

Taste of Bordeaux ~ MMC River Boat/Wine Tour

October 11-24, 2016



On Tuesday, 10/12/16 we began our adventure with MMC members and guests to France for an exciting 2-week river boat/wine tasting cruise. We boarded our Dolphin bus at the Marco Island Yacht Club and since Bob Marks was not going on this trip, Eddie and Cindy were in charge of seeing that our bus load of 36 people got there safely. There will



be 72 of us on the trip, some coming from other locations and on different planes. We flew from Miami to Lisbon and then on to Orly Airport, France on TAP, the Portuguese airline. Once we arrived in Paris on Wednesday, 10/12/16, the bus took us to our hotel, the Paris Ambassador Hotel at 16 Boulevard Haussmann. Our cruise manager, John Riley, was very nice and helpful in giving us suggestions of what to do while in the "City of Light". He gave us suggestions about restaurants and told us that in most cases, tipping is not necessary as most meals are "service complete", but if you do tip you should give only 1-2%.



We had a chance to walk around a bit and explore on our own. We went to the Opera Garnier, the grand theatre of the Belle Époque which was built for Napoleon III and finished in 1875. The building is huge with an auditorium that seats 2000. We were able to look into the opera auditorium and see the huge glass chandelier that was the model for the one in "Phantom of the Opera" as well as see the colorful ceiling painted by Marc Chagall. The massive foundations of this building straddle an underground lake, which was the inspiration for "Phantom of the Opera". Stage hands were working on the sets, so the curtains were up and we could see the entire stage. But even more spectacular is the extravagant lobby and grand staircase, which was magnificent with its many statues of marble



and gilded gold, its beautiful marble floors, mirrored glass walls, and colorful frescoes on the ceilings. We saw the very impressive Salon du Glacier, (hall of mirrors) with more gold and mirrors than one could imagine!

Next, we walked over to the department store Printemps, went up the escalator to the 6th floor of one of its buildings to the huge café with the beautiful domed ceiling all of stained glass. We went up to the top of the middle building to the 9th floor and the rooftop observation area for a wonderful overview of Paris and my first glimpse of the Eiffel Tower. We will see it up close later on in the trip. We could see Basilica de Sacre-Coeur and Montmartre in the distance.



One of the things that Eddie wanted to do was to sit at a sidewalk café and have espresso, so Eddie, Cindy, & Cathy stopped at Brasserie Cordial Cafe to have some drinks. It was lovely to relax and just observe the French going about their business. Eddie observed how Parisians all seem to wear only black or very drab colors. It was much colder than we anticipated, so there were lots of black leather coats.





Back at the hotel we had "Happy Hour "in the Vendome Room with John Riley, our AMA guide, and he gave us lots of good information about what we would be seeing on the rest of the journey. We walked down the Boulevard de Haussmann to the Promenade where there are lots of small restaurants. We ended up having dinner at L'Ami Marco where we had a delicious French meal. Back at our hotel, our room was very comfortable with a great bathroom and shower and we enjoyed a good night's sleep.



Thursday, 10/13/16 ~ We had a lovely buffet breakfast in the hotel

before we met for our Morning City Tour including the Seine River Cruise and Montparnasse Tower. Our tour guide was Celine. Paris is sort of an amphitheater of hills, one of which is Montmartre. The Seine River flows through the center of Paris with several islands, the biggest being Ile de Cite, where Notre Dame is located. Paris is the political and administrative center of France. It is made up of several small neighborhoods, the arrondissements, that each has its very own charm. Paris is the global hub of fashion, known as the "international capital of style" with its haute couture tailoring, high end boutiques, and twice-yearly Paris Fashion Week. (Then why do most Parisians wear only black and drab colors?) Paris also is world renowned for its haute cuisine, attracting many of the world's leading chefs. Paris is known as "The City of Love" and most famously as La Ville-Lumiere ("The City of Light"). Paris was one of the first European cities to adopt gas street lighting.

We learned that outside of the loop road, housing costs \$1,000/month for a 500-square foot apartment. To purchase property, one square meter costs between 8,000 and 18,000 Euros. Most apartments are 30 square meters. The population of Paris central is 2 million and 12 million in the suburbs. Paris is getting ready to incorporate the suburbs into Paris central. There are 20 districts, or arrondissements in Paris. An arrondissement is noted on the street signs on the corners of the buildings so that you can know where you are. For instance, "9ARR" means you are in the 9th Arrondissement.

Paris has many beautiful boulevards, which are very wide streets. We learned that there were no trees along the boulevards because Napoleon III was afraid of trees, that someone would hide in them to try and kill him.

Our bus took us past Vendome Square, and the Ritz, where Princess Diana stayed before she died. Coco Chanel also stayed here. We noticed that many buildings have geraniums planted in window boxes to keep the mosquitos away. We also went past the beautiful Opera Garnier, the city's original opera house. This is the very beautiful opera house that we explored yesterday.



We drove by the Louvre and saw the glass pyramid, designed by I.M. Pey, which serves as the entrance to the museum. During the Middle Ages, the Louvre was a fortress. Although the royal families sometimes deserted it for Versailles or the Tuileries Palace next door, it was continually extended and embellished to become a palace and then a museum. Catherine de Medici had the Water's Edge Gallery built to link the Louvre to the Tuileries Palace. The old Palace was burned down in 1871 but the Tuileries Gardens contains the Orangery Museum where

Monet's Water Lilies or "Decorations des Nymphaes" are located. The main entrance to the gardens opens to the **Place de la Concorde**, with the beautiful 3300-year-old pink **Obelesque** -a gift from Egypt. It is the biggest square in Paris. This square was first laid out in 1755 and originally named after King Louis XV, but its royal associations meant that it took center stage during the Revolution. Louis XVI was the first to be guillotined here in 1793. From here we drove down the famous **Champs Elysses** to the **Arc de Triumph**, which is the magnificent 1836 monument to Napoleon's 1805 victory at Austerlitz.



We boarded our boat, **Bateaux Parisiens** for our tour of the **Seine River**, the famous river which runs through the middle of Paris. Thanks to the draining of the marshes, the construction of the 36 bridges, and the development of the quays, the Seine has become part of the urban landscape. It is actually Paris' main thoroughfare, its finest boulevard, the one on which the greatest number of monuments, views, and facades laden with history are to be found.



The **Eiffel Tower**, probably the most famous structure in Paris or the world, was built in 1889 for the Universal Exhibition. It was built as a temporary building by Gustav and was built in 26 months. At the time, it was the world's tallest building at 320 meters and was meant to be demolished, but was saved when it was taken over for military use as a watch tower, then later used for radio, and finally used for television starting in 1957. Today it still functions as a giant aerial tower. It is painted every 7 years. Many Parisians call it the "Awful Tower".

The **Isle de la Cite**, known as the "Cradle of Paris", the largest island in the Seine, had walls around it at one time. Today it houses a number of important civil and religious buildings including the Palace of Justice, the Prefecture, the Police Headquarters and **Cathedral of Notre-Dame**.

The Cathedral is Paris' most visited monument and is renowned for its beautiful stained glass rose windows, its soaring Gothic architecture with its famous gargoyles, and a breathtaking view of the city. Notre Dame is the heart of Paris-distances from Paris to every part of metropolitan France are measured from **Place du Parvis Notre Dame**, the vast square in front of the cathedral.



Museum d'Orsay was once a train station. Built for the 1900 Exhibition, it was abandoned in 1939 and barely escaped demolition in 1971. Since 1986 it has been home to a museum devoted to art of the second half of the 19th century, including many impressionist paintings. We went by the **Grand Palais** and the **Petit Palais**. The Grand Palace, with its huge metal and glass roof, is used for shows. We drove by **Les Invalids**, the military hospital built by Louis XIV in 1671, which now houses the Army Museum and the tomb of Napoleon.

The bus drive and river boat tour was somewhat overwhelming as we went by so many beautiful and famous places so quickly and didn't have time to stop and explore any of them! Obviously, we definitely do need to come back to Paris again and really spend some quality time here!!

Our next stop was **Montparnasse Tower** which was built between 1963 – 1973 and has 59 floors. From the top observation floor, you get a fabulous overview of Paris. On the bus ride back to the hotel, we passed something called **Bustronome**, which was a bus/restaurant. What a unique idea! We arrived back to the hotel around 1pm and had the afternoon free to explore on our own.

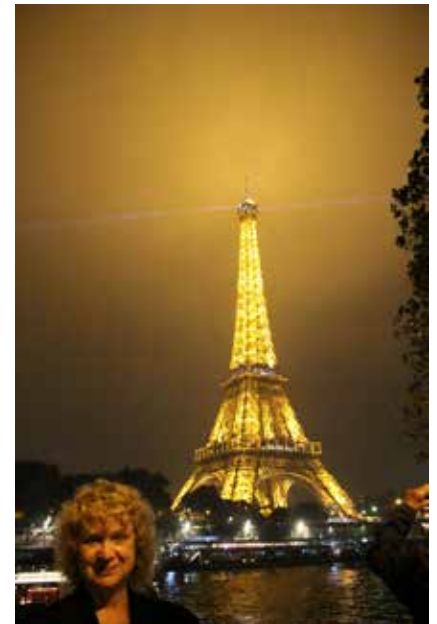
At 6:30 pm we took the **Montmartre /Illuminations** tour. Montmartre is an area on a very high hill with a beautiful white cathedral, **Basilica de Sacre-Coeur**, sometimes referred to as the "Wedding Cake Church". There are beautiful views of Paris since we are high up on the hill. Montmartre (Hill of Martyrs), was home to the burgeoning Parisian artist community in the late 19th century. It is a very bohemian village and still attracts painters and sculptors from all across Europe. Its center, Place de Tertre, still has the vibe of the Belle Époque era, with street artists,



performers, and restaurants. After touring the cathedral, we were free to have dinner here and Eddie, Cindy, Cathy, and Nancy had a lovely dinner of boeuf bourgeoine at **Au Cadet de Gascogne**. We bought a bottle of wine from the restaurant to take with us on our trip by train tomorrow. On the bus ride back to the hotel late this evening, we passed by

the famous **Moulin Rouge**, immortalized in the posters by Toulouse-Lautrec and the Baz Luhrmann movie of the same name.

At precisely 11:20pm we stopped in front of the **Eiffel Tower** for their spectacular light show, when the normally lighted tower adds a 10-minute laser show. Back home to the hotel to pack up our bags and get a good night's sleep.



Friday, 10/14/16 ~ This morning we had another delicious buffet breakfast in the hotel restaurant and took some extra breads and cheeses with us for our train ride. The bus departed from the hotel to the Gare Montparnasse's train station where we boarded the TGV high speed train from Paris to Bordeaux's Gare St. Jean train station. The train ride was from 10:46am to 2:32 pm and was a very pleasant ride with our wine and goodies. When we arrived, we took the bus to the **AmaDolce**, our beautiful AMA boat for our river cruise. We boarded the boat at 3:15, checked in to our stateroom, and enjoyed our welcome cocktail and the delicious welcome dinner on board. Dinner was very gourmet and there was unlimited wine and beer with the meal. Tonight, the AmaDolce cruised overnight to Cadillac.

The AmaDolce is a lovely riverboat built in 2009 for AmaWaterways with 3 decks plus the sundeck on top. It is a small boat, holding only about 150 passengers maximum and our group fills up about half of the boat. There is another large group on board, the Fine Art Connoisseur Group. Our spacious room has a French balcony. There is free high-speed internet access, movies, music library and TV in each room, fine dining including unlimited wine, beer, and soft drinks with lunch and dinner, and the Chef's Table specialty restaurant featuring a fine tasting menu. There are included guided tours at each port, most of which include a winery and wine tasting. We will be cruising the Garonne and Dordogne rivers and surrounding Gironde Estuary. Then we will depart the riverboat and experience the UNESCO World Heritage Loire Valley, "The Valley of 1,000 Chateaus" where we will tour the best of the best.

The Garonne river has its main origin in the Pyrenees in Spain. Just after Bordeaux, the Garonne meets the Dordogne at the Bec d'Amnbes, forming the Gironde Estuary which goes approximately 62 miles before it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The Garonne is one of the few rivers in the world that has a tidal bore, which is a large wave caused by the funneling of a flood tide as it enters a long, narrow, shallow inlet. In this case it is the tide coming in from the ocean going against the current of the river going towards the ocean.

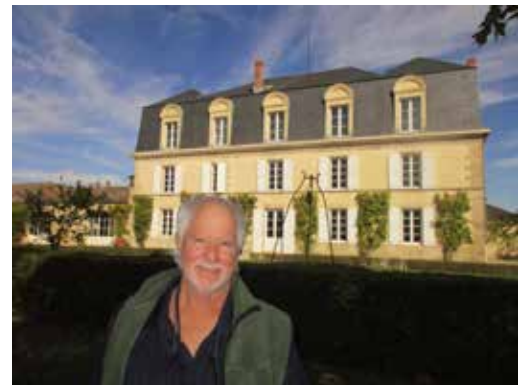


Saturday, 10/15/16 ~ After a delicious breakfast buffet we took the walking tour with John into the town of Cadillac. (the "l" is not pronounced). Today was the Saturday farmer's market and there were several streets full of vendors selling everything from fresh vegetables to live chickens. We went into the local church which had very beautiful stained-glass windows. We toured the small Chateau de Cadillac which was once used as a women's prison. After our market tour, we had brunch on board the boat and then an afternoon

tour to the Chateau Guiraud for an excellent tour by Michael of the winery, chateau, and a lecture about Sauterne wines. We had a good wine tasting and pairing with delicious appetizers. We learned that you



should pair sweet wines like Sauterne with food that is not sweet, such as the Tart with Roquefort Cheese and Pears. The Chateau and grounds were so beautiful. We saw an Insect Hotel which attracts the proper kind of insects to help keep the vineyards healthy. The official 1855 classification recognized Chateau Guiraud as 1st Grand Cru Classe winery.



The Sauternes region is located 25 miles southeast of the city of Bordeaux along the Garonne River and its tributary the Ciron, and like most of the Bordeaux wine region, the Sauternes region has a maritime climate, which brings the hazards of autumn frost, hail and rains that can ruin an entire village. The source of the Ciron is a spring, which has cooler waters than the Garonne. In the autumn when the climate is warm and dry the different temperatures from the two rivers meet to produce mist that descends upon the vineyards from evening to late morning. This condition promotes the development

of Botrytis Cinerea Fungus, also known as “noble rot”. By mid-day the warm sun will help dissipate the mist and dry the grapes to keep them from developing less favorable rot. Due to this climate, Sauternes is one of the few wine regions where infection with noble rot is a frequent occurrence. The grapes become partially raisined, resulting in concentrated and distinctively flavored wines. The sweet wines from the Sauternes region are made from Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Muscatels grapes. They are some of the longest-lived wines, able to potentially age to 100 years. They can also be very expensive because, due to their climate, the yields are much lower than for other wines of the Bordeaux region. The grapes must be harvested individually by hand between September and November. The wine is then fermented in small oak barrels. Viniculture is believed to have been introduced by the Romans, but the earliest evidence of sweet wine production dates only to the 17th century. Dutch traders began investing in the planting of German white wine making techniques, such as halting fermentation with the use of Sulphur in order to maintain residual sugar levels.

From here we went on to Roquetaillade Castle, which means “carved out of rock” and the grottoes beneath the site were home to early modern humans. This is an amazingly preserved masterpiece of medieval military architecture originally built in the 10th century by Charlemagne as his army advanced toward the Pyrenees. The castle was rebuilt in the 14th century by a noble family, Cardinal de la Mothe, nephew of Pope Clement V. The family still lives there after 700 years. The interior decorations, with its furnishings and paintings, were created by Viollet-le-Duc and are listed as a French Heritage site. This is a unique example of feudal architecture, that is to say two



fortresses within the same castle walls. This was a traditional looking castle with a moat where there lived a couple of goats. There was a charming chapel next to the castle. We were fortunate to have an excellent tour by one of the owners.

Back on board the ship, we saw a beautiful moon as we enjoyed a special dinner at The Chef's Table. This was a 6-course dinner of very gourmet delights each paired with a different wine. Entertainment tonight was the String Trio La Strada.

Sunday, 10/16/16 ~ This morning we are in Pauillac, located on the left bank of the Gironde Estuary and known as the gateway to the “Haut Medoc” wine regions. The area is home to three of the five “First Growth” wineries, from the world renowned 1855 Wine Classification. After a great buffet breakfast on the boat, we enjoyed a walking tour with Isabella to the vineyards of Bage Village. At this charming French village, we went into Café Lavenal for a great hot chocolate. We saw the golf cart driven by the owner of the Chateau. This family basically owns the vineyards, the Chateau, and the entire village of Bage. Isabella gave us some insight into the cultivation of the grapes and told us that it is forbidden in France to use pesticides or irrigation on any vineyards. The soil is very gravelly and the predominant grape is





Cabernet Sauvignon, but it is blended with other grapes. The predominant fruit flavor is usually blackcurrant, sometimes leaning towards plum.

After our tour, we walked back to the boat and enjoyed a delicious lunch of leek soup and boeuf bourgeoine and of course, lots of wine. After lunch, we again met Isabella for a tasting tour of the Medoc region. This region's gravelly soils are renowned for producing some of the world's finest Bordeaux wines, especially those made from the Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot grape varieties. We had a panoramic driving tour of the area and drove by some of the world's most famous chateaux such as Chateau LaTour, Chateau Mouton-Rothschild, Chateau Lafitte

Rothschild, Chateau Margaux, and Chateau Pichon-Longueville. We visited Chateau Leoville Poyferre where we toured the winery and saw the entire process of wine making. This of course, was followed by another excellent wine tasting.

Isabella told us of the 3 key factors of wine making: 1-pruning; 2-age of plants, the older the plant, the less production, but the better quality of production; 3-no irrigation. We returned to the ship where we had another excellent dinner with unlimited wine. Entertainment tonight was Sweet Blend. The AmaDolce stayed overnight in Pauillac.



Monday, 10/17/16 ~ Today we have an early boat trip from Pauillac to Blaye. Situated on the right or north bank of the Gironde Estuary, Blaye is best known for its military importance. We took a tour with Dagmar to the Fortress Citadel, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, built by the military engineer Vauban in the 17th century. This citadel was built on a rock by the river on the ruins of an ancient Gothic chateau. People have lived here since the middle ages when Count Geoffroy de Rudel was writing love poems to Melissande, Princess of Tripoli. The fort once became a prison



for the Duchess of Angouleme and later a hospital for the wounded soldiers in WWI. The views of the Gironde Estuary from the top of the fort were fantastic. The town was an important stronghold during the wars against the English and the French Wars of Religion.

Some of the more adventurous travelers of our group, including Kathryn and Bill Rogers, took the optional bike tour instead, which went from Blaye to Bourg. The rest of us relaxed as the boat did a nice afternoon cruise to Bourg. The





Gironde Estuary is the confluence of two rivers, the Garonne and the Dordogne. Though the countryside is beautiful, I would have to say that I was not impressed with the rivers. They are shallow and quite muddy...the color of chocolate milk.

While on board, we enjoyed a delicious mustard soup, pasta bar, and ice cream for lunch. We were able to sit on the top deck and enjoy the views of the countryside on our way to Bourg.



The town of Bourg-en-Gironde is quite steep with many fortress-like walls built during the Roman times and later fortified by the English. There is much interesting architecture. We toured the beautiful Eglise Saint Geronce with the beautiful stained-glass windows. We hiked up to the top of the town where we enjoyed an exclusive wine festival in the Maison du Vin with wines from Cotes de Bourg, local snacks and a live performance of typical French music. The wine, music and dancing were enjoyed by all.



Back on our boat, we enjoyed a magnificent sunset and another delicious dinner, Chaine des Rotisseurs Dinner. Entertainment is the onboard musician Panache, and a live music quiz, "Name that Tune".

Tuesday, 10/18/16 ~ This morning the boat cruised to Libourne. This wine-making capital is situated on the left bank of the Dordogne River.



We toured one of Bordeaux's most elite wine regions, Saint Emilion, an old historic village 21 miles northeast of Bordeaux, known for its picturesque architecture, monuments, and historic vineyards that were first introduced to the land by the Romans almost 2000 years ago. The town itself dates from the 18th century when Emilion, a Breton Monk, came to settle in a hermitage carved into the rock. Fascinating Romanesque churches and ruins remain, stretching all along steep and narrow streets. From the 9th to the 19th century, blocks of limestone were extracted from the ground to construct buildings in the town of Saint-Emilion as well as nearby chateaus. This left 124 miles of underground galleries and the largest monolithic church in Europe, Place de l'Eglise Monolith.

Limestone is everywhere, and accounts for soil that is exceptionally well-suited for winegrowing. A tall bell tower marks the place where Europe's largest monolithic church lies underground. The gigantic church was carved out of solid rock at the beginning of the 12th century. The steep cobblestone streets, called "Tertres" are a special feature of Saint-Emilion. There are four Tertres in town. The cobblestones were brought by English wine traders who loaded them in their ships as ballast before replacing them with barrels full of wine. We shopped at Aries Macaroons de Saint Emilion.

We toured Chateau de Pressac, in the Pomerol area, and saw the wine-making process all the way from the picking of the grapes to the making of the wine. And of course, we had another great wine tasting. It was not until 1923 that the Pomerol region was set apart from Saint-Emilion and Libourne wines. It gained AOC status in 1926. That is why Pomerol wines are among the most prestigious AOCs, but not included in any of the Bordeaux classifications.



Back on the boat, we got to experience the Mascaret (Tidal Bore). This was not nearly as exciting as I thought it would be...just a few little waves. Then we had a special toast in the Lounge to celebrate and we enjoyed the Captain's Gala Dinner followed by evening entertainment, "A Man and his Guitar", an authentic French artist, performer, and composer.



Friday, 10/19/16 ~ Early this morning we got to experience another Mascaret and the boat left the dock for about an hour while this took place. After breakfast, we begin with a tour of Chateau de Vayres, located on the left bank of the Dordogne less than five miles from Libourne. This Chateau is one of the most prestigious historic buildings of Aquitaine and since the medieval ages, has belonged to the great Albret family, Kings of Navarre during the 16th century. The estate was inherited by Henri IV, King of France, the most famous of his family. This medieval castle was renovated during the Renaissance period around 1690. The interior of the chateau was decorated for Halloween. We visited the wonderful French-style formal and medieval gardens.



After a nice lunch, onboard the AmaDolce, we toured the magnificent Chateau de Montaigne, a stunning 19th century castle with its 14th



century tower which was the family residence of the philosopher, Michel-de-Montaigne. This chateau has a wonderful mix of Medieval, Renaissance, and Gothic styles of architecture. In 1885 the building was destroyed by fire and the daughter of Pierre Magne, Marie Thirion Maugauban,





rebuilt it a year later, so the current castle actually dates from 1886. The tower of Montaigne is a historical monument of the XIVth century. It was here that Michel-de-Montaigne lived most of his life and spent hours of each day meditating, thinking, and writing his essays. After our visit to the tower we went into the main chateau for an excellent wine tasting. It was here that we were able to buy great bottles of excellent wine for \$4-\$5. While we were touring, the boat cruised from Libourne to Bourg, where we joined the boat. Back on the boat we enjoyed another excellent dinner as we toured to Bordeaux. After dinner, the

entertainment was by the musician Panache.

Thursday, 10/20/16 ~ Today we enjoyed a morning tour of the elegant **City of Bordeaux**, which is the capital of wine country. Bordeaux is the capital of the Aquitaine and is its largest city with approximately 245,000 inhabitants. Built on the curve of the Garonne river, it has been a major port since pre-Roman times and for centuries a focus and crossroads of European trade. Today Bordeaux produces over 44 million cases of wine per year. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is also classified as a “City of Art and History”. It is known for its Gothic Cathedral St. Andre, as well as for its many fine and contemporary art museums and 18th and 19th century mansions. This was the largest city we have visited so far and it had so many huge buildings, as well as a great park with many water fountains, statues, and rides.



We visited the beautiful **Eglise Notre Dame** with its many stained-glass windows, the **Great Opera House**, and the **Place de la Bourse with the Three Graces** fountain at its center. We visited the new **Citi-du-Vin**, the ultra-modern wine museum. We saw the **Pont de Pierre Bridge**, **Mirroir d'eau** (the water mirror) along the river. We had the afternoon to explore this beautiful city on our own before going back to the ship



for the Captain’s Farewell Cocktail, one last delicious dinner and evening onboard. At 9:30, the AmaDolce left the dock for an Illumination Cruise of Bordeaux.



Friday, 10/21/16 ~ This morning we disembarked our very comfortable AmaDolce ship. It was a very relaxing and enjoyable trip along the rivers and we were sad to leave, but more great adventures await us! We traveled by TGV high speed train to **Tours**, a very charming medieval city in the heart of the **Loire Valley**. Tours is located between two rivers, the Loire to the north and the Cher to the south. It has about 15,000 residents and is the region’s largest city and commercial center. Though much of the city was bombed in WWII, the attractive half-timbered medieval quarter around Place Plumereau has been carefully restored with many pubs and

restaurants offering open-air seating. This area offers the very best of French lifestyle with medieval streets full of art, history, ancient buildings, and excellent cuisine.



We had lunch at **Chez Giraud** and then a walking tour along the quaint narrow streets. We enjoyed viewing the architecture. All of the houses seem to merge together with various styles of décor. We saw the Restaurant Leonardo da Vinci, which was closed. We saw the Basilica Saint-Martin. After our walking tour, we took a fabulous bus ride past the Loire river to our hotel in **Amboise, the Novotel**. The river was on our right and the beautiful cliffside homes were on our left. There were several homes built into the mountain, like caves.



The Loire river is the longest in France at 629 miles long. In centuries past, the Loire was a key strategic area, poised on the crucial frontier between northern and southern France. Kings, Queens, Dukes, and nobles established their feudal strongholds, country seats and lavish playhouses along the Loire and the broad fertile valley became home to the most extravagant castles in France. This entire area became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000. Tomorrow we will see what this means.



Saturday, 10/22/16 ~ This morning we begin our tours of some of the most fascinating, lavish, impressively huge chateaux in the world. Amboise is a small market town today, but was once home of the French royal court. Our first stop is the 15th century renaissance style **Chateau d'Amboise**. We saw it from across the river first, then



went over to tour it., after posing in front of the huge bronze statue of Leonardo da Vinci. This was the childhood home of Charles VIII. This former Medieval Castle was remodeled in the Renaissance to a royal resident. The Gothic chapel contains the final resting place of Leonardo da Vinci.



Next, we visited the **Chateau du Clos Luce**, Leonardo da Vinci's last home. It was here, during the final years of his life, that he completed some of his most treasured works, such as The Mona Lisa, The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, and the Saint John the Baptist. This was an exceptionally beautiful home, not so ostentatious, that I felt one would really be comfortable living in. We were able to tour the entire property, including the kitchens, and the beautiful gardens. King Francis 1st so





admired DaVinci's genius that he is said to have visited him often using the underground passage linking the Chateau du Clos Luce to the Royal Chateau d'Amboise. In the lower level, we were able to view models of many of Leonardo da Vinci's impressive inventions.

We went into the attractive town of Amboise for lunch where we ate at a charming little French restaurant. After lunch at a lovely little place called Le Patio Restaurant, we toured the stunning Chateau de Chenonceau which along with the former



watermill spans the Cher River. It was turned into a palace by the French King Frances 1st for his mistress Diane de Poitier. It is an exceptional site not only because of its original design, rich collections, furnishings, and decorations, but also because of its destiny, since it was loved, administrated, and protected by extraordinary women, who for the most part have marked history...Katherine Briconnet, Diane de Poitiers, Catherine de Medici, Madame Dupin. This "Chateau des Dames" was built in 1514-1522 on the foundations of an old mill and was later extended to span the river. The bridge over the river was built in the 1550s and the gallery on the bridge in the 1570s. In 1913, the chateau was bought by the Menier family, famous for their chocolates, who still owns it to this day. During WWI, they set up the gallery to be used as a hospital ward. During WWII, the chateau was bombed by the Germans in 1940. It was also a means of escaping from the Nazis occupied zone on one side of the River Cher to the "free" zone on the opposite bank. While being occupied by the Germans, the chateau was then bombed by the Allies in 1944. In 1951, the Menier family entrusted the chateau's restoration to Bernard Voisin, who brought the dilapidated structure and the gardens back to its former glory. This was a truly massive chateau with gorgeous grounds, fabulous paintings, and sculptures. Each room was exquisite.



Tonight, we took a cab from the Novotel into town for a delicious dinner at Restaurant L'Epicerie.

Sunday, 10/23/16 ~ This morning, after checking out of our hotel we visited the very massive Chateau de Chambord. It is located at the heart of Europe's largest enclosed wooded park and has a 156-yard façade, 426 rooms, 77 staircases, and 282 fireplaces. This is by far the largest castle in the Loire Valley. The carvings were amazing, as were the sculptures, and portraiture. It is one of the most recognizable chateaux in the world because of its very distinctive Renaissance architecture mixing French medieval forms with classical Renaissance structures. Located between the river and the wild woodlands, it is home to many boar and deer. Building





was begun in 1519 and completed in 1547. It was built as a hunting lodge for Frances 1st, but he only spent a total of 72 nights in the chateau in his entire lifetime. What a waste! One of the highlights is the ornate roof which makes Chateau de Chambord so recognizable. Another highlight is the double helix staircase. The two helices ascend the three floors without ever meeting. It is thought that Leonardo de Vinci designed the staircase. Coffered vaulted ceilings were used for the first time here in France.

When Louis XIV inherited the castle, he began a long series of restoration work and expansion that he abandoned when he began building his Chateau of Versailles. This castle was the inspiration for the castle in Disney's Beauty and the Beast.

After France's occupation during WWII, German leaders entered the Louvre only to find that all of the masterpieces were gone. Almost 3,700 pieces had been moved to the Chateau de Chambord including the Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo.



Next, we went to the town of **Blois**, where we had lunch at **Le Clipper Saladerie** before we climbed up the many stairs to the **Royal Chateau de Blois**, residence of seven kings and ten queens of France. It was also the castle where Joan of Arc was blessed before setting off to defeat the English at Orleans, the turning point of the Hundred Years War. Since Kings and Queens were forever moving in and out of this castle and leaving their marks, the four sides of the chateau show the evolution of castle architecture. Once again, this beautiful chateau contained many beautiful statues, portraits, and beautifully appointed rooms. The outside spiral staircase of Francois 1st is spectacular as is the vast Gothic hall with its heavy colors, paintings, and wallpaper.



Catherine de Medici was wife to one French king and mother to three French kings. She died at Blois in 1589. She was quite the meddler in affairs of state and is rumored to have killed several of her enemies. She was born in Florence, Italy to the infamous Medici family. Her mother died 28 days after her birth. Her father, Lorenzo, was the prince for whom Machiavelli wrote his famous instruction and he died only a few days later. She was brought to Rome by her uncle, the Pope. At age 14 she married the 14-year-old heir to the French throne who openly disliked her. Catherine eventually bore 10 children, seven of which lived long enough to get into politics. Her final pregnancy was with twin girls who had to be cut out of her womb to prevent the death of them all. The girls did not survive. Shortly after, her husband's reign was cut short as he lost an eye to a lance during a jousting match. She then turned her attention to managing the affairs of her children... her 15-year-old son Francis who died at age 16, then her 9-year-old sickly Charles who died at age 24, and finally her favorite Henry, who came to power



during a very tumultuous time. Legend has it that a room in the Royal Chateau de Blois had 237 small cabinets hidden in the beautiful woodwork which contained her poisons. Or maybe, the small cabinets were just to store and display beautiful small objects. Who knows?

After this somewhat exhausting day of adventure, the bus took us to our hotel where we spent the night before we transferred to our plane for the long flight back to Miami and then the bus trip back to Marco.

This was an extraordinary adventure, one that we will always remember.

Journal created by Cindy Crane