmoil of the Revolution (1789) continued to make peaceful hill towns desirable. Over the next century, most of the hill towns slept peacefully, housed between 200 and 600 people, and were self-sufficient, producing just what was needed.

After WW I, many hill-towners moved down and pillaged hill towns' stones and roof tiles to build in the flatlands. In recent years, however, the hill towns have bounced back. Lavender production took off, and wealthy Parisiens, Americans, and British people have purchased properties.

Steves page 90

Avignon starred as the *Franco Vaticano* during 68 years (1309-1377) and during that time grew from a quiet village to a thriving city. We took the TGV train there from Gare de Lyon in Paris, and traveled 600 km in 2 hours and 40 minutes. The two-hour walking tour of the city and *Palace des Papes* was very informative. The Church essentially bought Avignon and then transformed it. It grew from 6,000 to 25,000 in short order. The three-acre palace was built, along with some 5 kilometers of protective wall, with 39 towers, mansions for the cardinals, and residences for the entire Vatican bureaucracy. Today, 13,000 people live within the walls. The palace, the biggest surviving Gothic palace in Europe, was built to accommodate 500 people as the administrative center of the Vatican, and the home of the pope. In the Napoleonic age, it served as army barracks, housing some 1800 soldiers.

The Pont St. Bénézet, constructed through a shepherd's religious vision, is the Pont d'Avignon of nursery-rhyme fame. It dates back to the 15th century, and was the only bridge crossing the Rhône in the Middle Ages, until part of it was destroyed by a flood. It was a 22-arch, 3000-foot bridge extending from the Vatican territory to the lonely Tower of Philip the Fair, which marked the beginning of France.

In 1309, a French pope was elected (Pope Clement V) and he moved to Avignon, under a supportive king of France. Popes then resided in Avignon until 1403. From 1378 on, there were twin popes, one in Rome and one in Avignon, causing a schism in the Catholic Church that was not fully resolved until 1417.

The open-air market at Les Halles was replaced by a modern covered market in 1970. Dixie bought a turquoise pendant at the flea market, and we found out from another market visitor what a Huguenot cross looks like.

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'Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence* nudged tourism in this part of France into overdrive'.

Steves page 165

Ménerbes (of Peter Mayle fame) 'offers little interest to most'. In 1970, the Luberon was unknown to most travelers but has, since then, experienced a dramatic change. Locals led simple lives and had few ambitions (as depicted in the movies *Manon of the Spring* and *Jean de Florette*..

Wednesday 12 October

Off to St. Rémy-de-Provence for the morning market where we wandered for several hours, bought some scarves. Audrey bought six, I think, and planned to wear a different one every day for the rest of the trip.

Market days, *Jours du Marché*

Steves page 82

St. Rémy-de-Provence 'gave birth to Nostradamus and cared for a distraught artist' (Vincent Van Gogh, after he lopped off his earlobe).

That day (I think) we discovered that our car had a GPS navigation system that helped us get around much more easily, as long as we knew where we wanted to go.

We drove to Arles, found the tourist office, and scouted around for a hotel. The first two choices were full, and we then found the Hotel le Rodin, not particularly cheap, but very comfortable. The owner helped get us a reservation at the Bastide Pierre de Feu in Aix-en-Provence for the next night, so we had that settled already.

We walked up to the Roman amphitheatre and found ourselves a place to eat. The place recommended by the hotel owner was closed, and we got ourselves to the Hotel Ibis, where we had a pleasant supper.

Steves page 57

Arles was an important port city. With the first bridge over the Rhône river, it was a key stop on the Roman road from Italy to Spain, the Via Domitia. Vincent van Gogh at age 35 settled here in 1888, and produced more than 200 paintings. During WW II, allied bombing caused much damage, while townsfolk hid in the underground Roman galleries.

We walked around the Roman arena (capacity about 20,000?), and Wilco and Audrey checked out one of the old hotels nearby, probably the Hôtel Calendal. Later they went back for the car and picked us up as we patiently waited along one of the narrow streets, somewhere near the Rue de Hotel de Ville and rue du Grand Prieure. We had bought some yoghurt in a store nearby but next morning forgot to take it out of the fridge in the Hotel le Rodin, where we stayed the night. Too bad.

Thursday 13 October

On our way to Aix-en-Provence we went via Gordes, where we visited the Village de Bories nearby, stone houses and other buildings from very early times.

This also was the day we were at the market in Isle-sur-le-Sorgue, where we saw lots of interesting stuff, and to which we decided to come back on Sunday morning for the big market.

Steves page 149

Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, about 30 km and 30 minutes east of Avignon, sits within a split in the River Sorgue. On Thursday the pig delivery man was there.

Dixie found a nice table cloth somewhere, and later we visited Rousillon, with all the red 'ocre' rocks. A touristy place where we did not spend a lot of time.

That was also the day (I think) that we visited the lavender museum and got a lot of information about that crop, imported not more than 200 years ago, perhaps less. Also, the difference between the real *pur* lavender and the higher-yielding and not so nice-smelling cheaper version, lavandin.

Our navigation system easily took us to the B&B we had booked, and we were able to get it for two nights right away. The owners of the 200-year old place were very pleasant, as was the accommodation. Wilco and Audrey, being the youngest, took the room upstairs, and we settled for the main floor room.

Le Musée de la Lavande.

Located 10 km from Gordes, at Hameau de Coustellet. Operated by the Lincelé family, growers and distillers of fine lavender for generations. A collection of stills from the 16th century to the present day. An interesting video about lavender production and harvest.

Steves page 132

Lavender grows best at an elevation of at least 2500 feet. It was not cultivated in Provence until about 1920, when it was imported by local perfume makers. There is the true lavender (traditionally used by perfume makers), spike lavender, and lavandin (a cloned hybrid of the first two). The true lavender is a far superior product, but the plants yield much less of the essential oils (recovered by steam distillation) and need more care to cultivate. Lavender goes into perfumes, and lavandin mostly into soaps.

According to another book, *Provence and the Côte d'Azur*, by DK Eyewitness Travel Guides (main contributor Roger Williams), cultivation in the region began in the 19th century, and provides the world with about 80 per cent of its needs.

Steves page 161

For the last 40 years, Gordes has been the most touristy and trendy town in the Luberon. It is now completely renovated, and many properties have been bought up by Parisian big shots, putting property values out of sight for locals.

The *Village des Bories* is an open-air museum of dry-laid stone structures that predate the Romans, some say by 2000 years. This one was inhabited from about 1600 to 1800.

There are several homes, animal pens, and a community oven.

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Many roads are lined with stately plane trees, the trunks of which look vaguely like eucalyptus trees. The trees are said to be a hybrid between Asian and American sycamores, created accidentally in a 16th-century Oxford botanical garden. The trees were imported to southern France in the 19th century to replace the traditional elm trees, and now line many roads and town squares. Napoleon allegedly planted them along roads to give his soldiers shade for their long marches. The trees do well in poor soil and with little water.

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Aix-en-Provence was founded about 120 BC as a Roman military camp. It was the first Roman base outside Italy, intended to defend the Greek merchants of Marseilles against the local Celts. The region's name, *Provence*, comes from its status as the first Roman

province. Because the area was once owned by Barcelona, Provence has the same colours as Catalunya: gold and red.

Friday 14 October

On advice from our landlord, we drove to Cassis, on the Mediterranean. Spent some time at the beach and the boat harbour, decided not to take the boat tour to the *calanques* (fjord-like places with limestone cliffs) because it was quite windy. Instead, we drove through the town to the first *calanque* and had a nice walk around. Apparently, limestone was quarried there for quite a while in the early 1900's.

Afterwards we took the Route de Crête to the high cliffs east of Cassis that overlooked the town. At a small wine-tasting place near Séguret, we sampled a couple of red wines and Wilco bought a bottle for our lunch on the Sunday train ride back to Paris.

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Cassis is a poor man's St. Tropez, an unpretentious port town that offers travelers a sunny time-out from their busy vacation. Rocky *calanques*, fjord-like inlets. Cassis was once an important quarry, with stones being hauled off via ships.

Cap Canaille at 1200 feet is Europe's highest maritime cliff. We drove along La Route des Crêtes and saw the town from the top of the cliff. We did not go to La Ciotat but returned to Cassis.

Saturday 15 October

We started on our way to Vaison-de-Romaines where there are very old Roman ruins. Along the way we stopped at the small hilltop village Séguret, where we found a maker and seller of figurines who opened up shop just as we arrived, and we bought a crèche set for ourselves. We wandered the narrow streets for a while and admired the landscape from the lofty hill.

Steves page 294

Santons are tiny, brightly adorned clay or wood Provençal figurines. Originally designed for traditional Christmas crèche scenes, they now represent all walks of life. The most famous *santon* makers are in Séguret and Aubagne.

In Vaison la Romaine we visited the Roman ruins, including the museum on the same grounds. Some of them were reminiscent of the temple and other ruins we had seen in Greece a couple of years ago. In the meantime we had made a phone call to the Holiday Inn at Avignon and made a reservation for our last night in Provence, to make our departure as convenient as possible. We had finally decided to leave Sunday on the 2:30 pm train to Paris, rather than wait until 6:45 pm with a late arrival at CDG airport. So we stopped at the train station in Avignon to make the reservations.

Vaison la Romaine

It is estimated that in the 1st and 2nd centuries, the city covered some 70-75 hectares. The heart of the city still lies buried under modern buildings, but excavation since the early 20th century of 15 hectares has provided much information from the residential, commercial, and craftsmen's districts.

Steves page 127

The ancient city had a preferred 'federated' relationship with Rome which, along with productive farm land (olives and grapes) made it a prosperous place. The old ruins offer a picture of life during the Roman empire. To us they looked quite a bit like the ruins we saw in different places in Greece (although the latter more often were temple ruins rather than city ruins). The theater had room to seat 6,000 people (enough for all the inhabitants of the city at the time).

Sunday 16 October

We opted to have breakfast early, at 7:00 am, to beat the three tour groups that had arrived, and to get to the big market in Isle-sur-le-Sorgue soon after it opened at 8:00 am. We succeeded, and got there probably by about 8:30, when there was lots of free parking to be had, and well before the tourist throngs arrived. Some market sellers were still setting up shop. By 11:00 am the place was jammed with people. We wandered around, bought some place mats, and I got some photographs. We walked into the church (no service, and spent a few minutes there). We had a nice time there, bought some lunch to eat in the park, bought six colourful placemats, and made our way back to Avignon by 12:30, before the 1:00 pm checkout time we had agreed on for one of the two rooms. We finished packing our bags, drove to the TGV station nearby, dropped off some passengers and our bags, and returned the car to its place. We had driven about 800 km, and used about 70 euros in diesel fuel (about 1.10 per liter).

Back at the train station, we had time on our hands but then Dixie discovered that we could change our reservations for an earlier train that went a little different route but would get us into Paris an hour earlier also. No sooner found out than decided, with the train coming in from Nice, and leaving in twenty minutes. This time we made sure we were in the right place on the platform for our *voiture*, and we were on board in good time, again with seats available that were facing each other, with a table in between. Not the ones that we had reservations for, but available just the same.

By 4:45 we were in Paris, at CDG airport, and managed to find our way to the *navette* that would do the run to the hotel cluster nearby, where we had booked at the Holiday Inn. Again, not particularly cheap, but comfortable and convenient. Supper in the dining room was very good and reasonably priced, and the rooms were nice.

We played another game of '500' in the hotel lobby, though the setup was not as good for it here as it was in Avignon.

We did not go to Orange, Nîmes, Pont du Gard, or Les Baux.

Monday 17 October

We had to be up for breakfast reasonably early because we needed to be on the airport shuttle by 9:00 am. A sumptuous breakfast at the hotel was included in our room rate, so that was very nice. The bus took us to the airport in short order (about a 20-minute ride), and then we had the privilege of standing in line for about an hour to get checked in for our Air Canada flight to Toronto and on to Edmonton. The trip was almost over.

The flight was good, about 7.5 hours for the first leg, then about two hours in the Toronto airport, and four more hours for the last leg home. Both flights were full. By that time we were tired.

Elaine was there to meet us and drive us home, and Rebecca and new baby Elise came soon thereafter to meet Wilco and Audrey.

It had been a good two weeks with Wilco and Audrey and we probably need to do something like that again.

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