

Through the Vineyards of the Saone and Rhone to Provence

May- June 2007

Barcelona – Carcassonne – St. Jean de Losne



We started our trip this year by car via Strasbourg, Barcelona and Carcassonne in France before returning to St. Jean de Losne to prepare Havana for the Summer's sailing. We spent 5 wonderful days in Barcelona in a small apartment bordering the old city. Sunny 30+ every day. We toured the city by open top bus, seeing all the famous sights, Gaudi's unfinished Sagrada de Familia Cathedral which is totally weird but enormous in scale, his colourful apartments and the marvellously entertaining Martime Museum which gives you a tremendous understanding of the city's seafaring history through it's computer graphics and many fantastic displays. It ends with a tour of the harbour which is lined with simply huge cruise ships. The main pedestrian street La Rambla is also not to be missed with it's cafes and street entertainment...full of life, music and colour.



Carcassonne, in total contrast, is one of Europe's best preserved medieval towns. The fortress and chateau are restored. Looking over the surrounding countryside, it's like stepping back in time as you climb the ramparts, visit the towers and the town within the walls. Inside are a number of boutique hotels, small outdoor restaurants serving specialities of the area and shops selling regional products.



Back to St. Jean de Losne, our small but busy little river and canal town for several days hard work, polishing Havana inside and out. It was hot work with temperatures of 28 – 30. Not like Nykøbing in April! But we got it done and in the process met several lovely couples- Wendy and Ron from the UK who entertained us with tales of their sailing adventures and shared their local Burgundy on their cosy motorcruiser, Niels, the boat builder from Bornholm who gave us invaluable advice on how to restore our teak decks to new next season, and Birgit and Peer who shared our trip down the Saone and Rhone Rivers (in their own boat) and explored all the many cathedrals, cobbled streets, hillside villages, air conditioned supermarkets and riverside stops with us.



St. Jean lies where the great Saone River meets several of the man-made canals. It lies in the Bourgogne region, a few km. from the famous wine route that winds its way through all the tiny villages- each bearing a name you have seen on labels – Nuits St. Georges...all the famous Burgundy wines are produced here in this beautiful area.

Here in Beaune, too, is the unique “Hospice”- founded in 1443 to help the poor and sick of the region and used since the Middle Ages right up until the 20 century. It is stunning- a jewel of the Middle Ages – an amazing “Palace for the Poor” who were nursed by the nuns. The building’s multi-coloured tiled roofs are a feature of this region.



Here we also visited one of the great wine cellars-“La Partriarche”(founded in 1796) in an old convent! Even the hospice was partially funded by its own vineyards. Here you can see the elegant gift shop. Underneath the town stretch 5 km. of cellars containing several million bottles...here you can enjoy a tasting of 12 types by candlelight.



The season has started strangely (like the rest of the year) with extremes of weather...either very hot earlier than usual, or extremely heavy thunder storms with torrential rain. Lucky for us that both the Saone and Rhone rivers have largely been tamed by a series of huge locks (the biggest we encountered on the trip). Even so several towns along the banks showed where the waters had risen by up to 10 metres during flood years. In Avignon the whole riverside harbour was washed away and boats ended up in fields! But luckily not this year. This is also the area of the “Mistral”- terrifically strong winds that sweep down the Rhone valley for 1, 2 or 6 days. Then everyone heads for shelter.



Our last night in St. Jean de Losne.... with a thunderstorm and “moules et frites” (mussels and chips!) in our local brasserie, totally deserted! We are sad to leave as it has become like home...everyone at the boat yard has been so helpful and so nice....our new friends come out and waive us off....

Time to go ...new adventures ahead....