

Gently on...

Le Somail and Rennes-le-Chateau

Another little gem of a place was Le Somail, a few kilometres from the Canal de la Robine. A sleepy little village by the canal with lovely stone buildings and a few surprises. Someone had started a modest second-hand antique bookstore that sort of ran away with them, and took your breath away when you walked inside and saw the now over 5000 books lining the walls.



Another nice surprise was the tearoom full of artworks by the owner's wife. And they used to have a hat museum with over 1000 hats...Every village along the canal has its own wine and local produce – fruit-packed jams, olive oils and herby vinegars, olive, pepper and tomato tapenades, honeys, many varieties of flour – often made with chestnuts, biscuits and, of course, their own version of the humble baguette! There are also many delicacies (sweets, biscuits, syrups, jams, candied sweets made of violets here. We also spent a wonderful hour at a local wine-tasting (just us!) with such a sweet man who was so very enthusiastic the local wines. It is often the unexpected, spur-of-the moment treats that turn an ordinary day into something to remember. Interestingly, Languedoc has its own language, “Occitan” (related to Catalan) which was once spoken across most of southern France. Even more surprisingly, today 1,610,000 people either understand it or speak it fluently.



Rennes-le Chateau – is a small stone village atop a hill with sweeping views over the countryside. Because of various conspiracy theories about an alleged buried treasure discovered by 19th century priest, Berenger Saulniere, hundreds of thousands visit it each year. Various excavations have taken place and many books have featured it including Dan Brown’s “The DaVinci Code”. Today, it’s a bit “New Age”



But I was interested because 2 years ago, I was asked to translate a book about the village church for a Danish couple who run tours there. And they had it in the bookshop there, so that was kind of thrilling! It’s such a beautiful and peaceful spot with sweeping views across the mountains. We visited the Church of St. Mary Magdalene with its many unique statues and figures, the Villa Bethania and the quiet herb gardens. Pere Sauniere was eventually suspended in 1910, after a suspiciously large amount of money was used to renovate his home!



And peaceful though it may be, there’s not a day goes by that we don’t think of our third crew member.