

SOUTHERN FRANCE.....

September 5-20

I'm going to start off my calling this trip the French Fiasco! Just about everything that could go wrong, did go wrong. It started out to be a driving trip and that might have worked just fine but my friend and I decided to not try driving and take public transportation. Why not, most of Europe has excellent trains, planes and metro systems. THAT turned out not to be true in France. It actually surprised me at how old and cumbersome the whole process was around Southern France. Between the strikes, the not working lines, the lack of connection choices, the very lack of escalators or lifts— stairs everywhere and miscommunication —and/or lack of information from almost everyone, we spent more time traveling than seeing the sites. Made for some long, difficult days.

The itinerary started in Nice— plans for a cruise on the Riviera, travel down to Monaco for a day. Travel up the coast and spend some time in the little towns of EZE and Villa Franche. And then maybe a day trip to Portofino or Cinque Terra. Little of that happened. Cruise didn't pick us up. New choice the next day was cancelled due to high winds on the water. New choice to take a train didn't work— trains were on strike. After wasting time each day, we settled on a new tour that would drive us up and down the coast. That tour decided to stop at a perfume factory and waste most of our time to see anything else. Literally 30 minutes in Eze, no Villa Franche at all and only one hour in Monaco. That being said, Monaco was a disappointment. Since I had arranged most of this itinerary, I felt a lot of the weight when things didn't go well. But okay....done with Nice, off we traveled across the country to Caen. This was supposed to be a good hub for doing the little towns in the Normandy region.

What should have been a two hour drive distance, took six hours by train. Got there only to find out all the other trains to our destinations, were just as difficult to organize. The region of Normandy was fantastic. There were more American flags flying there than I see in my own country! I wish we had had more time to check out the area. We were blessed to get a great tour of Omaha Beach and see the WW11 museum. Fascinating history! We also spent a little time in the beautiful town of Bayeux and saw it's awesome tapestries. But time fleeting, we missed the opportunity to see the little towns of Honfluer or Dinan both of which sounded lovely. But maybe, just seeing the gratitude and history of what America did for this region was worth it all.

Our last must-see was a trip down to Mount Saint Michelle. Second only to Paris, it is quite a tourist attraction in France. One would "think", there would be easy transportation. But NO. What should have been a 2 1/2 drive, took six hours. We got there with two train connections and a bus. Again, one would "think" the same connector bus would work for our return. NO WAY. Literally six blocks to a bus, take a train an hour in the wrong direction to connect to another train back to our original train station before we could head homeward. Traveling along, our next destination was back to CDG, layover and take a tour the next day to Giverny Gardens. Again, a BIG tourist destination, only 1 1/2 hours from Paris, what could go wrong? Between not working metro's, no train connections, no bus....we had the option of Uber or a Taxi. Uber was cheaper— a mere \$165. I must say, it was worth it....fast and efficient, we were there to see the glory of this most special site. Coming back....we expected the same process but NO. The mayor had decided that no private cars could travel into the city due to Climate Change, so our only choice of transportation to get home was a Taxi. That was double the price of the Uber! It soon became a very expensive trip to see flowers! By now my friend was almost crying to go home early.....I agreed and was grateful at this point, to maybe be able to save our friendship.

As it turned out, it was good that we decided to travel home a day early as the next day— the flight cancelled. OMG, exhausting complications at every turn. Added to all this was the lack of help by the locals who worked at tourist desks or train stations, etc. Very few cared or understood or were of much help. All in all, not my best travel experience. In sharing my story with others who have traveled in Southern France, they ALL— I mean ALL— have similar horror stories. But "the journey" is half the fun. And now a good story.