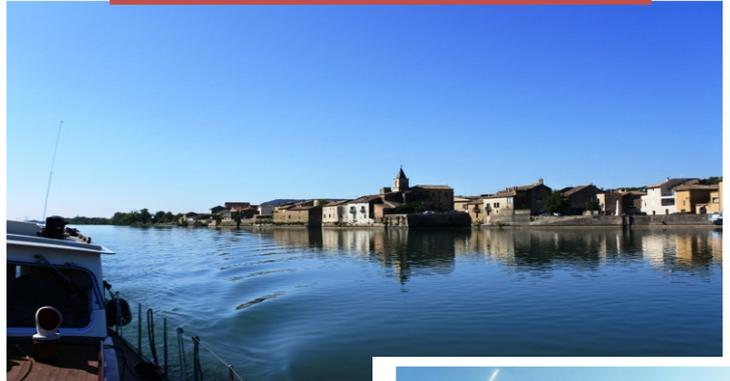




Gently up the Rhone



As we finally set off up the Rhone, after almost a month of waiting, it is difficult to believe the turbulence and 25 km/hr currents we witnessed earlier. Instead of battling heavy currents as expected, we are bathed in sunshine the whole trip from Aigues Mortes to St.Jean de Losne (almost 500 km), the river is like silk and we can hardly believe our luck. There is a little traffic, apart from the massive commercial barges, as everyone heads north, but we often meet only one or two boats in the huge 18 m. locks. We stop at the same ports as we did cruising south (there is nowhere else to stop), but this time even the ones that did make much of an impression on the way down, look better bathed in sunshine... Auxonne where we discovered a campsite with a gourmet restaurant (7 hour oven-baked lamb!).



Timeless Viviers where the extremely long river cruise ships somehow manage to squeeze into impossibly small spaces so silently that you jump out of your skin when you turn around to find them right behind you. The locks are still a couple of hundred metres long and it is always fascinating to see the huge barges squeeze in with just cm on each side - the locks were made-to-measure for them. The one below is called "Gracieuse" and gracious she is. They are also extremely considerate when entering and leaving the locks, going slowly and giving us as much distance as possible when passing. From Arles to Lyon, the Rhone is 310 km long and includes 12 hydro-electric plants/locks that produce 16% of France's hydro power. A key commercial route since Roman times.



It simply couldn't be better....until our first ever accident with Otter when the relay to our bow thruster (used to manoeuvre in/out of the locks so we can tie up alongside quickly) jams and the stern veers out hitting a barge beside us and slightly bending a railing. Much yelling and arm-waving from French owner....



Louie....loving every minute of it. A real sea-spaniel now. Only fell in once while at berth when he rolled over in his sleep up on deck. Found out he can swim. Nothing puts a good spaniel off though. We make sure he wears his life jacket – of which he is very proud and can't wait to get into while cruising in open water.