Day 6:

We are back along the Rhône in the double town of Tournon-sur-Rhône and Tain-l’Hermitage, separated by the river. We are in the northern part of the Côtes-du-Rhône wine region. Here, the 45th north parallel, like in Bordeaux and Oregon, is supposed to be the ideal balance line for wines. The Reds are easy to understand here: Syrah is the only grape varietal accepted, and its birthplace!

Hermitage, Crôzes Hermitage, Saint Joseph, Tain l’Hermitage… if you find these wine labels at home, those reds have to be 100% Syrah. This is also where finally the word “Côtes” makes sense.

“Le mot du jour”: “côte” = hill, slope (it can also mean coast, or rib...). “Côtes-du-Rhône” literally means “hills of the Rhône”, but in Provence the valley was just flat. It is no longer the case here. Terraced vineyards slope down towards the river, making it impossible to use machine to tend the vines.
**Rencontre:** I was lucky to meet on some occasions Dana and Quentin: “le cheval et son maître” (the horse and its master). The slopes are so steep here in the vineyards that the soil can only be turned using real horse power. It takes time, training and a lot of patience for a man like Quentin, who is hired by the different wineries, to work these narrow rows. It is so peaceful to hike in the terraced vineyards, that it makes you almost philosophical to watch nature, man and animal interacting to produce some wonderful wines...

But enough about wine (for now), let’s talk about food; let’s talk “chocolat”! The company “Valrhona” (on the Rhône Valley) was founded there in the 1920s after the industrialization of chocolate making. Valrhona invented the concept of dark chocolate, using more than 70% cocoa, and is the provider of the best pastry chefs, not just in France, but in the world. They have a cooking school here in Tain-l’Hermitage, but also one in Versailles, Brooklyn, and Tokyo. So time to get our hands dirty: tempering chocolate for chocolate bars, “chouquettes” (oh that’s another French delight with no calories...), “rose des sables” (easy for kids to make), chocolate fondant (like chocolate lava cake), and more...
Anne is one of the teachers at Valrhona, she left the world of business to work with her passion: food. She is friendly and her love for cooking is contagious. Even those who usually do not get their fingers greasy join in. For today, join me in drooling while checking her website:


Bon appétit!
Day 7:

I called Lyon home for four years, after having lived 13 years abroad. It's the second or third biggest city in France (behind Paris and maybe Marseille, depending if counting the population within the city limits or the extended city). I am not a city person, I love guiding in Paris, but I would not live there. Lyon with “only” half million inhabitants, two rivers and two hills has plenty of nature to offer though and we loved living there.

The two hills are nicknamed “la colline qui travaille” (the working hill) and “la colline qui prie” (the praying hill). Let’s ride the funicular to the latter one.

The official name of this hill is “Fourvière”, after “forum vetus” as this is where the first forum in Roman times used to be. If we go back to the 1st century AD, Paris (Lutecia) was not the capital of “Gaul” (name of France at the time), but Lyon, or “Lugdunum”, at the time, was. Confused yet? “Lugdunum”: the “hill of light” as it was facing east. This is where it all started; remember what we saw on day 1 of our trip in Provence?

-First the Celts were present by the river
-Then the Romans conquered and built this city of 50,000 people (Paris was only about 10,000 at the time) dominating on the hill with two theaters, a forum, a circus, and an important aqueduct system -for the villas on the hill. Lugdunum soon became the economic, administrative, and religious capital of Gaul. After Rome, it was quite a big deal for the Empire.
-With the fall of the Roman Empire: People moved down the hill by the river, and barricaded themselves behind a wall. Christianity took on.
-In the Renaissance time, Lyon (no longer Lugdunum, because when you do not use Latin anymore, why bother with such a long difficult name: just shorten it...) became very influential economically, but we will see that tomorrow.

Christianity spread from Lyon in France and it remains very catholic until today, which is quite surprising for a big French city. It was so staunchly Catholic and pro-monarchy during the French revolution that the city lost its name to become a "Ville affranchie". That was the consequence if a city was not following the ideas of the Revolution. You cannot behead a city, so you remove its name...

Let's look quickly at 19th-century French history. During the French revolution, Louis 16 was replaced by the first Republic; but very soon, the first Emperor of France took control. After Napoleon's last exile, three French kings came back to power in the first half of the 1800s. Then we had another revolution, and a new Republic was born. Hurray! Its President: Charles-Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte... who after four years decided he could be like his uncle: Emperor of the French. The Bonaparte had it in their blood... by late 1870 he decided to attack Prussia. Soon the Prussians surrounded Paris and were making their way towards the south of France. Back in Lyon: the very catholic population turned towards Marie. There was a chapel dedicated to her already standing on the old forum hill. If she could save the city from the Prussians, like she saved it from the plague and cholera earlier, a new bigger church would be built to her on that hill. And the Prussians stopped...

The “Basilica of Fourvière” was built as a result. If you have been to the “Sacre Coeur” in Paris (also on top of a hill), you will see the resemblance in architecture, especially in decoration: neo-byzantine style was the trend at the time. Both basilicas were built for similar reasons: the Franco-Prussian war and the rise after the exile of Napoleon III to a new Republic, and therefore a need to protect the Catholic faith from this new political regime.
The inside of the basilica is dazzling: a real jewel box dedicated to Marie. My favorite part, however, is exploring in a small group the upper parts of the church and climbing on its roof offer mesmerizing views over the city.

Le mot du jour: “le bouchon”. If you take out your “dictionnaire”, you will find several entries:

- 1-a stopper/cork on a wine bottle for example
- 2-traffic jam
- 3-old French: a handful of straw
- 4-in Lyon: a traditional restaurant
The last two entries are of interest to us here in Lyon. Before the concept of restaurants as we know them existed, travelers would stop at inns for a set meal and maybe a bed at night. While they would get their stomach “restored” (“restauré” in French...), their horse would get cleaned with a handful of straw or a “bouchon”...

Check out the menus (translated) at this famous bouchon: Les Lyonnais: https://www.restaurant-lyonnais.com/#cartes_etMenus

The specialties here: meat, meat and more meat, and the parts that you might not consider eating!

Last August, I was guiding Rick Steves as he was filming in Lyon. At a bouchon, the waitress told him he had to try one of the local specialties: tripe, which he ended up liking!
Day 8:

When you hear the word “Renaissance” you think of Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Florence, but you should think Lyon. Renaissance is a French word meaning the “rebirth”, rebirth of Antiquity after a thousand years of Middle Ages.

By the mid 15th century, France was at the end of a 116-year long war against the English (more famously known as the Hundred Years war). While the French had been fighting to get back their land (merci Joan of Arc), the Italians were having a cultural, scientific and artistic blast.

After the war was over, how do you think the new king of France kept his subjects busy? By going to war! Where? To Italy now!

Over a 60-year period, three French kings went to war in Italy and brought back what they discovered and loved there: architecture, sculpture, food, gardening…. The last of these three kings will even bring back a famous Italian artist. That’s right, the Mona Lisa was not stolen by the French, but offered to and paid by Francis I, French king who invited Leonardo to France, where he will spend the last three years of his life as the first “Painter, Engineer and Architect of the king”... (The Mona Lisa, we call her “la Joconde” in France, must be quite happy to be left alone from picture snapping tourists those days...).
Anyway, Lyon, which was at the border of the French kingdom and “Italy” at the time, was the base for the court and soon the first French city to embrace this new type of Italian architecture. It then became the gateway to import spices and silk from the Far East.

When the official right to weave silk was given to Lyon, it attracted more merchants, bankers, traders... The fine silk products (woven with silver and gold) were bought by the Church and the nobility.
Many Renaissance buildings were erected in a short time in a neighborhood that was so coveted that there soon was no more room to build. This led to a specificity of Lyon. Our word of the day:

**“Le mot du jour”: “traboules” comes from latin [trans] and [ambulare]: to walk through.**

There are about 200 of these passageways in the Old Lyon, the neighborhood by the Saône river (tributary to the Rhône), which is the biggest Renaissance quarter in Europe after Venice. Traboules have been used for several purposed in time: to cross quickly from one street to another; to seek protection from the elements, it sometimes rain here; during WWII, the Resistance fighters could escape from the Nazis using them...

The longest *Traboule* crosses four buildings and has three courtyards; let’s discover it with Rick!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlIF4VI83Bg

There is so much to talk about in Lyon. Yesterday, we discovered the “praying hill” of Fourvière, but you can also find many “traboules” on the second hill of Lyon. The “working hill” was developed for the silk workers as old convents with tall ceilings came handy to host the 12-feet high Jacquard looms (Jacquard was from Lyon). Today, the Croix Rousse, official name of this neighborhood, has a different atmosphere, fewer tourists and more locals and still tells the story of silk.
Lyon is not the capital of France, but I always tell my travelers that it bears more capital titles than Paris...

- Capital of Gaul
- Capital of Christianity
- Capital of Renaissance and silk
- Capital of Gastronomy (we have not mentioned Chef Paul Bocuse....)
- Capital of Resistance (official title given by Charles De Gaulle)
- Capital of Light! (the Lumière brothers are from Lyon and we have a wonderful light festival every winter...)

There is a lot to discover and enjoy in Lyon!
MORE TRAVEL 12-day tour from Provence to Burgundy

Day 9:

Today let’s learn about a love story that could make a good Hollywood movie. Meet a girl with a certain family background: Marguerite of Austria.

- Her grandfather: Charles the Bold, last Duke of Burgundy. Burgundy used to be more than wine and Dijon mustard; its territory used to stretch all the way north to Bruges.
- Her daddy: the Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg...
- Her nephews: Charles Quint (whom she will raise) and Francis I (future king of France, mentioned yesterday).

All this genealogy puts her at the center of a political game in 15-16th century Europe. And what a game:

1-At the age of 3, Marguerite is promised to the future king of France and is raised in the Loire Valley, but at 11 she is repudiated because the French kingdom has a new expansion plan requiring new wedding arrangements...

2-So as a good political pawn she is married to the infant of Spain, the son of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon (you know those two). But Don Juan, her husband, dies when she is just 17...

3-Let's try again: she is then married to Philibert the Fair, Duke of Savoy (Savoy at the time stretches from southern Burgundy, where we are, to Geneva-Nice and Torino). She is 21. Three years later, he will die hunting game.
MORE TRAVEL 12-day tour from Provence to Burgundy

Marguerite will refuse to marry again, but will become regent of Netherlands at the death of her brother.

Shall we make a TV series about her life? Born Princess of Burgundy, promised to be Queen of France, almost Queen of Spain, Duchess of Savoy, and Regent of Netherlands...

What did she leave behind for us to see? A real Taj Mahal in Burgundy: The Royal Monastery of Brou. She devoted the rest of her life to building a monastery and a church for her last husband whom she will join there for eternity. 
[http://www.monastere-de-brou.fr/en/Explore/Video](http://www.monastere-de-brou.fr/en/Explore/Video)

Did you like the place? This posthumous declaration of love in Flamboyant Gothic art was voted in 2014 as the **Favorite Monument of the French**.
“Qu’est-ce que c’est?” (What is that?) 75% of the French spend their long summer vacation in France. Shall we make “Chauvinisme” “le mot du jour”?

When you come to France, Italy, or Spain from North America, you explore almost through the entire country in just two weeks. The French take two weeks off to explore in depth a region of their own country. It’s as if they were traveling to a different country, but the language remains the same; the food and wine will not disappoint, but scenery will change from their own region.

For a few years now, every June in preparation for the summer vacation, we have had a TV show called “le village préféré des Français”, a bit like Miss America or Miss France where the Miss is a French Village. As it was a hit, a new contest was created for the “Favorite Monument” of the French. The first contest was in 2014 and Le Monastère Royal de Brou won!

It seems that they have stopped running the favorite monument contest, but are still doing the favorite village. Be careful, this is not the “plus beau village de France” label we learned about on Day 4. For this contest the French vote, it is not a label based on size or historic landmarks. But it brings a lot of advertising and tourists to the selected village!
Which village would you vote for in 2020?

Here is the list of 14 towns to choose from. You can Google the village name (region name in parenthesis). Feel free to share your vote and put it on your bucket list for your next trip to France. I already know which one I am voting for. Easy to guess if you know where I am originally from!

- Montpeyroux (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes)
- Chablis (Bourgogne-Franche-Comté)
- Pont-Aven (Bretagne)
- Trôo (Centre-Val de Loire)
- Cargèse (Corse)
- Hunspach (Grand-Est)
- Pierrefonds (Hauts-de-France)
- Montfort-l’Amaury (Île-de-France)
- Les Anses-d’Arlet (Martinique)
- Giverny (Normandie)
- Aubeterre-sur-Dronne (Nouvelle-Aquitaine)
- Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges (Occitanie)
- Ménerbes (Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur)
- Batz-sur-Mer (Pays de la Loire)
“La recette du jour”: (recipe of the day) In anticipation of the weekend, here is a recipe that was nicknamed by one of my travelers: the “Sugar Pizza”!

The medieval hill town of Pérouges claims this recipe: “la galette de Pérouges”.

“Galette” can refer to many types of round shaped goodies:

- In Brittany, it’s the savory version of crêpe made with buckwheat flour
- On the Mont Saint Michel, it is a butter cookie
- In Pérouges, just 45minutes east of Lyon, it is a light sugar and lemon tart

Even the New York Times has its recipe!

https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/9679-galette-de-perouges
MORE TRAVEL 12-day tour from Provence to Burgundy

Happy Easter weekend!

www.virginiemoretravel.com