

*Dijon, Beaune ...
and "home" to St. Jean de Losne*



Capital of the Burgundy region, Dijon (pop. 151,576) was home to the Dukes of Burgundy from the 11th-15th century - a place of tremendous wealth and power, one of the great European centres of art, learning and science - suitably reflected in its beautifully restored Gothic and renaissance-styled buildings and planning...and narrow, ancient streets. It's a wonderful place to wander around and we were surprised by its splendour, as we had been warned off the quayside with tales of theft and junkies...we actually enjoyed our stopping place very much which just goes to show that sometimes you have to take the chance and make your own experiences ...



It is, of course, the home of some very prestigious mustards! At Maille (below) the most exclusive (not for sale generally) are dispensed via pumps (rather like draught beer) into stylish containers...there is also every flavour you could imagine, with basil, paprika, with honey, liquorice, truffles, and the list goes on. You are ushered in and out of the store by a stylishly uniformed assistant and receive your purchase in a bag worthy of Harrods or Hermes....quite intimidating really if you just wanted something to go with your hot dog...ah, these French with their sense of style....

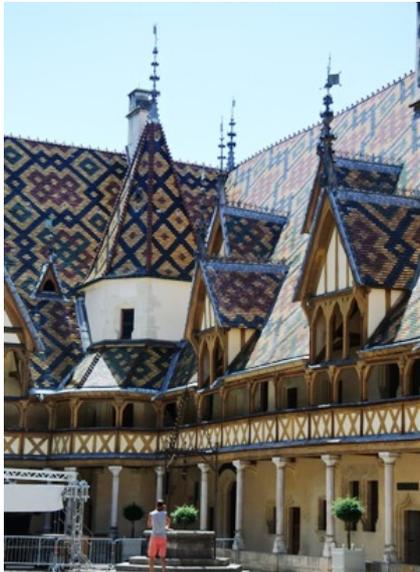




The mustard actually originated in 1856 when Jean Naiglon substituted "verjuice"(acidic green juice of not-quite-ripe grapes) for vinegar in the traditional mustard recipe. Et voila! But Dijon is also famous for its spicy cake...also available in mustard naturally. And for creme de cassis (used to make the "kir" drinks...and lovely desserts). Each year, they hold an international Gastronomic Fair that attracts over 500 exhibitors and 200,000 visitors. We made do with the covered market and treated ourselves to cheese, including one of their many varieties of goat's cheese. Everything looked good.



We missed the Musee des Beaux Arts (next year) which was closed but saw just about everything else. It's a wonderful city to visit for foodies and architecture/culture buffs. Easy to walk around the whole centre - a bit like a mini-Paris in style. It is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



We couldn't round off our trip through our small corner of Burgundy without a visit to Beaune, capital of the Burgundy wines and whose annual wine auction at the "Hospice de Beaune" is the premier wine auction in France. It is surrounded by some of the world's most famous and prestigious wine villages and they all have their outlets here. We were also lucky enough to arrive on market day which included an interesting stall with the regional truffles. A few of those and a couple of bottles of wine will put a hefty dent in your bank balance.

One of the most amazing buildings I've ever visited (and we have seen it before but that doesn't diminish its impact) is the "Hospice de Beaune", founded in 1442 by Nicolas Rolin, Chancellor to the Duke of Burgundy, and his wife (and way ahead of his time...the first welfare state, you could say) who started this charity run hospital to treat the poor and needy. Run by an order of nuns with those wonderful winged caps, it offered free medical treatment right down through the centuries and for soldiers during the Second World War and on into the 70's. There was also a private "paying patient" section where they got to lay and gaze up at amazing works of art. It was funded by donated vineyards bestowed by Popes and noblemen down through the ages. The roof is a masterpiece of "toits bourguignons" - tiles glazed in green, ochre, red and black, arranged in geometric patterns. It makes your mouth fall open when you enter the courtyard. Smaller versions appear on churches and even private mansions in the area. It was a good trip - thanks for joining us once again, Peter! for your humour, enthusiasm, energy and fine wines!



And so we returned to St. Jean de Losne, where Otter was lifted out for the winter. She needs her bottom scrubbing! After 420 locks and one final "moules et frites", it's time for Rørvig, and then on to Leros (and some sun!!). Sleep well, Otter. You served us well. Here's to next year. Sante'