

## Through Provence and down to the Med!

### Avignon, Arles and Port St. Louis- de- Rhone

May- June 2007



**Avignon-** home to 7 successive Popes in the 14th century, is dominated by the Popes' Palace, the largest Gothic palace in Europe and, of course, the famous half bridge of the famous song (Sur le Pont d'Avignon) built during the 12<sup>th</sup> century- Pont St. Benezet. The views are fantastic as we sail in and moor right outside the ramparts below the bridge.

It's like walking through history here as the city is so full of churches, museums and the Palace that dominates the huge square. The many narrow sidestreets are full of small shops with local products from Provence- olive oils, vinegars, syrups made from fruits and flowers...poppy, rose and lavender, soaps, cheeses, olive wood bowls and platters, bright cotton tablecloths with their colourful prints in sharp yellows, reds and blues.

We buy small treats and try and remember we're on a budget! A great day exploring the bridge, palace and gardens. It's hot!!!! (we try not to think about how it might be in August even further south...! Now we have to start thinking more about how to keep cool on the boat, instead of warm. We either BBQ or picnic on cheese, pate and sausage- too hot to cook. We have temporarily given up trying to lose weight as the bread is just too good to resist. Soft and chewy when fresh, it has to be eaten the same day. By the next day it becomes a lethal weapon- hard as a rock. We are armed on board with day old baguettes.



**Arles** is the city of Roman ruins and Van Gogh. It is dominated by the huge Roman amphitheatre (seating for 20.000 spectators) , 60 arcades on each level. In Roman times they came to watch the Gladiators, today it is home to the bullfights (also popular here in S. France as well as Spain). The town is full of beautiful squares and narrow streets, very “Provence”. The Mediterranean is only 40 km away.

It’s a busy Saturday for weddings at the Hotel de Ville (Town Hall)- one wedding party after the other rushes in in full bridal gowns, guests in flamboyant hats, much cheek kissing, decorated cars and horn tooting as they drive away. Great fun. We waive to them along with everyone else.

**Port St. Louis-du-Rhone**- finally the end of our journey through the canals and rivers of France- in total 1438 km. It has been a fantastic part of our trip. But now it’s time to get back to the sea. To get the mast on so Havana is her real self again. We pass through our last lock and into the port and salt water! Many boats in transit here. Hundreds of all shapes and sizes are stored on land.

Jan and Dad return to St. Jean de Losnes by bus/train to the car for the drive home. I will spend 6 days here alone on Havana (peace!) catching up with this and maybe take a local bus around to explore the Camarge- this unique marsh area of French cowboys, wild horses, flamingos and salt flats. It’s hot and blowing very hard but we have a good spot tucked along the harbour wall of this little seaside resort.

From here we’ll head out into the Mediterranean along the Riviera coast Nice, Cannes, St.Tropez, Menton??) towards Corsica via the Iles de Hyeres (small islands off Cannes). Stay tuned.....