

MEDITERRANEAN

SIGGY AND HEATHER | TRIP AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN | SUNDAY, 9 JUNE 2013

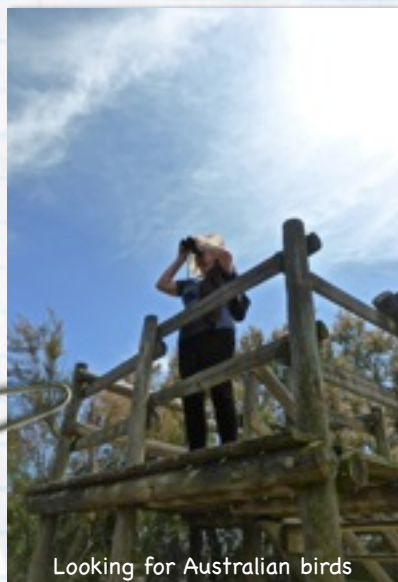
The Rhone

Avignon is located on the banks of the Rhone. It was the papal seat for about 70 years in the 13th century and is ringed by 4.3 kms of walls. Our caravan park is on an island in the river, a stones throw from this massive structure. The aim of today was to get out early and experience some of this waterside tourist hot spot. This required us to cycle down to the bridge and cross over. The bridge in the picture - Pont St-Benezet - is a little further down stream. It was built in 1185 and half of it was washed away in mid 1600s. The French are obviously just slow with their repairs!

We cycled along the river bank for ages enjoying the passing parade of people and moored house boats. The Rhone was quite swollen with waters from recent heavy rains. Thankfully they happened whilst we were in Corsica.

We visited the walled area and found the route to the higher sections which have been given over to gardens, playgrounds and lookouts. It was very peaceful in this upper section. There were views across the city and to the distant mountains and another fortified town nearby.

By this time, both of us started to think that we ought to stay for the day and visit the papal palace and walk the walls.



Looking for Australian birds



Serious bird stalker

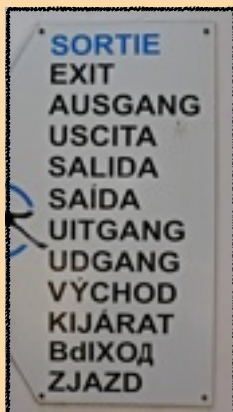


Stork's nest on top if eagle's cage

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A SWIMMING POOL BOAT! Lots of lovely house boats moored on the Rhone river bank but this one takes the cake. It is empty now but there is plenty of water to fill the pool.



NO RISKS

This lot were not taking any risks with people not knowing which way was out!



CELEBRATIONS At first we thought there was a major disaster ahead as a cavalcade of cars passed us with lights flashing and horns honking incessantly. We saw and heard another 8 of these soon after. Saturday appears to be wedding day in Avignon. Very noisy.

SNAPS



GRAND PALACE



FAMOUS FRENCH WORDS



MOORED HOUSE BOATS



CRYPT



HORSE RIDE ANYONE?

But once we came down and had to join the massive Sunday morning throngs in the streets below it was enough for us both to decide that we would leave Avignon behind and continue on to the the Camarague - a wetlands that is essentially the delta of the Rhone.

Our instinct about shunning places overrun with tourists was vindicated. Moving on proved to be a great decision. We found Ster Marie del la Mer.

But first, before getting there, we spent an enjoyable couple of hours walking around the Pont du Gau Ornithological Park. The Camargue is home to a huge bird population. The park has 7 kms of walking tracks that took us past many water birds - mainly pink flamingoes. We sat for ages watching their antics.

When on one of the observation towers we were lucky enough to spot some of the white horses that are famous in this part of the country. They apparently thrive in the wetlands. They are no more than about 13 hands high and are used extensively these days to provide horse rides for tourists. There were many places offering horse rides in the area but after seeing them walking one after the other through the sand dunes, Heather decided that this was not the day to pay for a ride.

After we found our park for the night, again on the water's edge just outside of town, we rode into Ster Marie del la Mer to investigate why the guide books rave about this particular place.

By this time it was about 4.30 pm but the docks and beaches were crowded with people. What an interesting place. The buildings are predominantly white with the usual terracotta roofs, but they were nothing like the medieval villages we have seen of late. There is a very strong spanish influence here. So strong in fact that they have a bull ring in the centre of town. They breed the bulls in the wetlands and then do mock fights with them. The "toreadors" leap around, apparently trying to get as close to the bulls as possible - but not too close of course. No harm, apparently except frustration, is done to the animals. Heather would have liked to see a "fight". I was not so sure. None were on anyway, so it was not a question I had to consider.

The town itself is a fabulous place. The main old feature was a church - of course. It really did look great outside but once we went inside - wow.

In a crypt below the alter there was a spot to light candles and leave messages. Heather surmised that they were for Saint Sara - alah "Letters to Juliet" - if you have ever seen that movie. There were some bones in a glass container, a dummy of "the saint" (richly dressed) and memorials to many people. It looked to mean a lot to some people.

What interested me was that you could actually walk on the chapel roof (and be closer to God) but only if you paid.



Ster Marie del la Mer



PHOTOS



Ster Marie del la Mer



Merry Go Round in Avignon main square



Flamingo huddle



Avignon's Papal Palace



Ster Marie del la Mer



Pretty in pink