

Europe

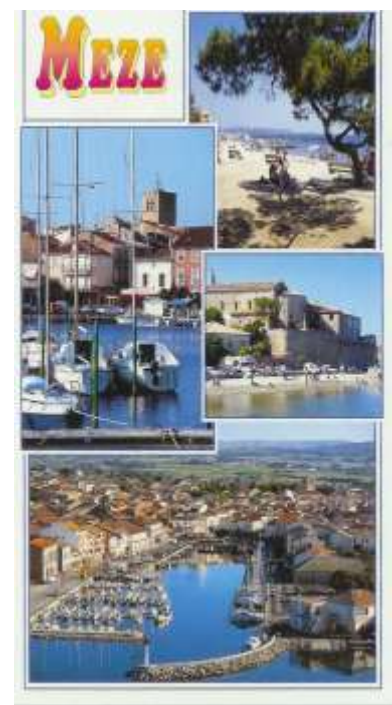
March 22-April 20, 2005

This is the story of our spring trip to the [Canal du Midi](#), [Provence](#), [Malta](#), and [Paris](#) in 2005.

Wednesday, March 23 - We arrived in Paris and began waiting for the train to the South. When its arrival time came, we were informed that it was thirty minutes late. Well, it ended up being three hours late to [Beziérs](#). Hertz had closed an hour earlier so we were unable to pick up our rental car and had to spend seventy-five euros (about ninety-eight dollars) for a taxi ride to our hotel in [Cap d'Agde](#). Oh, I forgot to mention that it was raining like crazy.

Thursday, March 24 - I had to take a taxi to the station in [Agde](#) and catch a train back to Beziérs. By the time I got there, Hertz had already rented our car so I walked around until I found a Budget car rental agency. They had a nice car which I rented. Meanwhile, we were expecting Tom and Angelique and the kids to arrive around four o'clock that afternoon via Air France. Their travel agent had booked the flight in Malta with Air Malta to Paris then Air France from Paris to Beziérs. Well, somehow Air France didn't have their reservation in their computer system and they had to wait for another flight. To make a long story short, they didn't get to Beziérs until about ten-thirty that night. Whew!

Friday, March 25 - Finally, we started our vacation. We all piled into the one rental car and drove to a little seaside town called [Mèze](#). We found a restaurant ([l'Ambere Marine](#)) and had a great lunch. You can see by the picture below that Cindy and I were very satisfied. After lunch, we drove along the Mediterranean back to the hotel where we celebrated Genevieve's sixth birthday.



Saturday, March 26 - We packed up all our gear in the car, hired a taxi, and drove to [Crown Blue Line](#) to pick up our boat. We got there early so we could have lunch at their café and then I took the rental car back to Beziérs. While I was away, the rest of the crew loaded our gear onto the boat with Captain Tom in charge (as seen below). After being checked out on the boat operation, we left the harbor and the adventure began.



Sunday, March 27 (Easter) - We made it to our first stop at [Villeneuve-lès-Beziérs](#) where we spent the night. Here's what we saw Sunday morning.



When the lock opened, we were on our way to seven locks of [Fonsérannes](#). It was a beautiful day as you can see from this picture. The kids got a chance to get behind the wheel (see Captain Genevieve below).



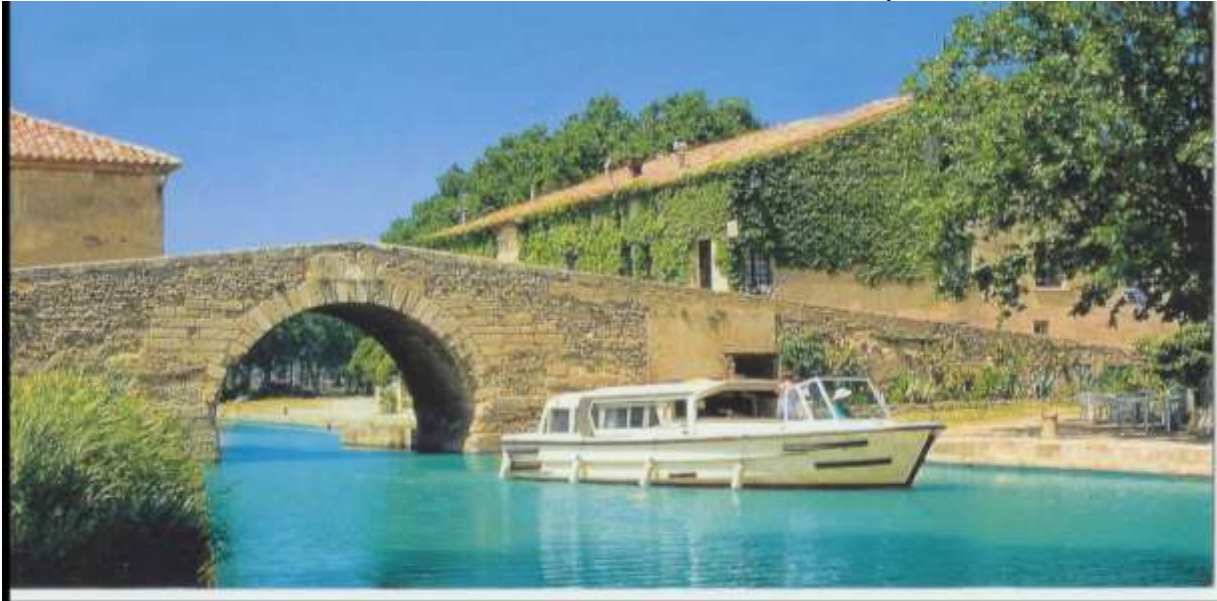
Then, the time came. Here was the massive lock. Cindy and I managed the lines through all seven locks and it was quite a workout. We were glad when it was over.

Here's an aerial view of the locks (notice the four boats in the first lock on the right which is where we entered):



Next stop was for lunch at [Colombiers](#) where we found Chateau de Colombiers (closed) that was serving a special meal for Easter. It started with an "amuse bouche" of pigeon mousse, then langoustine with asparagus and foie gras beignets for appetizers, tres pesches (three different kinds of fish) and gigot d'agneau for the main course, cheese quenelles, and finally chocolate fondant with chocolate espices for dessert. WOW! Next stop [Capestang](#).

Monday, March 28 - Weather is beautiful but a bit chilly. We're on a stretch of the canal where there are no locks until after our lunch stop at [Somail](#).

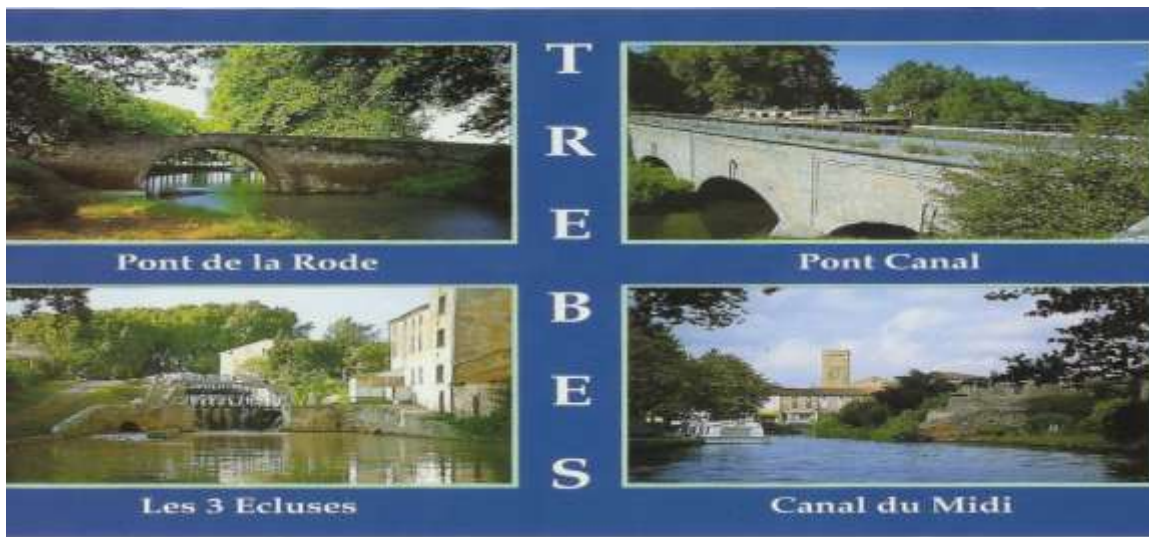


After lunch, we proceeded toward our next stop, [Homps](#). While preparing to go through a lock, Cindy fell while jumping onto a dock and badly hurt her arm. She kept it still and when we got to Homps, we took a taxi to [Lèzignan](#) where there was a small hospital with an emergency room. The doctor took x-rays and discovered that she had broken the radial head of the bone in the forearm which is in the elbow. He wanted us to go to a larger hospital in Narbonne to see an orthopedic specialist but it was already late at night and we had no way to contact Tom on the boat because my cell phone battery had died. So, we arranged to meet the specialist the next day in Lèzignan, where he fortunately visited twice a week. We called another taxi and went back to the boat. Homps would now be our home for at least another day.



Tuesday, March 29 - I decided to rent a car in case we needed to go to Narbonne for surgery on Cindy's arm after seeing the orthopedic surgeon. We have shore power now, thanks to [Captainier's](#) and Don Macphail, the base manager for Connoisseur in Homps (closed). We had lunch at [Restaurant les Tonneliers](#), then Cindy and I went to Lèzignan to see the orthopedic surgeon. At about five o'clock that afternoon we saw him and he said Cindy didn't need surgery but put on a full cast to replace the partial one she had. The trip to the emergency room was one hundred thirty-four euros (about one hundred seventy-five dollars). We dropped off the rental car and took another taxi back to the boat where I celebrated with some martinis.

Wednesday, March 30 - We finally said au revoir to Homps. Cindy seems to be doing well. Today is Olivia's third birthday but I don't think we can do much to celebrate. We had lunch on the boat (see picture of Tom and Angelique below). It was really windy today and I've had a bad lock day. At the Fonfile lock I threw the line into the water twice trying to get it ashore. Maneuvering the boat at Trebes was a disaster but arrived there early. It rained really hard and we decided to get takeout pizza for dinner.



Thursday, March 31 - We arrived at [Carcassonne](#) a little before lunchtime. We decided to pay eleven euros to use a city dock (bad decision) but were able to find a launderette where we could wash some clothes. Tom decided to have lunch at a place he found (another bad decision) and they served us after everyone else had been served, I guess because they wanted to serve their regulars first, so we were kind of late getting out of Carcassonne and didn't get to see much.

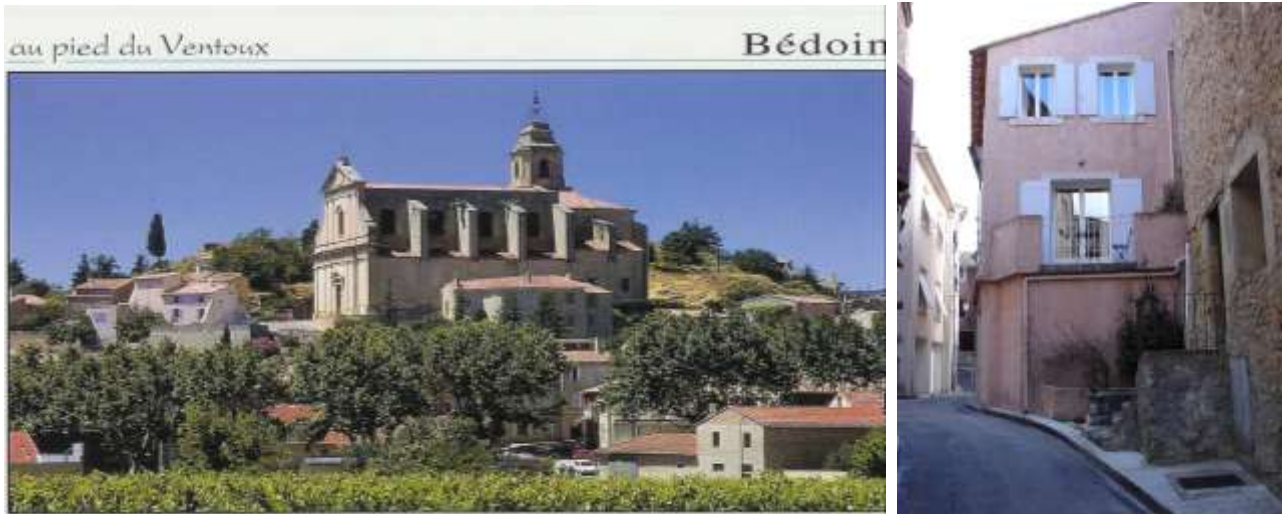
I didn't even get a postcard, but I picked up this card at a little village called [Villeséquan](#) (it was the only one I could find). Then we proceeded to the Beteille lock where we spent the night.



Friday, April 1 - We started our final voyage to [Castelnaudary](#). We made it through sixteen locks on the way but made it with time to spare. We got cleaned up and found [Centre et du Lauragais](#), a great hotel restaurant where they had the best cassoulet any of us had ever eaten (and Tom's tried a lot of them). It was great. Walking back to the boat, the wind picked up and it was difficult to walk. It was a little scary, with the kids and all, but we made it.

Saturday, April 2 - It's really windy again today. We turned in the boat to Crown Blue Lines. Tom rented a car to drive back to Marseille so he gave us a lift to the train station in Castelnaudary. We decided to take some of the supplies from the boat with us to the house in Provence so we needed the lift. Lugging all that extra stuff through the train stations in Castelnaudary, Montpellier, and Avignon was a

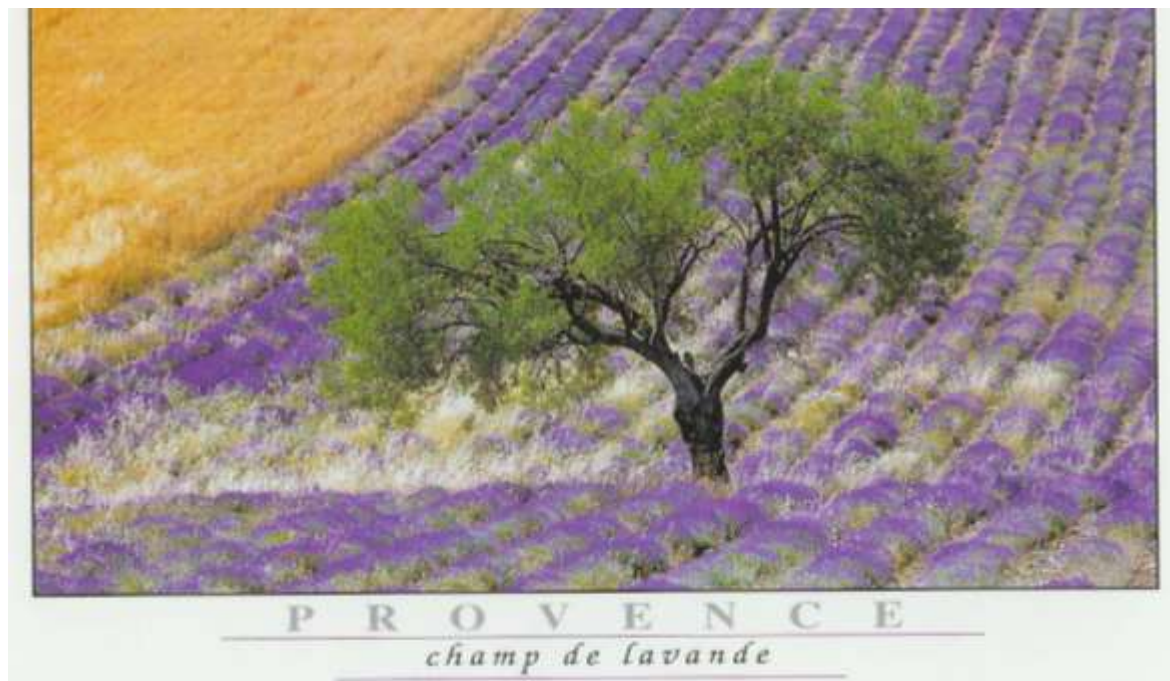
real pain though. Anyway, we finally got to [Avignon](#) on the train but found that we were at the wrong station to pick up the rental car from Herz. It turned out that it was at the TGV station, which was all the way across Avignon from the station where we were. So, another taxi ride and a long wait finally got us the car. After that experience I decided to return the car at the airport in Marseille next Saturday when we fly to Malta. We finally arrived at la Maison Rose, the house in [Bédoin](#). It was on a narrow little street which I made the mistake of trying to turn



onto. I quickly realized that I wasn't going to be able to make it so I backed up. What I didn't see behind me was a cast iron downspout, which I backed into, breaking the taillight assembly on the car. Oh well! We parked down the street from the house, unloaded the car and went to look for a place to have dinner. We found [l'Escapade](#), a restaurant on the main street, and ordered dinner but we were too tired to finish it. We asked for a "sac de chien" (doggy bag) but were told that they couldn't do that. We were really disappointed because the dish was a great beef daube and we anticipated having it at the house for dinner one night. They finally rigged up some way to give it to us and surprised us by bringing it as we left.

Sunday, April 3 - It's kind of cold, wet day so we decided to stay in, get the house organized, do laundry, and rest. Also, I had developed a bad cold (probably from the wind yesterday and the day before). The weather did get better during the day and I was able to get this picture of [Mount Ventoux](#) from the terrace. Later that evening, we went to a restaurant down the street that specialized in fried sardines, which we had after an excellent soupe de poisson (fish soup). What a great way to end the day.



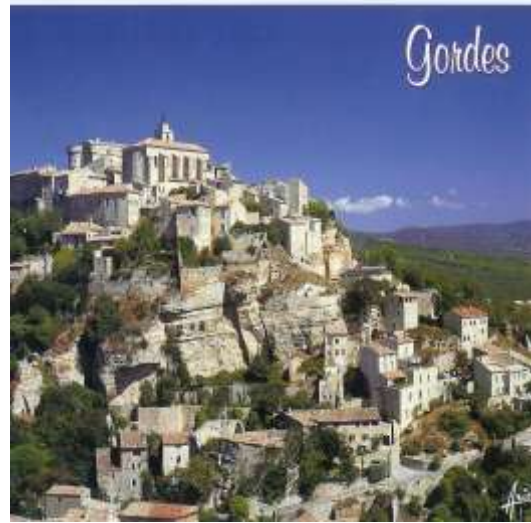


Monday, April 4 - I went to the local marché (market) that's held in Bédoin every Monday. There were all kinds of things from clothes to food, even housewares. Of course, lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, hams, sausages, even a poissoniere (fish market). I bought some fresh eggs for breakfast tomorrow and some CDs to play in our car (Edith Piaf seemed appropriate). Later that morning, we drove to Sault to have lunch at [Le Provençal](#). We drove back through the [Gorge de la Nesque](#).



After we returned to the house, we heated up the daube we brought home from l'Escapade and served it with some noodles.

Tuesday, April 5 - After a breakfast of fresh scrambled eggs and smoked salmon, we drove to the beautiful hillside town of [Gordes](#). We walked around for a while then stopped at Le Pause for a pastis and a kir.

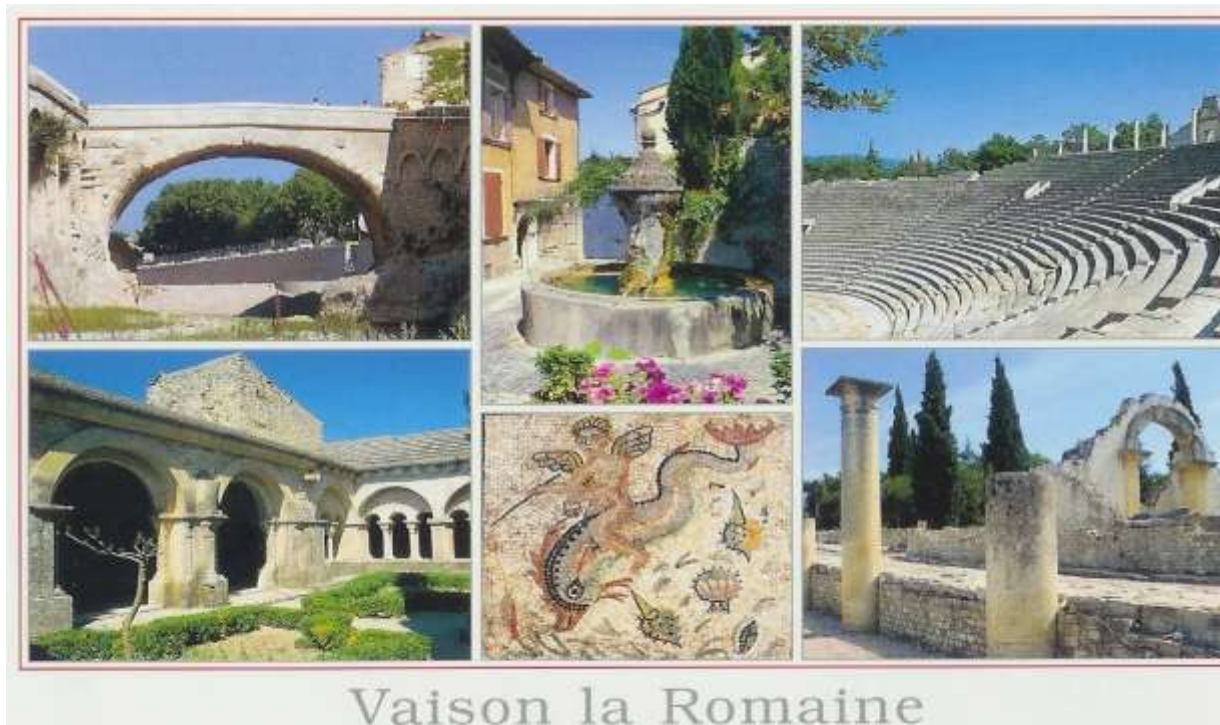


Next, we drove to [Roussillon](#) which is another hillside town built on ochre soil so the whole town appears red.



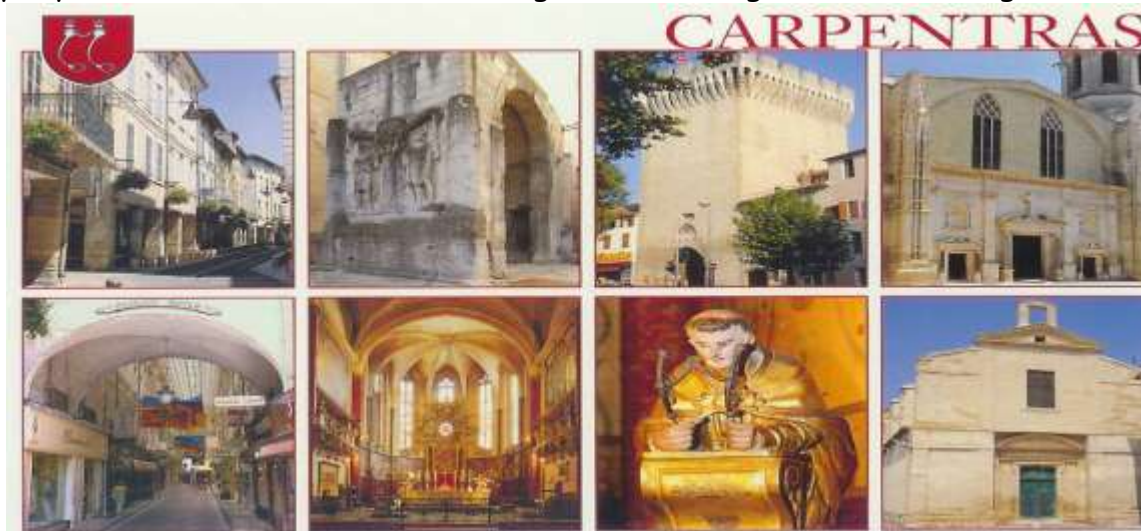
Wednesday, April 6 - It was a beautiful day and we drove to [Vaison la Romaine](#) to see the Roman ruins there. On the way, we stopped for lunch at [Auberge d-Anaïs](#), a great little restaurant (now a hotel) where we had a prix fixe lunch on the patio consisting of a great salad, stewed rabbit, and a glass of red wine for only nineteen euros (about twenty-four dollars).

Vaison la Romaine is a French town built around a Roman ruin which is a good sized town itself. The ruins are preserved as a big museum.



When we returned to the house, we attempted to make dinner by roasting some chicken legs in a ceramic coated cast-iron Dutch oven that was there. Being unfamiliar with the oven, and unable to understand the French instructions, we inadvertently set it on a clean cycle, which is a very high temperature. The dish turned out alright, just a little overdone, but there was some damage to the cooking utensil. It's still useable though.

Thursday, April 7 - Slept in and had a leisurely day to try to get over my cold. Went to [Carpentras](#) in the afternoon to find a working phone to call about the Visa car rental insurance (I later found out that Herz had charged me for insurance anyway so I wasn't liable for the damage to the taillight). After calling, we went to



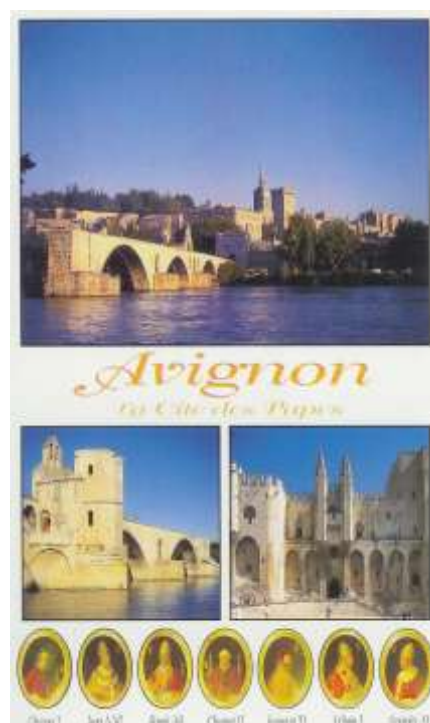
have a drink then started looking for three restaurants we had read about. One was from an old Green guide, the other two were from our new Michelin guide. All three were out-of-business.

We went back to Bédoin and found a restaurant that had fondue Bourguignon (whose name I didn't remember) but it had to be reserved twenty-four hours ahead. We reserved one for Friday night and searched for another place to eat. We found another little place ([La Gousse d'Ail](#)) which was very good, and very cheap. We didn't eat in every restaurant there but I'm amazed that every one of those in which we ate was really good.

Friday, April 8 - Cindy has a cold now. It's kind of a rainy day so we just stayed in and read. I finished Bill Bryson's book "A Short History of Nearly Everything". We had the fondue for dinner and it was exceptional.

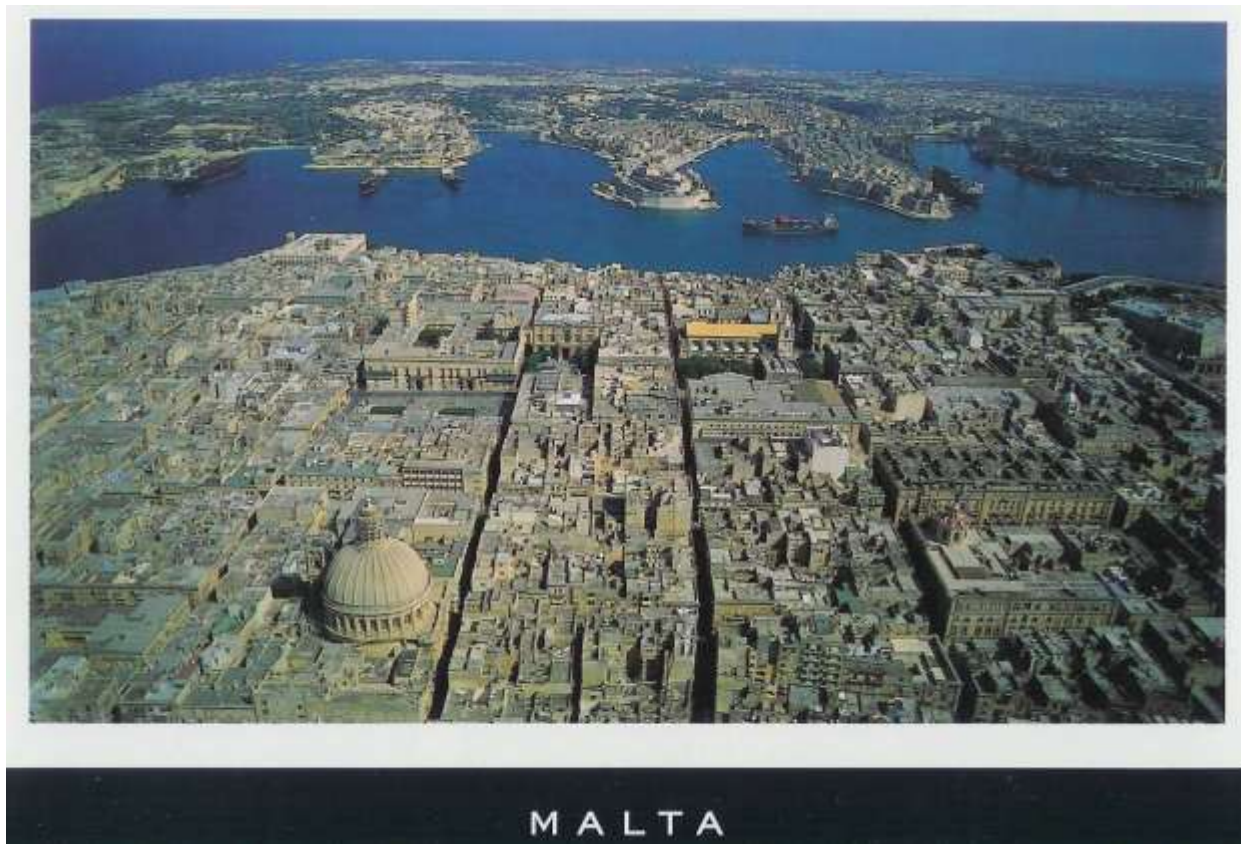
Saturday, April 9 - Packed up and left the house (au revoir, La Maison Rose). We really enjoyed our stay there. We drove to [Avignon](#), had lunch near the Palais des Papes (closed), then checked into Hôtel de Blauvac (closed). After settling in, we walked around to find available restaurants for dinner and found [Hiely Lucullus](#), which turned out to be a great choice. The food and service were excellent and it was very near the hotel (the wind was blowing like crazy).

Sunday, April 10 - We drove from Avignon to [Aix](#) and strolled down the Cours Mirabeau looking for a place to eat lunch. We found a very nice sidewalk café but didn't really have enough time to stay in Aix. After lunch we



drove to the Marseille airport and dropped off the rental car. Our flight to Malta left right on time and we had a pleasant flight over. When we got to Malta, Tom was waiting for us. We picked up our rental car and followed Tom back to the house but he hadn't anticipated some construction along the way and

we got a little lost. That was very unusual for Tom. He knows Malta like the back of his hand. When we got to the house, said our hellos, had a few martinis, and ate a great dinner that Angelique prepared, we were ready for a good night's sleep.



Monday, April 11-Sunday, April 16 - We didn't do a lot of sightseeing this time in Malta. Mostly we visited, played with the kids, etc., nothing special. We did have several good meals at the Wight house as well as some good restaurants. We had dinner at Angelique's parent's house (Joe and Mary). Her two brothers (Ivan and Aaron) and their wives (Mandy and Bettina, respectively) and kids (Francesca, Sebastian and Nicky) were there. We made pork and chile stew and Joe made a lamb curry.



Sunday, April 17 - We said our goodbyes and flew to Paris. Our flight got in pretty late in the evening so, by the time we got to [Hôtel Parc St-Séverin](#), it was almost ten o'clock. We went to Le Bar à Huitres (closed) to have some oysters and soupe de poisson. By the time we got to bed it was almost midnight.

Monday, April 18 - The weather was really nice in the morning. We got dressed and went to check out some restaurants for dinner that night. After walking around for a while, we stopped for lunch. When we finished eating, it started to rain. We walked in the rain until we found a restaurant called La Rôtisserie d'en Face (which closed in December 2016) where we had dinner later. It was filled with Americans and I was dismayed to hear some of the stupid things they were saying. Oh well, it's Paris.

Tuesday, April 19 - Au revoir, Paris!

