

# Paris & French Riviera 2002

## AN OVERVIEW

In the summer of 2001, Doug Depew told me that his boss had a friend, Jo Chahine, who lived in England and inherited a villa on the French Riviera, which we could rent for \$4400 for a week. With its five bedrooms, it meant four couples (one bedroom was a single) could spend a week in this fabulous area for less than a \$1000 a couple. The trip "sold out" even before I had a chance to ask anyone. Barbara Kelly said, "I don't care if Terry goes or not. I am not missing this trip. I will pay for his spot," taking the third room. Don and Diane Lancaster took the remaining room.

We selected the first week of June 2002 and Doug sent a confirming e-mail to Jo. She responded that it was "off-season" and the villa rented for only \$2200 at that time. We couldn't believe our good fortune. However, our savings quickly "burned a hole in our pockets." Since we were traveling all that distance, why not add a couple of days in Paris. We could fly into Paris and take the train to the Riviera. Also, why not charter a limousine to take us to the airport.



Prior excursions taught: don't try to do too much, expect trouble when driving in a foreign country, maintain a structure with lots of free individual time, and get as many people involved as possible in the planning. Diane planned our stay in Paris, booked all our reservations, including dinner, and booked the TGV, the high-speed French train to the Riviera. Doug got the airline tickets at a discount, booked and managed the villa, and acted as our trip accountant. I laid some basic itineraries, and booked our rental cars. Doug, Diane, and Don drove the cars while we were in the Riviera. Marsha/Doug took 300 pictures, Tom took 150, and Barbara/Terry took 50, and Diane took 20. So I had a lot to choose from to build this photo journal.

Our trip was from June 6'th through the 17'th. This journal summaries what we did as outlined below:

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Always the trip cost more than our original budget. Traveling as a group generally meant compromise and less efficiency in expenses. However, we emphasized that even though we are traveling together, plan to do your own thing. We had a default plan in case anyone ran out of ideas. Don and Diane planned a longer trip around ours. They flew into Brussels and took the train to Paris a day earlier than the rest of us. We met in Paris. They also stayed a couple of days longer so they could visit with all their old buddies.

When in Paris we also traveled a little different from each other. Doug didn't want to pay the high price for taxis while the rest of us didn't want the inconvenience of the train. So Doug and Marsha made their way from the airport and TGV by Metro while the rest of us went by taxi. During the days we roamed around separately and then met in the evening for dinner.

What you see is the ***Internet Draft***. After working on it for so long, I get tired and post this version to get others to help look for the errors (Sorry, there are still many. As I read and re-read, I will find them and correct them. Maybe by November all the little bugs will be gone.) Then I will print the final version for posterity.

## DOING IT THE FRENCH WAY

**When we discussed our trip with others, a frequent response was, "The French are rude; I would never visit France."**

We'd say, "Strange, that has never been our experience."

They'd continue, "There are so many great places in the States, why do you want to go to Europe?"

Unfortunately, they had no idea what they were missing. We loved Paris and have never found the French any more or less rude than any other place we had traveled. After each trip, we couldn't wait to return. The reputation the French had in America most likely wasn't deserved.

For nearly five years, while on a foreign assignment with Qualcomm, Diane and Don lived in Paris, three blocks from the Arc d'Triomphe. They also have not experienced this reputation for rudeness but had some ideas how Americans might think this way. Don's employer provided them with training in the French culture and as Diane shared with us, it can be quite different from American culture. Here is a short list of some of the things she told us.

- As if by manifest right many Americans expected the French (and the rest of the world) to **speak English**. For any proud people that attitude was demeaning. We always attempted to speak in French, no matter how badly it came out. When we failed to communicate, many volunteered to speak in English.
- Another rub with Americans was the **attitude of service people**. In a recent Gallup Poll survey on rudeness, Americans listed treatment by service people as the top complaint. In American the customer is always right or the customer is king. We expected instant response. When we needed them service people were expected to be available. That was not the French way. In France if clerks were busy, including talking among themselves, the customer was expected to wait politely. Now imagine an American approaching a French clerk. Fireworks!
- **French restaurants** were numerous, small, and quiet. There were no chain restaurants. Each had its specialty that made dining a unique experience. In American restaurants loud, boisterous behavior was common. If the patrons weren't yelling over each other, the establishment provided loud music as supplemental noise or had hard walls to echo the sounds. The deafening ambience alone can cause indigestion. We emphasized uniformity with chain businesses where menus were identical have become the norm.
- French restaurants **only served meals between 12PM and 2PM** and between 8PM and 10PM, arrive at any other time and you most likely wouldn't be served. We accidentally arrived at one at 7:45 and had to stand outside until they were ready for us.
- When it came to **table manners**, the French had their rules of etiquette. Many weren't too different from what we taught as youngsters, but had long since forgotten.
  - o In France a waiter didn't approach a table until all patrons had closed their menus. In America

- waiters guessed at the best time to take our orders and came when they were ready.
- o When seated, there usually was a "presentation plate" at your place, which was not used for eating. The waiter removed it when he brought your meal.
  - o Everyone waited to all were served before eating or until the un-served directed to the contrary.
- The French also **street etiquette** quite different from America.
- o In France strangers on the street never make eye contact; even when they are trying to be friendly. To do so was rude and tantamount to invading a person's privacy.
  - o Americans feel they have to greet everyone. They feel they are being rude if they don't look another straight in the eye and say, hi.
  - o In France conversations were generally subdued and people usually patiently wait their turn to speak.
  - o Americans typically were loud and commonly interrupted each other.

Without a doubt America had great places to visit, but Europe had something we didn't have. Whereas our history was measured in decades and centuries, European civilization was measured in centuries and millennia. We walked on streets built by Romans over two thousand years ago. We roamed grand cathedrals built when the largest thing in America was a tepee. We walked on the shores near Pompeii under Mount Vesuvius where Greek ships described 3000 years ago in books by Herodotus once landed.

Life in Americans was fairly consistent, uniform, and predicable. In Europe people with dozens of different languages, ideals, and attitudes lived within a day's drive of each other. Experiencing their cultures first hand gave us a better perspective of our own. We witnessed September 11'th while in Munich, Germany. Spending time with other nationalities on their turf has allowed us to be less egocentric and parochial in our judgment.

## THE MAGIC OF PARIS

**In 1998, Sharyn and I visited Paris for our first time** while traveling with Larry and Beth Bucklin. Don and Diane Lancaster invited us to stay in their apartment on rue Brunel, just a few blocks from the Arc d'Triomphe. We had a great time and planned to return. We had visited other grand cities, such as San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, New York, London, and Rome, but Paris was somehow different.

Paris was the most visited city in France and most likely in the world. Walking its crowded streets were people of every nationality with varying attires speaking dozens of different languages, including lots of Americans. We enjoyed watching the young people. Excitement beamed from their eyes as they hardly contained their enthusiasm. Next to Notre Dame cathedral a half-dozen American musicians on a bridge over the Seine entertained the crowd with New Orleans jazz in an impromptu concert. In a park an American choral group of a dozen high school girls and boys sang rock and roll classics from the fifties and sixties. Life in Paris seemed like a large, never ending party.

Like many of the major European cities, Paris had a historic old city with lots of tourist attractions and a modern city with the suburban and industrial areas. We never visited the new part of town. We landed at Charles DeGaulle airport in the north and went straight to historical center of town. A taxi ride cost 45 Euro (or 15 Euros each for three passengers), a shuttle bus ride was 15 Euro, and lastly a RER/Metro ride was about 10 Euro. Most travelers chose one of the first two alternatives, but some hardy souls like



Eiffel at dusk from Trochadero

Doug and Marsha endured the train.

For the average tourist the train was not a good choice. He or she had to make at least two changes - once from the RER to the Metro and then again several times on the Metro while dragging luggage up and down stairs and fighting for space on some very crowded, standing-room only cars. To make matters worse, the RER traveled some of the less favorable, crime-ridden areas of Paris. The extra 5 Euros per person for the taxi was insurance for security and convenience.

Old Paris had its "high rent", "medium rent", and "low rent" sections. Put the point of a compass on the Louvre, the pencil on the Arc d'Triomphe, and draw a circle. Every thing within was big bucks. Around the immediate periphery, rooms in hotels cost about twenty-five percent less. Move farther out, near the suburbs, and the savings double. The area near the Sacre Couer was the "low rent" district and the contrast was dramatic. Whereas the famous fashion shops and high society typified the inner two districts, thrift shops, cheap and trashy souvenir shops, and sleazy sex shops were the norm here. The "high rent" district had the opera house; the "low rent" district had the Moulin Rouge.

For only 179 Euro Diane found a hotel, the Bellechasse, at the heart of Paris - alongside the Musee d'Orsay across the Seine from the Louvre. But, it was too good to be true. Overbooked, they had to move us. Our new hotel, the Baltimore had rooms twice the size, had luxurious amenities, such as a lounge, restaurant, big bathroom, air conditioning, etc. was easily twice the value of the Bellechasse, but was eight blocks outside the high rent-circle on Kleber.

Rebuilt in the middle nineteenth century, old Paris was one of the first planned cities. The majority of the buildings were uniformly six or seven stories tall, constructed from gray stone or cement, and had shuttered windows with small balconies. Depending on the use of the building, the façades and structures varied somewhat, but for the most part they all looked similar. Small businesses and shops were usually on the ground floor with access onto the street, apartments were on the next several levels, and service or storage areas were on the highest floors.

Paris had wide thoroughfares and a web of narrow inter-connecting streets no more than a couple of cars wide with pedestrian sidewalks on either side. Cars frequently parked on these streets, reducing traffic flow to one direction. They were designed for horse-drawn carriages with no need for unattended parking, not for automobiles. Driving was tough, and parking was impossible.



Eiffel at night from Trochadero



Wait for bus to Musee d'Orsay

A network of inexpensive and efficient subway and bus lines more than compensated for limits on car traffic. For about one Euro we could go anywhere in the city. After one day of tutelage from Diane, we were able to navigate the complex maze of Metro routes, thereby making all of Paris safely and easily accessible to our exploration. Our exhilaration of freedom was as we remembered when we first got our driving license. We spread our maps, marked our destination, and traced a convenient passage. Even with several changes between tracks, we got where we wanted with seldom more than a five-minute wait for each train.



Modern sub-ways

During the daylight hours, we visited Musee D'Orsay, Arc d'Triomphe, Sacre Coeur and Notre Dame cathedral. We kept busy trying out small street-side brasseries and patisseries and looking through paintings at small, randomly placed artist stands. At night, we'd walk or take the train to a restaurant or walk to a nearby brasserie and just enjoy the activity. A short distance from our hotel on Kleber was the Palais de Chaillot (a.k.a. Trochadero) across the Seine from the [Eiffel Tower](#). On our first night we sat there sipping glasses of wine, indulging on Crème Brulez, joking with the cute French waitresses in our broken version of their language, and watching streams of tourists admiring the brightly-lit Parisian icon.



Brasserie at Trochadero

Diane reserved her favorite restaurants for our visit. We were able to eat at two of her three. On our second evening we had an intimate dinner in a tiny restaurant L'Orangerie, tucked away on a back street on St. Louis Island in the Seine River. Typical of French restaurants it had room for less than a dozen tables, and its chef met and greeted the guests. We had to be on our best behavior, even Terry, and do it the French way; otherwise we might get a matronly frown from Diane. Except for one small foix pas, where we arrived early at 7:45 and got shoed out, we did well. And yes, for those readers familiar with our last visit to Paris, Sharyn didn't embarrass us with an inappropriate selection of cheeses.



Sharyn with Van Gogh

Mention Paris and the [Musee d'Louvre](#) came immediately to mind, but the [Musee d'Orsay](#), in the old train station, with its world famous exhibition of impressionistic art and has become one of its major tourist attractions. Whistler's mother was serving tea, and half of Paris was in attendance. Even though the six of us, Diane and Don were off in another museum, got to the museum fifteen minutes after it opened at 9AM, we had to stand in line for an hour. Queues at the entrance have always been long, but our delay was exacerbated by added security checks.

Once inside we headed immediately to the Impressionistic Art exhibition on the top floor in the far back section, as far away as they could put it. Thanks to our visit the day before to the Museum in Auvers (highly recommended) and its multi-media exhibit, we had a better appreciation as to what we were seeing. We could have spent hours there, but that was not going to be. Terry did it! Terry did it!

We were sitting with the Depews near the souvenir stand by the old clock with the multi-faceted glass window facing the Sacre Coeur section of Paris, when the security guards started escorting people out. They were so low key and matter of fact we had no idea what was happening. We walked to the main section of the museum, which normally is shoulder to shoulder with people and began to suspect something was wrong. It was empty!

Amazed we stood for several minutes on our second-floor perch staring down on the now-abandoned main floor. Was some political bigwig visiting? The security people had not asked us to leave the museum. There had been no alarms. Weirdly, we felt like we just awoke and found we were the only people left on earth. Even worse, what had Terry done?

We didn't have to wonder too long. Alarms sounded. Still not knowing what was happening, we now knew we had to leave. Once outside, I did remember hearing several suggestive announcements on the PA system. When we were in the clock room, a page had requested the owner of an unattended gray bag to claim it. Finally as we exited, I heard another page directing the bomb squad to the same location.

We decided not to wait until the museum re-opened. We walked across the bridge over the Seine to the Louvre. At a small corner brasserie on rue Enoli alongside of the Tuileries Gardens in front of the Louvre, we found two empty tables on the street and sat down for lunch. Accenting dishes of quiche and escargot with several (after all we just had a harrowing experience) glasses of French wine, we relaxed, laid out our maps, and planned our afternoon. Doug and Marsha wanted to see the Egyptian Exhibit across the street at the Louvre and the rest of us just wanted to



Sharyn with Whistler's Mother



Sacre Coeur from clock room



window shop our way back toward our hotel.

Don was already back at the hotel across the street in another brasserie washing down his lunch of cheese selections with a beer while watching the World Cup Soccer match on TV. Diane still was off visiting with her Parisian friends whom she had surprised with her unannounced appearance at their luncheon for another absent comrade. Having had a wonderful reunion, she was all-smiles when she joined us. Being in a great mood, she volunteered to escort Barbara, Sharyn and me to [Sacre Coeur](#).

A three-domed, white stone church built on a high Paris hill, Montmartre, Sacre Coeur was visible every where in Paris. Built as an act of penance after the nation's clubbing by the Prussians in 1870, it was lavishly adorned and its crypt and gallery in the dome were open to visitors. The area around the church was home to designers, musicians, writers, and actors. The site of the Marche aux Puces Saint Oeun, Paris's largest flea market, we felt like we where entering the front gate in carnival section at a County Fair when we emerged from the Metro, except everyone was speaking French. There was even a carousel.

For three blocks we weaved our way through dense crowds until we arrived at the bottom of MontMarte with Sacre Coeur still high above us. We had two alternatives: ride the funicular to our left or climb the two hundred feet of stairs straight in front of us. We chose the route covered with hundreds of people who were sitting, conversing, studying, people watching, or taking an eye-ball tour of Paris from their elevated vantage points. The image reminded us of the Spanish Stairs in Rome. We were adventuresome and needed the exercise as penance for our over-indulgence with French cuisine.

At the halfway point an old gypsy lady sat feeding hundreds of gray-brown sparrows flocking to and sitting on her out-stretched hands full of bird treats. Further up, minstrels strummed guitars and blew into flutes. Finally reaching the top, we watched a procession of about fifty nuns dressed in white and black woolen habits march two abreast behind six priests into the church. Carrying the Eucharist above their heads in a gold and silver sunburst chalice, all were singing. The music from the pipe organ was intoxicating as it echoed its melody from every wall. As we followed them, the sounds and visual images of this solemn event were enchanting enough to penetrate the spirit of the most recalcitrant sinners.

This section of town was also home to infamous Parisian icon - the Moulin Rouge. Leaving church Diane asked if we wanted to see it since it was only a few blocks away. I started walking in the direction where she had motioned with her hand when she said, "No, no you don't want to go that way. We have to take the Metro."



Carousel at Sacre Coeur



Stairs up to Sacre Coeur

We were a little confused, but we followed her anyway. We went back and forth, in and out of three subway tunnel exits, searching for a seemingly illusive cabaret. Like prairie dogs, we momentarily poked our heads out of our holes to see if we were near the Moulin Rouge. Finally, on our third attempt we found it - about one block from where we had started at the Sacre Coeur exit. And what was Diane trying so hard to avoid?

The street was lined on both sides with live sex shops. Her effort was all for naught. We still had to walk past them. But not to be defeated, she made us go down the center of the wide boulevard, fifty feet from the action on either side. Sharyn and Barbara thought Diane was a spoil sport, but I knew she was looking out for my well-being.

On this trip to France, we visited Paris twice: first, on our way to Rayol and second, on our way home. On our return we stayed at small hotel with only fifteen rooms, the Centre Ville Etoile on 6 rue des Acacias, only a couple of blocks from the Arc d'Triomphe and from Don and Diane's Paris apartment on rue Brunel. On that evening Diane made reservations at Paolo Patrini on Debarcadere in their old neighborhood. It was like old home week for Don and Diane as we walked down their street to dinner.

With many of their old acquaintances in their little street level shops met with them. I know I saw a tear in their eyes as they hugged their friends.

On our return on Saturday we got back into Paris about mid afternoon with plenty of time to continue our touring. Now that Barb, Sharyn, Marsha, Doug, and I were experts at this Metro thing we left Terry with Don and Diane at Brasserie de Grand Armee and walked to the Arc d'Triomphe. For 6 Euro a piece, the five of us climbed a winding circular staircase up six flights to the observation deck across the top. From here we could look down to the terminus of the streets that form the twelve spokes of a wheel in which the hub was the Arc. The most famous were the beautiful, tree-lined Champs Elysees and the Avenue de la Grande Armee on which Hitler triumphantly enter the city.

Charles De Gaulle subway station was below the Arc. We caught it for Notre Dame de Paris on the Isle of St. Louis. Always a popular tourist destination, hundreds of people were milling around its courtyards waiting to climb its bell towers, to tour the cathedral, or just to observe its unique architecture. This gothic church with its menacing gargoyles was started in 1163 by Bishop Maurice de Sully and not completed until 1345. During the French revolution anti-royalists destroyed the statues of the kings on the façade (they were now in the Musee De Cluny). Having been restored a couple of time since the early nineteenth century, Notre Dame has been kept closely to Sully's original plan.



The bird lady of Sacre Coeur



Sex shops near Sacre Coeur.



Moulin Rouge near Sacre Coeur



## AUVERS-SUR-OISE



Ride the Metro to Auvers



The Main street in Auvers



A backroad to see Van Gogh paintings

Visiting [Auvers-sur-oise](#) was like stepping back into a Van Gogh painting. He spent the last 100 days of his life here painting some of his famous scenes of the town. Copies of his paintings were posted on bill-boards in front of the actual images, such as the immortalized Notre-Dame of Auvers and Wheat Fields. We lunched in the apartment building where he died, visited his gravesite, and at the Musee de L'Absinthe got a great education on impressionistic art.

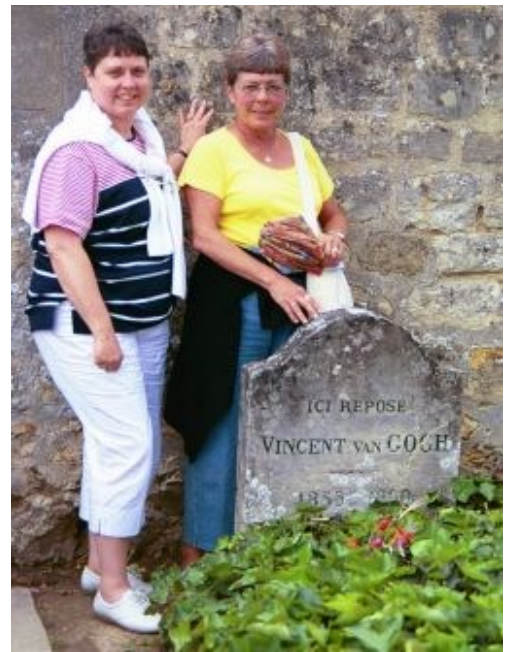
A sleepy little town, located fourteen miles north north west of the center of Paris, Auvers was absent from most tourist guides. Suggested by Diane and Don as place to visit, I spent hours trying to find information about it and directions to it. The most popular route was to ride the train from Gare du Nord to Pontoise, take the connection to Creil, and exit at d'Auvers-sur-Oise. The ninety-minute trip (including a 30-minute wait at Pontoise) cost 12 Euros.

Only our little group of eight got off the train at a small village that hadn't changed much since the late nineteenth century. Only a half dozen blocks in all directions, single-story stone residences and farmhouses surrounded a business district. From the single platform train station, we walked three blocks on cobblestone streets to some of the sites made famous by Van Gogh: Notre-Dame, the wheat fields, and the cemetery where he was buried. His burial plot next to his brother Theodore was a dichotomy of values. Simple, unobtrusive, and not commercialized, it was inconceivable that one of his paintings had just sold at auction for five million dollars. The head stone was so plain that a British woman standing right in front of it asked us where Vincent was buried.



Van Gogh's Notre Dame

Six blocks away from the cemetery at the opposite side of Auvers was Musee de L'Absinthe, a museum for Impressionist art. For a cost of ten Euros a visitor could take a self-guided, animated, multi-media tour into nineteenth century Paris, learning how impressionism developed among a handful of artists. Names that almost every school child could recite, these same artists often had to purchase their own paintings because of embarrassing low selling prices. The exhibit began around 1851 when Louie Napoleon Bonaparte commissioned Baron Georges Haussmann to rebuild Paris after centuries of decay. For ten years he gutted medieval Paris and built the railroad stations, recti-linear streets, boulevards, and new bridges. They became the subjects for so many of the early works of Monet and Monet. The show examined the evolution of the various forms of Impressions, such Pointillism and Fauvism and explained how the artists attempted to capture those initial mental images, before the analytical functions of the brain activate.



Van Gogh's Repose Finale

Surprisingly, Auvers had very little tourist trade; so we didn't have much selection for lunch. We found a tiny four-table restaurant in a two-story building adjacent to Van Gogh's apartment. Squeezed into tight quarters along the front window, we sat at a couple of old hand-hewn wooden tables. We felt a little uncomfortable as the dozen of other patrons quietly watched as the waiter pulled together tables to accommodate the eight of us. No more spacious than the average American living room, we almost sat in their laps. But, it was homey.



Lunch in Van Gogh's apartment diner

In the front the window was draped with a simple lacy cotton curtain. At our right were ceiling-to-floor bookshelves, not much deeper than a paperback . Its yellow-pine boards held dusty volumes whose once-white pages had aged to blend into the tan background. On our left, an old counter was stacked with desert selections of date pie, assorted selection of berries, and a cream tort.

The menu was simple and limited to one sheet, but we were clueless. Diane and Don kept busy trans-lating. Eventually, we selected appetizers of escargot or green salads, entrees of duck or lamb, and bottles of the house Bordeaux. Our lunch excelled in what made French cooking world famous - subtle culinary treatments and secret blends of spices



Auver's most famous resident

## RIDING THE TGV



The TGV Station in Paris  
Gare du Nord

**Train travel was a fond memory from our childhood**, but in America we didn't much chance to ride the train. So, we selected it as often as possible. The TGV was France's modern train that moved passengers comfortably with nary a bump at speeds approaching 189 miles per hour. We selected it to get us from Paris in northern France to the Mediterranean. Not only fun, the train was economical. Roundtrip airfare was \$400 a person. The same ride on the train was \$100 a person, but careful reservation making was necessary.

Having travel by train in France for the last five years, Don and Diane strongly believed that First Class was the only way to go. They had some bad experiences with Second Class. Doug, on the other hand, had talked with his French friends and they said on the TGV the extra 30 Euros for First Class over Second wasn't justified. I thought I could "check it out" with a little Internet research on the TGV web site and with opinions in on-line travel journals.

The official WEB site for the TGV was [www.sncf.fr](http://www.sncf.fr). Even though I was fairly skilled with the Internet, this French site confounding me, not the language, but its use. Every time I tried to make a reservation, it told me the train was sold out, regardless of my desired day or time. I couldn't believe it; I was checking 90 days in advance.

In frustration I found an alternate site, [www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com) from which I could book a TGV reservations. However, it was VERY expensive and listed none of the many SNCF discounts. A reservation on Rail Europe was about TWICE the price as SNCF. Obviously, something was seriously wrong. Furthermore, neither site provided enough information to determine the value of First Class over Second Class.

Eventually, I discovered that tickets could not be booked more than sixty days in advance and that Americans, Canadians, and Australians were not permitted to book reservations on the SNCF site (no reason was given). They were expected to use the expensive Rail Europe site. Finally, convincing Doug to go first-class, I asked Diane to get the best tickets she could. She called the SNCF office but got second class, round-trip tickets for less than 100 Euro per person - less than half first-class price.

Our second class accommodations were more comfortable than any airline coach seat. The ride was smooth and quiet with adequate room for our legs and space for our luggage. I think Doug had good advice. We couldn't think of any justification to pay the additional price for first class.

Our destination was the brand new Aix-en-Provence TGV station, near the airport and ten miles outside of town. Although farther away from Rayol than stations in Marseilles and Toulon, it was more convenient with easier car rentals. But, don't look for it on road maps or at the SNCF web site. It just opened in summer of 2001. My best recommendation is "follow the signs." Routes to and from the train station are well marked.

The train station housed six car rentals: Hertz, Europcar, Avis, Budget, and two others. We reserved our car on-line at [www.avis.fr](http://www.avis.fr), not the same as [www.avis.com](http://www.avis.com). The French site was very easy to use, but for some unknown reason, had a different inventory than the American site. Avis was much too popular. We waited forty minutes to get through the two-person counter, while others behind us endured for over an hour.

Travel journals report that our experience was not uncommon. Consequently, I wouldn't rent an Avis car at the Aix TGV station again.

## FRENCH ROADS

**Driving in Europe could be confusing for Americans**, especially in the cities. Anticipating trouble, I used Map Quest on the Internet to mark the route from Aix to our villa following instructions from Jo Chahine. As an extra precaution, we brought walkie-talkies for communications between cars. Nevertheless, we still had trouble, partly because of Jo's directions, insufficient for foreigners, and partly because of French signs, which could have well as been in Cyrillic.

Our first lesson learned was get a current road map with details showing roundabouts and direction of traffic flow. My Map Quest printouts didn't do the job. Within minutes of leaving the TGV station on our way to lunch in Aix, we missed a turn, went off my computer maps, and couldn't find our way back. We circled Aix for an hour, like vultures getting hungrier by the minute. My maps showed precisely where our lunch was supposed to be, but weren't expansive enough to show where we had gotten off to. It showed only a very narrow section of town and we weren't in it. When we finally found us, we still couldn't get to our restaurant. Access roads, so narrow a car could barely pass, were under construction and parking spaces, even for one car let alone two, could not be found.

In frustration we gave up trying to get to our reservation. We found a place to park the cars and walked to the nearest restaurant. That was our second lesson learned - do not make reservations in unfamiliar small French towns. We should have just driven toward Aix, found the first restaurant with convenient parking, and stopped, as we eventually did. Nevertheless, we still had a greater challenge facing us.



Lunch at a convenient Aix restaurant

The whole philosophy underlying French road signs was foreign to American drivers. The difference became painfully clear we when we got lost at our first roundabout, an experience we repeated many times latter. Entering it, we expected to see the route numbers of the intersecting roads. For example, if Route 41 intersected with Route 66, we should have seen either a Route 41 or a Route 66 sign at each exit from the circle of confusion. But no, that was too easy for the French; they demanded intrigue. Instead, their direction markers gave the name of the city or the route to which that road went. At our first roundabout we wanted to turn south on D43. The sign at the appropriate spot said A57, not D43. Instant panic, we were lost! Well not really, that was a destination for D43.



Terry at roadside wine chateaux

In some interchanges the French stacked so many town signs on a pole we either had to stop the car to read them all or had to loop around and around until we memorized all the towns. We then parked, consulted our map, found which town was on our desired road, and returned to the roundabout to continue our trip. The French weren't about to let us get away with that little trick. They stacked these roundabouts, one after another like Mandelbrot sets, to insure chaos.

What was the methodology of the Machiavellian mind that devised French road signs? They seemed so confusing and inefficient. For example, in American speed signs told how fast I could drive; in France these same signs told how fast I could not go. When they did show a speed sign, they always added a small white rectangular sign below it saying, "Rapella," which meant remember this speed. I guess that was because all the other signs were for the speed not to go. Da!

The French also had Priority signs that told drivers which road must yield at an intersection. They seem redundant since they still used stop and yield signs at those roads. Their route markers were on tombstones at the edge of the road. But be alert, these little guys, often no taller than a foot, were often obscured by the grass.

Our biggest problem with those French roads was with wine châteaux's. Similar to our corner gasoline stations, they were everywhere and Doug's car couldn't get passed them. As soon as we got around one, another popped up and the walkie-talkie proclaimed Doug's car was thirsty again. Like a magnet, it sucked his vehicle right off the road. We had to buy thirty bottles of wine just to get Doug to Rayol. Then the problem didn't stop. From there it was just a short ten-mile jaunt into wine country and refills.

## RAYOL

**Two hours from Aix along the Mediterranean coast was the ancient mountain range the Maures Massif.** Meaning dark and gloomy, this area was heavily forested in sweet chestnut, cork trees, oaks, and pines with shaded undergrowth of myrrh and briar. It remained practically uninhabited until 1885 when the Provençal Railway network was built. The spectacular beauty of this region made it an instant resort attraction. More recently D559, a two-lane coastal road, provided primary access. No more than a notch in the side of the mountain with views across the azure blue Mediterranean, it ran along a magnificent shoreline of olive, cork, eucalyptus, and mimosa forest. Everywhere, wonderful scenes were picturesquely accented with medleys of red, blue, pink, violet, and lavender flowers on the bushes, scrub,



Barb stand in front of grape vines with roses

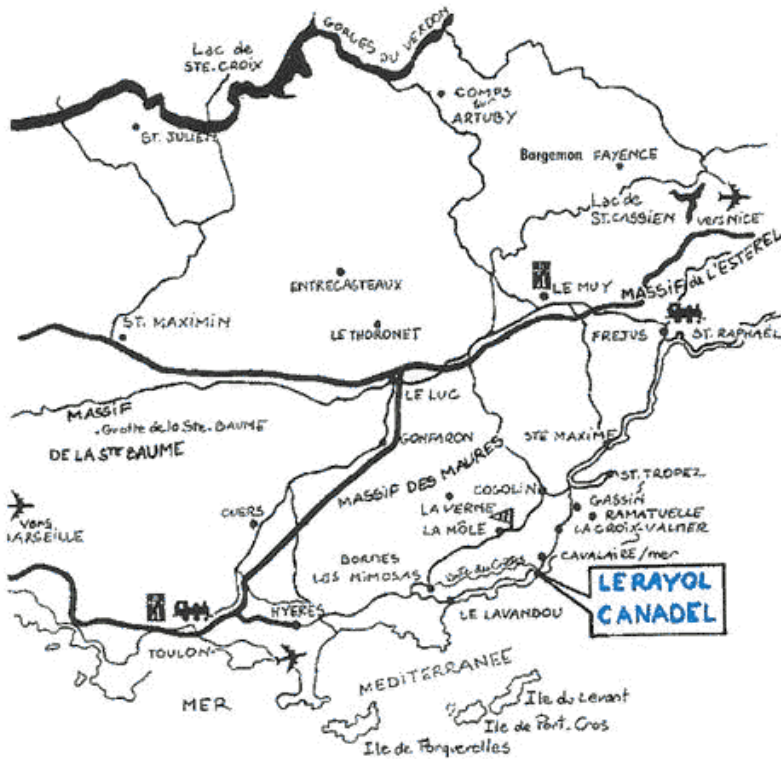


Our wine tasters make selections



Rocher du Drapeau

houses, and walls.



Beginning of the Escalier Monument



Bottom of the Escalier Monument

The tiny [village of Rayol](#) was on D559, halfway between Cavalière and Cavalier-sur-Mer and in the heart of Côte d'Azur. Whereas each of these two larger tourist destinations was situated on relatively flat coastal sections of the hilly terrain, Rayol was nothing more than a bus stop, hanging onto the side of a thousand-foot high mountain and struggling not to slide down thirty-degree slope into the sea. Literally translated, Côte d'Azur meant "side of the sky," but the absence of crowds and traffic and the natural scenic elegance and beauty of the Riviera made our quiet retreat seem more like "close to heaven."



Rayol's public beach

Rayol's history began in 1925 with the construction of the Pergola, a large stately manor built by Monsieur Courmes and later converted to the resort Hotel de la Mer. Extending from La Môle, in the north and to the sea, in the south it encompassing the coastal area that was incorporated in 1949 as Rayol. Erected at the same time, the Escalier Monument was a stairway that led several hundred feet down the hillside from the soon to be village of Rayol to the beach on the Mediterranean. Both were listed as national monuments in 1989.



Small brasserie on Rayol's public beach

Another interesting landmark was the Pateck. Originally a park at the very top of the Escalier with a luxurious grassy knoll, footpaths and exotic flowering plants had at its center a Stonehenge-like structure, Rocher du Drapeau, with a ring of stone, fifty-feet in diameter supported by sixteen, twelve-foot high stone pillars. From here a footpath led a couple of hundred feet to the Eglise du Rayol, a small Catholic Church built in 1932. Unfortunately, the grass was transformed to gravel and the footpaths to roads that led up the side of the mountain to the numerous gated private villas, including our L'eun Eol.



Barb asks, "What's a public douche?"

Although not well maintained, major portions of the stairway still remained. Starting at the Pateck, a section ran down to D559 and Rayol. Glistening with gold-flake surfaces constructed from mica schist mined at the local quarry, these steps crisscrossed down the side of a hill overgrown with cacti and similar succulents.

At the road, the Escalier straightened out and continued through cork oak stands to a public beach on the Mediterranean. A line of cedar trees proudly ensconced both sides. At the bottom a small sign read The Avenue of the Americans. We never learned the reason for that.

Rayol's had a small public beach five-hundred-foot along the seashore. Protected at the back by woods and private villas and on either side by high rocky and wooded points, its seclusion made it seem more private than public. Its shoreline offered an enjoyable, albeit short, walk with an opportunity to dip our toes into the Mediterranean and a theater to watch small children romping on the yellow sand and splashing in the white foamy surf. It was so peaceful. A tiny on-the-beach café brasserie provided precisely what we needed - a couple of bottles of wine to accent our relaxation.

The village of Rayol only had about a couple of dozen stores in its downtown. The first major building the Maurin des Maures, a restaurant and bar, was constructed until 1949. Since then it had expanded in both directions to include about a dozen small storefronts on either side of the road: a Casino (grocery store in France), a patisserie, a tabac, a pizzeria, and a rotisserie. The restaurant was quite americanized - loud and large - in contrast to Parisian standards.

## THE VILLA

**On D559 stop at Maria de Maures, turn left, and drive for a couple of miles on switchback roads climbing five hundred feet up the side of the Maures Massif.** A blue rot-iron gate marked the entrance of a pebble-stone driveway leading to our villa, L'eun Eol. Surrounded on either side by ten-foot high rhododendron bushes with pretty pink flowers, it led fifty-feet up to the garage and carport.



The gate to L'eun Eol

Our two-story, tan, stucco Mediterranean style home for the week faced the Sea. On the upper level was a patio with sliding glass doors opening into two bedrooms and a living room. On the lower level was another patio with French doors opening into three bedrooms and a kitchenette. On the upper floor a large thirty-by-fourteen-foot living room connected to a dining room and full-size kitchen. The lower level had a laundry room. All rooms were comfortably decorated with large paintings, numbered prints, and pictures of Jo and her family. The bookcases were filled with general reading material, information about the area, and a collection of French road maps, which we definitely needed.

The patios constructed of tan, one-foot square clay tiles led to a similarly tiled stairway and two stories down to our kidney-shaped, twenty-five by fifteen foot swimming pool. On this tile around the pool chairs and tables sat for our afternoon sunbathing and evening wine and cheese parties. Between the pool and villa was an eight-foot high stone wall covered in red, violet, and lavender flowers. On the other side a little forest of olive, cork, mimosa, and rhododendron provided us with privacy. Vines growing on the villa walls picturesquely accented it with red and blue flowers.

Our location, high up the side of the mountain, provided us with a spectacular unobstructed view of the Mediterranean Sea. Straight out were the islands of Levand and St. Cros. On our right and left heavily forested, dark green peninsulas rose out of the water with nearly vertical shorelines. Down below, a couple of resort hotels hidden by the dense vegetation were barely visible. And behind us, the Maures Massif continued to rise for at least another five hundred feet

We were elated; our expectations were exceeded. Previous guests warned us that we wouldn't want to leave, even for brief tours. We now understood their sentiment. The setting was so quiet and peaceful. Although dozens of gated villas like L'eun Eol were around us, we seldom saw anyone. The dwellings were usually hidden in the trees and bushes. We could stand on our upper patio, look out over the mountainside, and see several homes with that tan or light-pink stucco common to this region sticking up through the trees.

The weather could not have been any better. Although it rained on Saturday evening when we arrived and the winds blew on Sunday, we had cloudless skies with temperatures in the lower to mid eighties for the rest of the week, providing us with the ultimate in relaxation in the Garden of Eden.



Our villa - L'eun Eol as seen from pool



Levand and St. Cros from our patio



Marsha look back toward Cavaliere



On the upper patio a large white plastic table with seating for eight people was the site of our breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In the evening we played cards here or just sat sipping wine until we were forced to surrender the day to sleep or had to escape the mosquitoes to the safety of the enclosed living room. Later, a couple of us stole back in the darkest hours to enjoy a brilliant celestial panorama of twinkling white dots and ivory band of the Milky Way.



View opposite from Cavaliere, Hotel le Sufren

We certainly weren't short of wine. Doug made it his personal responsibility to assure our continuous supply. When our supply got low, Doug just hopped in a car, drove to his favorite nearby Chateau, and bought a dozen bottles. We had at least thirty-six bottles just to snack on while at the villa. When we dined away from the villa, we always had at least four more bottles with each meal. Wine was inexpensive, typically 5 Euros a bottle, and wineries were everywhere.



Marsha views Massif Maures from window

Besides wine the French were famous for their pastries. On the first morning Don and Diane initiated another one of our daily traditions. Early, before the rest of us even found the coffeepot in the upstairs kitchen, they made a quick trip to the patisserie in Rayol and returned with breakfast. With arms laden with treats born only hours earlier using the freshest of ingredients and no preservatives, they laid out light, airy cake filled with vanilla, caramel, or chocolate cream, and regaled with a light dusting of powdered sugar - none of that deep fried stuff found in the States. They became instant celebrities.

As a brief sidebar, when I was roaming some of the small French villages, I noticed another difference between French and American culture. Being the world's expert on desserts, since I seldom get them at home, I made frequent visits to patisseries just to gawk. A midriff issue prevented me from indulging. The French exhibited their creations in jewelry cases, like works of art. Each masterpiece sat individually and proudly on its own little white doily. In the States pastries were piled high and wide and shoveled out.



View behind our villa at Massif Maures

For three days of our week we just relaxing at the villa, lying around the pool, sunning, and reading a good book. We'd go for short hikes into Rayol or roam around the mountainside. On our really lazy days the ladies made dinner. One evening, Diane whipped together her world famous, savory, little ham and cheese sandwiches. On another night, our cooks made salads of tomato and mozzarella cheese and rotisserie chicken. And on a third evening, Laurence treated us to a crepe dinner.

Laurence was Doug and Marsha's French exchange student. The last time they saw her was in 1991 when we stayed with

them in Hendersonville. I thought I remembered Doug saying he or he and Marsha visited Laurence and her family in France. She was a nice young lady and we enjoyed the couple of days she spent of her vacation time visiting Geriatric du Royal.



Terry on the first patio



Terry in our pool



Group suns themselves at our pool



View up at villa directly below pool



Crew head down road for walk into Rayol



Marsha stops to talk picture on our walk

## MONACO

**The Principality of Monaco was a sovereign state** no larger than one square mile, consisting of Monaco, the old town; Monte Carlo, the new town; La Condamine between them; and Forte Veilli, the industrial section. Without a doubt the community planners packed as much as possible onto the smallest amount of land surface. Land locked, backing up to a two-thousand-foot cliff, and sea locked, built on the shoreline, everything was so squished and cramped together I felt claustrophobic.

My guidebook described Monaco as follows:

The roads and ramps on the ocean-side screwed up the harmony of Monaco and Monte Carlo. The thirty-story buildings in town were big and ugly. The gorgeous villas set far back in the hills weren't accessible

Unless they wanted to spend hours, navigating roads that were obviously a manifestation from a cartographer's nightmare, why did several million tourists visit it every year? None of us asked that question when we decided to drive sixty miles for two and a half hours.



Tight narrow streets on hills



Restaurant in front of Casio

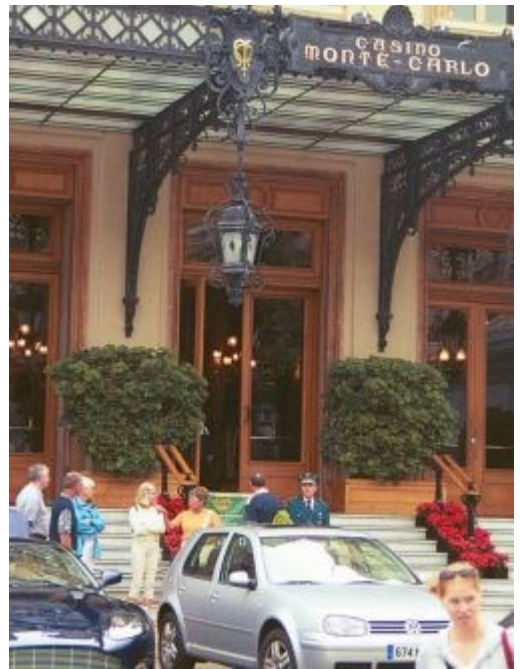
Although Autobahn A8 allowed travelers to get across southern France with speed limits of 80 mph, we had to get to it from Rayol. Half our drive was along coastal roads that weaved through a dozen of densely populated resort towns. We enjoyed the contiguous string of beaches along the route. Doug had a great opportunity to spot turtles. An expert with the eyes of a hawk, he could spot those critters 100 yards in the distance while maneuvering his car through pedestrian and vehicles. The drive was beautiful, but time consuming.



Doug & Marsha in front of Casio

We left A8 at exit 56 and followed the signs to Monte Carlo. We didn't dare miss spotting a road sign and consequently get caught hopelessly in the swarms of cars going every which way. The traffic moved quickly and signs instantly appeared and disappeared. We couldn't anticipate because the tall, densely packed-in buildings meant we couldn't see too far. For awhile our drive was a bit tense, but fortunately, the route led directly to the Casino parking lot. How convenient!

A small park with flower gardens and two circular stone water-fountains was in front of the Casino. A single lane road ran along both sides and made a big loop at the foot of stairs at the grand entrance to a palace with twin golden domes. Roles Royces, Lamborghinis, and other vehicles I had only previously seen in magazines were parked in front. Uniformed attendants stood at the top along side the doors. Dozens of people milling around at the base of the stairs but were not entering. We were early. The Casino didn't open until noon. For fee of ten Euros a visitor was allowed to enter the main gambling hall.



Time to enter the Casino

The scene was right out of James Bond and Gold Finger. In the gold gilded, domed ceilings forty feet above eight green-felted gambling tables hung three large ornate crystal chandeliers just like in the movie. However, instead of a sophisticated crowd in tuxedos and silky evening gowns attired, only a dozen tourists in street clothes huddled quietly around one table playing craps.

We watched the relatively sedate action for about fifteen minutes until our ladies found the slot machines in an adjoining and similarly decorated room. The four ladies and Doug wasted no time getting a stake. With quart-sized plastic buckets, partially full of half-Euro coins, they headed for the nearest electro-mechanical robber. Two drops and Sharyn hit a jackpot. Clang, clang, clang, the machine spit noisily two hundred of them, one at a time, against its metal tray. Without a doubt the blood pressure of the others rose one point with each ring. Instantly, more machines begin to whirl and coins dropped faster, but they disappeared forever.

The Casino obviously had a great strategy - pick one player in group, give him or her an instant hit, and recover that investment ten-fold as the his or her buddies strive to duplicate the win. However, they didn't know me. I put Sharyn's strike into a separate bucket, niggardly held on to them while turning a deaf ear to her pleadings. She continued to play with her initial stake. In thirty minutes when that was gone, we left - two couples as winners and two as losers. But as always, the house was the net winner.



Some WIN and some don't

## EZE

Perched in an eagle's nest five kilometers from Monaco and high above the surrounding area was the tiny medieval village of [Eze](#). With caves dug into the side of a rocky mountaintop, Eze was narrow roads, archways, superbly restored stone houses, shady squares, and ancient fountains. Every available space held a small arts and crafts boutique. Diane had visited it when she lived in France and put it on her "must see" list. Not as heavily visited as some of other tourist stops Eze provided an enjoyable side adventure after having spent all that time driving to Monaco.

As we entered the village we passed the trail head of the Friedrich-Nietzsche path, which ran down the side of the mountain to Eze Bord de Mer. With its lush tropical vegetation including banana, date, carob, lemon, and orange trees, the hour-long foot-walk had been an inspiration to Nietzsche to compose the last part of his work, Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Several years ago, Diane walked the trail and described it as one of the most memorable experiences of her life. Unfortunately, we did not have time to repeat her journey.

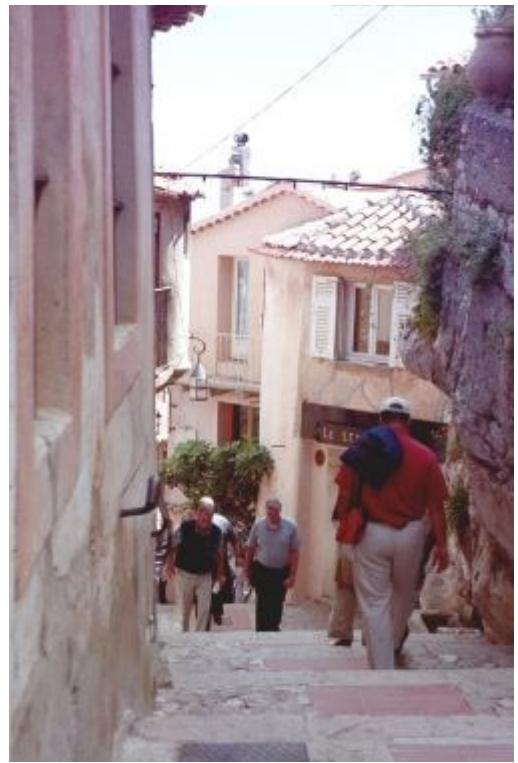


Climb the stairs to get up into Eze

In the very center of the village at its highest point, a small botanical garden had a collection of cactus and exotic vegetation. It surrounded the ruins of an ancient chateau and at an altitude of 1300 feet provided a spectacular panoramic view of the surrounding area. In front of us was the deep blue Mediterranean Sea, on our left was Monaco, on our right was Nice, and behind us was the barren and gray stone façade of the Maritime Alps.

Our return to the autobahn was over Moyenne Corniche, which roughly translated meant average cliff road. Switching back and forth as it rose up the side of the mountain, the narrow road was anything but average. Frommer's travel guides listed it as one of the most scenic in Provence. Higher and higher we climbed until the spectacular view from Eze seemed mediocre. We had a grand panoramic view of Monaco and the Mediterranean Sea. At an altitude of over three-thousand feet, Monaco on its own 500-foot high mountain peaks appeared like an ant village. As our road had narrowed down to a couple of car widths, we became convinced we had made a wrong turn and were lost. But, when tour buses started coming down this road, we knew had chosen correctly.

At the highest point, just before the entrance to A8, was Le Trophée des Alpes in La Turbie, a huge Roman monument built in 6 BC out of white stone. Marking the division between Italy and Gaul, the structure has been gradually dismantled and partial destroyed (by orders of Louis XIV) until only about a quarter of it remains.



Narrow streets & medieval houses

A view of the Mediterranean from the top of Eze



They watch cruise ship enter Port of Nice

Sharyn looks back to Monaco in ruins at top



Terry & Don are ready to go back down



Botanical gardens in ruins at top

## ST TROPEZ and TAHITI BEACH

At the turn of the century, [St. Tropez](#) was unknown to tourists. Then Maupassant and Signac discovered it. Because of its quality of light, which in Europe was a euphemism for saying it doesn't rain all the time, other painters, such as Bonnard, Matisse, Marquet, Camoin, and Dunoyer de Segonzac, joined Signac. Together they developed the impressionist styles of Pointillism and Fauvism. Then in 1959 a more modern artist, Brigitte Bardot, on Tahiti Beach added her special touch to the local beauty. Consequently, the tour books extolled, "In St. Tropez everything is famous."



Girls stops to view signs to Tahiti Beach

St. Tropez was a half-hour drive from Rayol and at a small peninsula into the Mediterranean Sea that was totally surrounded by beaches. We were advised to see St. Tropez on Tuesday or market day, but warned, "Get there early or parking would be difficult to find." Shortly after 9 AM we found a large and convenient parking lot along the shore. After a brief breakfast at an outdoor café we walked to market at the corner of rue Gambetta and Boulevard Vasserot.



Doug leaves his "dates" to hunt turtles

This massive "flea market" crammed several hundred little twelve-by-twelve foot stands and booths into an acre of space. Merchants were trying to sell everything imaginable, from olives to clothing and from paintings to furniture. The aisles were jammed with a hundreds of tightly packed people having to slide sideways just to move. The guys didn't appreciate that much intimacy and left the ladies to rub shoulders We waited patiently at the perimeter for the ladies to complete their fun.

I don't think anyone really enjoyed St. Tropez. Expecting most of our day to be focused on the market, we hadn't planned alternatives. The crowds limited our mobility to getting around by foot. We never went over to the famous section of town. Instead, by noon we headed over to the other famous landmark in the area - Tahiti Beach.

Nearly a half-century ago Brigitte Bardot, while being harassed by the paparazzi, pulled off her bikini top and started a style of bathing that continues until today. This beach was at the top of Doug's list for "turtles." He wasn't wrong. But, as we latter found out, "turtles" inhabited most of the beaches along the Riviera.

St. Tropez was the western boundary for the section of French coastline known as the French Riviera. The beaches extended as far as the eye could see. A line of brasseries was several hundred feet back from the water's edge. Between them and the water were several lines chairs with beach umbrellas. The brasseries maintained the beach and rented umbrella space. The cost depended on the available amenities and the clientele. Anyone could walk the beach for free but they just couldn't sit. Often interspersed were short sections of totally public beach.



Enjoying a pizza, beer, and the sun



Sunning themselves of Tahiti Beach

## BOUILLABAISSE

**Invented in Marseille, Bouillabaisse, the most famous dish** of Cote d'Azur, was one of Barbara's favorites. A couple of months earlier, the New York Times had an article in their entertainment section identifying Tetou's, a beachside restaurant in Golfe Juan, as serving the world best, but it wasn't cheap.

Our first reaction when we saw a price of \$75 for fish soup price was to think wow food prices on the Riviera must be out of sight. We'll starve. Fortunately, just this dish was priced in the stratosphere and for the life of me, even after seeing it, I haven't a clue why, except people willing to pay it. We found other prices to be in line with most American resorts.

Bouillabaisse, worth a king's ransom, consisted of a bowl of fish soup, a serving of croutons with rouille (mayonnaise with garlic and other spices), and a platter of the fish. Four kinds of fish were used: monkfish, mullet, snapper, conger eel, and most importantly rascasse (scorpion fish). Supposedly the rascasse, available nowhere else in the world, made this Mediterranean specialty unique.



Recommended by the locals



For \$52 a head it does seem much food

Bouillabaisse was not everyone's favorite, plus its unreasonable price, meant not all of us would eat it. But we were committed to make sure Barbara got the best in the area. We asked Laurence, Doug and Marsha's French exchange student, for advice. She called her father who lived in the area and asked him. He said, "Tetou's served a good bouillabaisse but was over-rated and over-priced. A much better alternative was Chez Camille in Ramatuelle." At this small restaurant on a secluded beach at Camarat, only thirty minutes away from us, Barbara got her bouillabaisse for only \$52 a serving, in my opinion still thirty bucks more than it was worth.

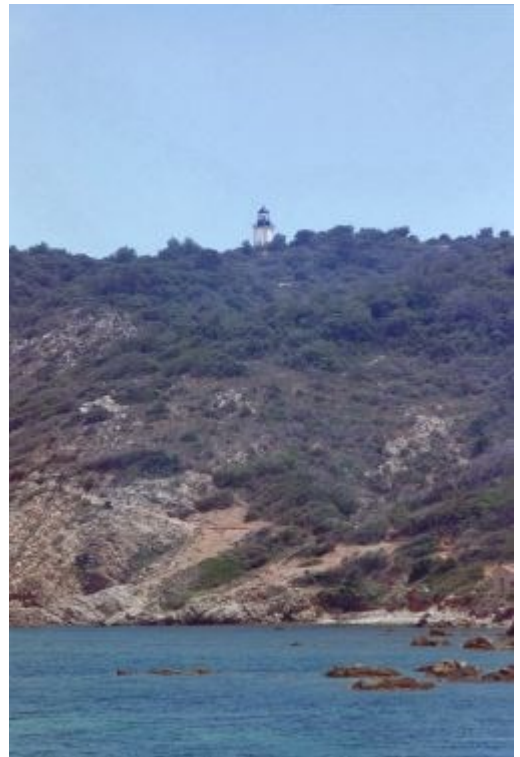


Bay behind *Chez Chamille*

**Bouillabaisse:** Is the specialty of the Riviera. **The most famous is prepared at Tetuo in Golfe-Juan** 33 (0) 4 93 63 71 16. It is closed on Wednesday and accepts no credit cards. On the same beach is **NouNou** 33 (0) 4 93 63 71 73. Its menu is listed on its WEB site (no prices).

*Tetou, a beachside restaurant, produces what is arguably the area's best bouillabaisse. In the south of France, where the greatest of all fish stews was invented, the secret ingredient is rascasse, a fish found only in the Mediterranean. The bouillabaisse at Tetou is an experience. The fish is served separately. The broth is dense and aromatic, but the best part is the spicy, garlicky aioli that you smear on every part of the bouillabaisse. Be aware that France is expensive right now, especially for Americans. The bouillabaisse at Tetou is about \$75 per person and the restaurant does not take credit cards.*

- From the Archive of the Wine Spector On-Line, December 15, 1995



Lighthouse on bay point

## ST PAUL DE VENICE

The third most visited city in France, [St. Paul de Vence](#), was described in most tour guides as one of the most beautiful villages in Provence. The beauty of the surrounding area, quality of life, and exceptional light inspired famous artists, painters, writers, and poets. Signatures of some of the famous residents along with a large collection of paintings, sculptures, drawings, and other twentieth century works were found at the Fondation Maeght.

To get to St. Paul from Rayol, we chose D2210. Originated near Grasse it wound through the mountains and ended at Vence. Frommer's travel guide said this route was one of the most luxuriant countryside roads along the French Riviera,



View of gorge on D2210 near Grasse



providing spectacular views of a Gorges du Loup and of a panorama of waterfalls near Point-du-Loup. The book didn't exaggerate on the gorge but no one saw any waterfalls.

The roads between Rayol and Grasse were marked reasonably well. We made the trip with only one bad turn. But in Grasse, the highway map looked like a plate of spaghetti with the noodles crossing at hundreds of unmarked roundabouts. How we found our way was a mystery. We roamed awhile, prayed awhile, and with nothing but luck noticed a very small sign that pointed to Vence. Clueless if it would lead to D2210, we no longer cared. We didn't know if we were driving in circles for the past half-hour or actually moving toward our destination. Finally, after a dozen do-you-know-where-we-are questions, we spotted a tiny tombstone at the edge of the road that miraculously said D2210.

For fifteen miles this little two-lane asphalt path snaked its way through a gap in mountains. They rose a couple of thousand feet on either side of us forming a gorge. As we drove, the region was slightly wooded with scrub trees and shrubs. Small tan stucco houses randomly sat every several thousand feet. We stopped the car often take pictures, but the absence of scenic turn-offs and the narrow shoulders, which either ran abruptly up the side of the mountain or down off a cliff, made our stops dangerous.

St. Paul de Vence was a classic perched village found throughout Provence. Originally built around the 12'th and 13'th century behind the coast to withstand a Saracen attack, it was re-ramparted in 1537 by Francois I. A walled city, with bastions and ramparts still intact, it appeared as it might have five centuries ago, except each building was now occupied by some type of art or sculpture studio. St Paul became a local tourist attraction when Bonnard, Modigliani and other artists discovered it in 1920 and settled there. Since then the rich and famous have flocked there. The renown Foundation Maeght, with its a collection of modern art by Chagall, Matisse, and Miro, was located in the village.

I think, once you have seen one medieval perched village in Provence, you have seen them all. Most were from approximately same period, had comparable architecture, and were nicely preserved. The more obscure, not included in the guidebook, were probably just as deserving of a visit. We accidentally found a few on our way to some planned destination.



Medieval village on D2210 near Grasse



Le photographer snaps the following pic



Medieval village with red flowers

## WRAPPING UP THE TRIP

After our visit to St. Paul, we drove down to the city of [Cannes](#) on the Mediterranean. Its casinos, beaches, boats and fairs have made it the city for the rich and famous. But unless you were involved in one of those activities or participating in one of the many festivals there wasn't much else to do. Cannes lacks museum, monuments, and other attractions commonly sought by tourists.

One car parked at the Carlton Hotel and the other parked in the public garage at the Palais de Festivals about a mile away. We walked toward each other down the seaside walkway that ran as far as the eye could see along the beach between the main drag through town the miles of beachside brasseries. Knowing that Cannes was the site of the world's film festival we expected to find some kind of tourist exhibit. But nothing was to be had. The Lancaster and Kelly car was tired (and much older than the Depew and Evans car) so they headed back to Rayol while we continued to search for something interesting to do.



Cannes Sculpture

After Sharyn, Doug, and Marsha played the slots for awhile in Lucky's and won nothing, we decided Cannes was a bust. However, Doug decided he needed a beer for the road at the brasserie across from the Palais. We were watching our driver down a grande mug of beer wondering if we would make it back to Rayol when someone in a passing car tossed a bomb between our tables. Hitting Sharyn in the leg, the projectile while emitting a dense cloud of smoke rolled under the table alongside of us. The people sitting there leaped to their feet knocking over several tables in the process. Initially, I looked over and saw what I thought was just a common smoke bomb, but I soon had second thoughts. With all the craziness in the world I could be mistaken and decide I had better be safe than sorry and join the mass exodus. Fortunately, it was just a smoker.



Palais de Festivals

A couple of other towns were Gassin, another one of the perched walled cities, and Cavalair-sur-Mer, one of the tiny new resort towns on the Mediterranean. Within ten miles of Rayol neither town had any major attraction to drawn tourists, but was a nice out of the way stop.



MILES ! of hotels - Carlton has bullet roof

Our stay in Rayol with a stop in Paris was a great trip. If the French Riviera wasn't so far away from Tennessee, we would put a return trip at the top of our list. The spectacular beauty of the area with mountains rising out of the deep blue sea to altitudes of five thousand feet and dense vegetation accented by profuse numbers flowers of every color in the rainbow make the Cote A'zur region a unique location. We picked the perfect time of the year; June was warm and Europe was not yet vacationing.



MILES ! of beaches

Traveling with a large group always means compromise. Our group has been traveling together for over a decade, so we all know what each of us likes and dislikes. It's great to be able to share adventures, travel albums, and stories. We are already planning our next excursion next year to Spain and Portugal.



BIG, expensive boats

We spend a little more than we budgeted, but a lot less than a comparable trip. Just for the record, the budget per couple was:

Round Trip Airfare:	\$1296
Villa Rent:	\$ 550
Paris Hotels:	\$ 425
TGV:	\$ 200
Cars/Cabs:	\$ 250
Food/Wine:	\$1200
Limousine:	\$ 75



Casino to steal your money

**Owner of the Villa:** Jennifer Jo Croft;

Office (+44) 1494 79 8644,  
 Mobile (+44) 7765 897 862,  
 Home (+44) 1753 8858 053

**Local Contact:** Benedicte Simon,

Agence Goy, (+33) 04 95 05 62 20  
 (don't dial 0 in "04" when calling from the states.)



Brasserie in which we were bombed

**Check in time:** 3PM Saturday, Check out time: 11AM.

There is a washing machine and closeline that we are welcome to use.

The Travel Guide recommended by Jo is

**["Eyewitness Travel Guide to Provence and Cote d'azur"](#)**

Click on the above link to order or to read a fairly in-depth review. Cost \$15. I bought it.

**Bomb thrown from here->**

