

Tauck Rhone River Cruise

April 7-8, 2017: Lyon, France -

This 2000 year old city was first settled in 43 BC by the Romans because it is the juncture of the Rhone and Saone Rivers, allowing goods to be transported from the Mediterranean Sea into the northern area of what is now France. High on the hill here in Lyon are the remains from Roman times. Every time they dig for any reason in this area, more remains are discovered.



Here you see the walking bridge across the Saone River with the Palace of Justice at the other end and the Notre Dame de Fourviere church on the hill



Inside the church

High on the hill above the city is a church that looks more like a castle, The Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourviere. The hill itself is called Fourviere, or “the hill that prays”. It was build to honor the “princess Mary”, mother of Jesus, hence why it looks like a castle—to honor the princess. To get up the hill there are three options. One, drive a very winding road, two, hike a very steep path or three, and the easiest way, that the funicular up the hillside. On the inside of the church, it’s a bit unusual in that instead of biblical scenes, there are scenes depicting the history of France, especially Lyon. In addition to the church, also located on this hill Fourviere are the ruins of an old Roman forum.



The Notre Dame de Fourviere

After a good study of the hill, we ventured down into the old town area of Lyon. This is an area with centuries of history starting with the Romans and continuing through today. This

area feels like your typical European old city with narrow streets and storefronts. There are also these small, inconspicuous doors that you would normally walk right by without a thought. But open one of the door and it leads to a narrow passageway. Follow the passageway and eventually it leads into a courtyard surrounded with apartments. It’s a very interesting place to explore.

During World War II, Lyon was a centre for the occupying German forces, as well as a stronghold of resistance. The secret passages through houses enabled the local people to escape Gestapo raids.



Our guide explains the history of Lyon



Some of the ruins of the Roman amphitheater on the hill Fourviere



One of the many small passage-ways leading to courtyards



Stairs leading to apartments . No elevators allowed in the Old City



Apartments in the courtyards of the Old City section



View from high on the hill above Lyon



City owned bikes are available everywhere



Lots of street vendors here like this Crape maker



Typical outdoor café in Lyon



A street in the Old City



All kinds of goodies available to tempt you



Any kind of nuts & spices are available in the markets



Yes, those are all kinds of drinks available to purchase by the liter



They served us a tasting platter at the market



All the vegetables look very appealing



Yes, they DO have LOTS of chesses here in France. I counted over a 160 different kinds in one shop in the market



Along the Saone waterfront



In the USA, we celebrate Easter with chocolate rabbits, here they celebrate April fools day with chocolate fish!

April 7-8, 2017: Lyon, France - Visiting the Beaujolais wine region

This afternoon we headed about 25 miles north from Lyon to a great wine growing region of France call Beaujolais. We first visited a small church in the region and then a castle called Château de la Chaize. This castle was built in 1652 along with it's gardens designed by the same designer as the gardens at Versailles. After that we headed to the vineyards to learn about the growing process and then the winery for some wine tasting.

It's interesting that when a new grape vine is planted, it take three years to start producing, but when it does it continues to produce for the next 80 to 100 years!



The Chateau de la Chaize



The winery



Mounuments like these can be found all over France honoring men who lost their lives in WWI and WWII—many more in WWI



Our guide did a great job of explaining the process in the vineyard





The church in the small town we visited



Inside the church



The cloister area



A very old fresco on the wall of the church



Details of the beautiful columns in the Cloister



April 9, 2017: Viviers, France -

It's a Sunday morning and we are sailing south on the Rhone river in the south of France. This is wine country and we are seeing plenty of vineyards go by, but we also see plenty of castles and small towns with their resident cathedrals.

Finally we slow and pull alongside the riverbank in the small town of Viviers. Viviers was at one time a much larger town of 30,000 people, but now boasts just 4000 residents. From what we are told, this place is always quiet; but this is Palm Sunday morning, so it's that much more peaceful as we walk down the tree-lined street into town.



These sycamore trees are cut back every other year until there is no green left. In fact there is hardly a branch left on the tree. And then, out pops the buds and away they go, growing very quickly in the springtime warmth. But it is funny to see half the trees with lush green limbs and half of them completely naked.

We are headed into town and then up to the cathedral. Along the way we see many interesting houses and shops. Some are adorned around the doorway with all kinds of decorations.



Many seem like they have too many doors, some smaller doors and other larger doors. I'm thinking maybe the small doors are for the short people - after all, people were shorter back then. But when we ask our guide about this, they explain that the short doors were for the livestock. Winters were cold and you needed some way to keep the house warm. Ah Ha! Let's just bring in the cows and goats. That should do the trick!



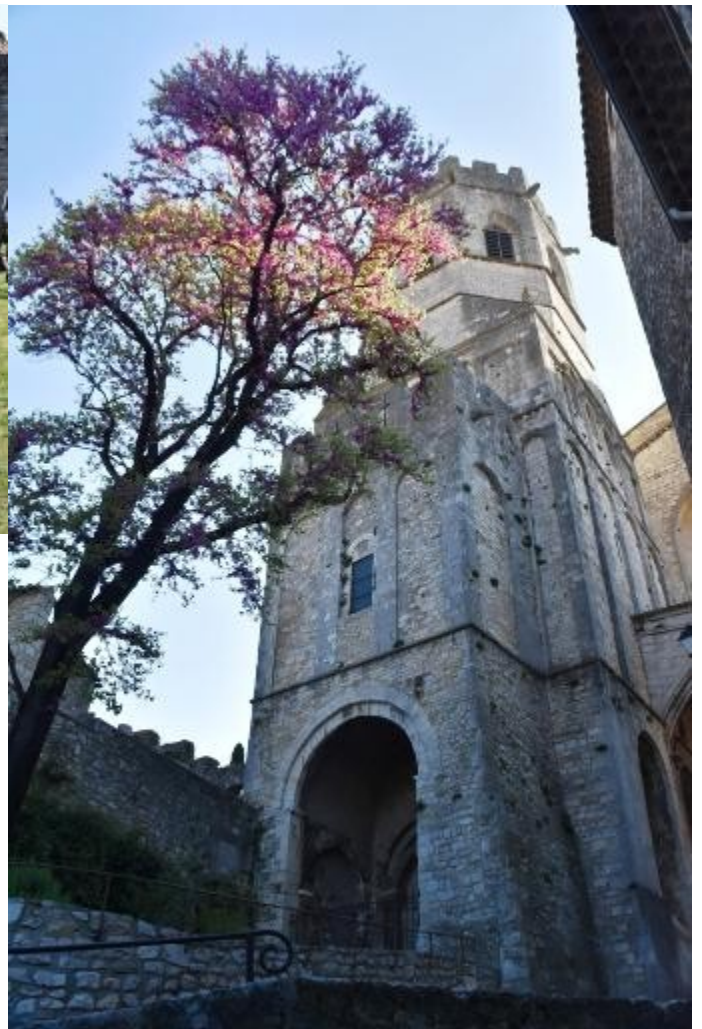


We wander down the narrow alleys and they all seem to either go nowhere or end up back at the same place, heading to the cathedral. I also notice that these people must love their pets as there are water dishes outside many of the homes. Some of the homes have very nicely decorated courtyards.



On one occasion we passed a young boy trying to throw a stuffed animal from the street up through the second floor window to his brother.





Finally we climb the hill to the cathedral, the oldest cathedral in France that is still in use. It's a magnificent building with a great view of the surrounding hills and valleys.

As we are wandering around outside the church admiring the view and taking pictures, suddenly people start streaming from the cathedral out into the courtyard over-



looking the valley. They are all carrying palm branches. Duh... it IS Palm Sunday.

And then the priest comes walking up the path followed by all his attendees to hold an outdoor service on Palm Sunday. THIS is what makes travel great—the little unexpected surprises that come out of nowhere.



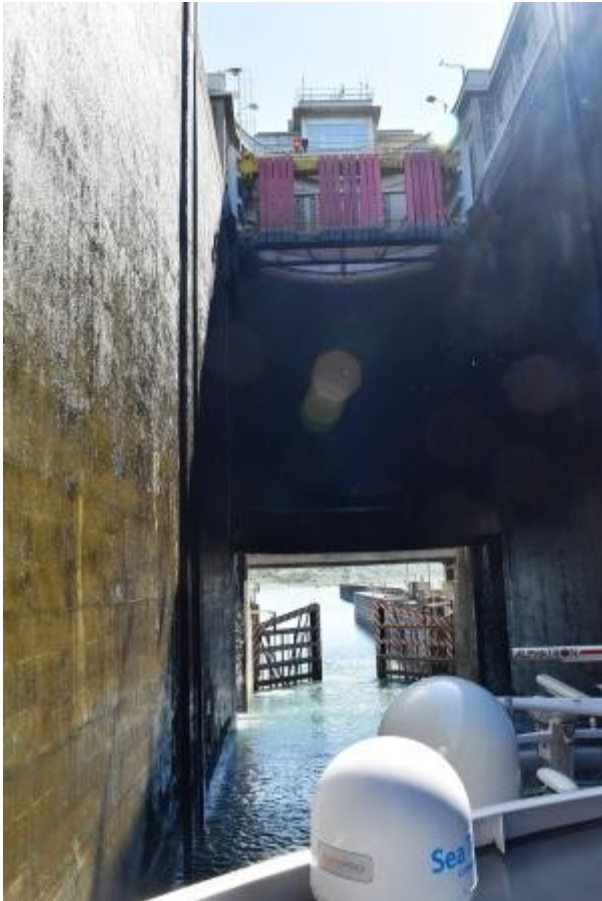
After the visit to the cathedral, we ventured back downtown and stopped by a Petanque court and I learned how to play this crazy game. Then it was back to the ship and on our way down the river.

Later we traversed a couple of locks, one of which dropped us down by over 70 feet. It's always inter-



esting to see these captains slide a ship that is hundreds of feet long into a lock with only inches on each side.

After another wonderful dinner, this time on the outside deck, we enjoyed an evening of music. Another great day on the river.



April 10, 2017: Arles, France - From Arenas to Theaters to Chateaus

We wake up this morning in yet another fascinating city in the south of France, still on the River Rhone, of course. After a good breakfast to start us on our day, we walk from the waters edge into the town of Arles. This city, like so many in this part of the world, is not lacking in UNESCO World Heritage Sites and the first one we come to is a big one—the Arles Amphitheatre, an old Roman arena that is still in use today.



But maybe a little background is in order. This area saw its first settlements around 800 BC and became an important Phoenician trading port. Then the Romans took over in 123 BC and made it into an even



more important city, and this is when the arena appears. The arena was used for many kinds of shows in the early days ranging from pageants to animal fights to gladiators fighting.

Centuries later, when killing animals and people in the arena fell out of favor, the arena sat idle. Gradually, squatters moved in and the arena



became a community with shacks built over, under and throughout the arena. Today it has been cleaned out and restored. It's used for a variety of concerts and performances. As we walk through the vast arches entering the arena and sit in the stands overlooking the arena floor, we can't help but speculate who walked these aisles and sat in these seats all those centuries before us.

After the arena, we walked over to the Roman Theater grounds. This area was used for plays, of course, but also for philosophical and political debates. It's much smaller than the arena which shows, I suppose, that the people then were more interested in fighting than in philosophizing (still true today, I'm sure).

From there we continued on to the main square of the city with the town hall and cathedral. If you look



closely at the entrance of the church, you can see on the left hand side of the façade a row of people well dressed and marching into heaven. While on the right-hand side of the entrance there is a procession



of naked, skinny people marching into hell with the devil greeting them.

Arles remained a very important port city on the Rhone for many centuries until the 1800's when the railway came along and displaced much of the river traffic and it gradually became a sleepy little town. But apparently this was perfect for some people, including Vincent van Gogh who decided to move here in 1888. Over the next years he produced over 300 paintings based on landscapes around Arles. Many of the places are still very recognizable today, such as *The Night Café*, *Yellow Room*, and *Starry Night Over the Rhone*. But gradually his mental health went downhill and culminated in the well-known ear-severing incident. He was committed for a while in the Old Hospital of

Arles and finally the people of Arles circulated a petition to have him permanently committed. Well, van Gogh took the hint and left Arles. Today you can still see many of the places that he used for his landscapes and find many people around town painting on their canvases.





Vincent van Gogh's 'The Night Café' with the actual café in the background



This truck was trying to negotiate the narrow streets of Arles and got totally stuck between the buildings



The grounds of the Arles Hospital where van Gogh spent some time. A van Gogh reproduction stands in the foreground.



A free van Gogh painting class was offered aboard the ship



A common scene around Arles.

Later in the evening we drive through the countryside outside of Arles to the beautifully restored Chateau Duchy D'Uzes. This Chateau, or family castle, was built in the 9th century and has continued to be in use ever since, mainly as a family home with a couple of stances as a school. From 1951, the Marquise de Crussol began to restore the Chateau. His grandson and his wife, the Duke and the Duchess of Uzes today continue the restorations and live in the Chateau. While we are at the Chateau, we actually run into the Duchess and her son coming home with their suitcases.

The rooms in the Chateau are very interesting and have the feel of times gone by. There's the chapel with its stained glass windows, ornate paneling and chandeliers. By contrast, down the hall is what I call the "dead animal room". I guess it's formally called the hunting room with all the animal heads on the walls.



After touring the Chateau, we were escorted to the back gardens where dinner was set up. The lights were low, the fountains flowing, the string trio playing and the food was delicious. What more could a person ask for to end another wonderful day?



April 11, 2017: Avignon, France -

When you travel, sometimes you have good days and then sometimes you have Great Days, and then.... Sometimes you have a really WOW day. Well, today was one of those days. If you ever have a chance to visit Avignon, by all means don't miss it. After the dinner we had last night, Tauck followed up with an absolutely wonderful day today.



We wake up on our ship as it is tied up across from the old city wall with all its old world charm, and set off for a walking tour of the old city. Again this



area is wonderfully preserved with narrow streets, large squares, and old churches with heavy wooden doors, some with branches above the doors for Holy Week. City Hall (Hotel de Ville) with its strong stone façade sits majestically on the main square holding it's



flags from the European Union, France and Provence. And as always, there are many cafes, both large and small, to choose from when getting that urge for a cappuccino with a French pastry.



We've had great weather on this trip and once again today it's a bright, sunny morning as we take in the sights and sounds of this old city. Eventually our walk takes us up the hill to the Palace of the Popes (Palais des Papes). Whoa. Hold on. We are in Avignon, right? Not Rome. So why is there a Palace of the Popes here? Well, it turns out that back in the 1300's there happened to be all kinds of trouble and turmoil going on in Italy, so they moved the head of



the Church to Avignon. Nine

popes (mostly French) lived in this huge place in the 1300 & 1400's. Then when things settled down in Italy, they wanted their Pope back, but by now the French had gotten used to have the seat of the church in Avignon & having French Popes, so they resisted the move back to Rome. As a result, for a while there was a pope in Rome and one in France at the same time.



View from the pope's window out onto the courtyard

It's interesting wandering around this palace and realize what all happened here. There is the courtyard where five thousand people could be blessed by the pope from his papal window above the courtyard. And the huge dining hall where guests were served a 7-course meal and ate with the pope. Guests were seated according to rank in society, but none used utensils but instead ate with their fingers. Next door, in the kitchen with it's 60 foot high chimney / ceiling, they would grill as many as 5 cows at a time for a banquet. Always making more food than his guests could possibly eat, the leftovers were given to the poor in the community.

But this place was not always a pope's palace, for after the 1400's when the popes left this area, soldiers lived in the castle. They built walls and floors and lived there in the castle until 1906. Since that time it has become a museum owned by the city.



Phil & Carol at the Palace of the Popes



Note that all the heads have been destroyed from the various statues. This occurred after the time of the popes being here when the populace rebelled against religion



In the afternoon we drive about twenty miles out of Avignon to Point du Gard, part of an ancient aqueduct built by the Romans 2000 years ago. The Romans wanted running water in their homes in the city of Nimes and in order to have enough water and pressure, they needed to find a good spring somewhere higher up, and sure enough, they found one. But they needed to build an Aqueduct over 30

miles long to bring it to the city. This was constructed so that it dropped 15 inches per mile, just enough to keep moving 400 liters of water per second. It took 15 years and 10,000 people working day and night to build the water piping and aqueduct, but finally they had their water.



Yes, this IS a wine tasting in the Palace of the Popes... I guess their version of a really big communion for Holy Week.



April 12, 2017: Roussillon & Chateauneuf-du-Pape, France - Beautiful Views, Red Clay and more Wine Tasting!



Up for breakfast and an early morning start as there is lots to do today. We begin the day by boarding our coaches and head away from the river and up into the



mountains. I like the way Tauck handles the motor coaches—never pack them full, but instead leave plenty of room to move around. We wind our way



up and around and up some more until we come to the first little town of 2500 people, Gordes. The town is perched on the side of the mountain with spectacular views. It also happens to be very expensive real estate and hence has a lot of actors and celebrities. Steven Spielberg has a home here, we are told. Along with all the fabu-

lous houses, olive trees and a 10th century castle, now a church, adorn this town.

From there, we went to the town of Roussillon, a very old town where most buildings are at least 300 years old. Roussillon is known for its ochre fields. Ochre is a natu-



ral pigment

that is in the sandy soil which makes up the cliffs around the town. These pigments have a wide range of colors and are used to make the deep colors of the local artist's paints. We take a nice hike through the ochre fields admiring the rich colors in the soil.





After lunch back on the riverboat and some relaxation, we once again head out to a vineyard for another wine tasting. I must say, we probably have had a wider variety of wine in this seven days than any other week I can remember. We have a short drive to the world renowned wine growing and producing region of Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape. This is another very protected region with strict rules for wine growing. Our wine tasting today takes place at Le Verger des Papes (The Orchard of the Popes) just below the ruins of the ancient castle. We end up tasting five very different kinds of



wine from a variety of years and everyone has their own idea of which one is best.

After all this is Provence, one of the richest wine-growing regions in the world. But there is more to this region than wine! This whole French Provence area of



12,000 square miles has national parks and natural protected areas. This area averages 320 days of sun and has very rich soil. Because of this it grows many things: wheat, grapes (lots of grapes!), honey (from lavender fields), goat cheese and olive oil. In fact, the Greeks brought the trees here 3000 years ago and today

there are 80,000 olive trees. They are harvested in November, the same time as the grapes. So, this area is busy raising sheep, making wine and growing all kinds of things. Agriculture is so big here that 30 to 40% of all fruits and vegetables in the whole country of France is grown in this area.



And, oh yes, did I mention—they DO make some wine!



April 13, 2017: Tournon & Rain L'Hermitage, France - Cooking, Cheese & Wine, what else?

It's the last full day on this cruise on the River Rhone in the south of France, and we plan on making the most of it. When we get up this morning we are docked on the river between two towns. We are docked in Tain L'Hermitage and across the river is Tournon.

BUT, we start this morning by traveling by coach to yet another town, Valence, home of the cooking



school "Scook", owned and operated by 3 Star Michelin Chef, Anne Sophie Pic. Here we get to participate in two different activities. First we go into the cheese and wine tasting room. There are about twelve of us around a large glass table set with various cheeses and wines. Our leader is a very animated guy who REALLY knows his wines and cheese and particularly knows how they go together.

So for the next half hour we taste cheese, describe it, look at wine, smell wine and taste wine. And then taste the same cheese with a swig of a particular wine and note the difference in taste. And our leader made it all so much fun!

Then we move over to the cooking school and learn a little from the chef. We make a great little _____ with a foam topping. Again great fun.



After we return to Tain L'Hermitage, we take a train ride on the Petit Train up through the vineyards above the town . It's a beautiful day with the sun shining brightly and a nice breeze blowing. From here we can look across acres and acres of vineyards all nicely maintained. Past the vineyards down in the valley is the quite little town with the river flowing through it. It's such a peaceful setting that, when the time comes, we all hate having to leave.



On our way back into town we stop by the famous chocolate shop, "Chocolatier Vairhona", and sample its many different kinds of Chocolate



After a nice lunch back on the ship, we walk across the bridge into the Old City of Tournon.

