

Published as part of Traveller's Tales
Grapevine - Volume 36, Issue 1
Perth International Dance
December 2024

Pam Massey - A Trip to France 2024

Off I went on my sojourn to France for a kibbutz reunion in Normandy. 19 of us, now 3 generations of old volunteers (none of us Jewish!)

We stayed in a converted old water mill that has become a 4 storey house big enough to accommodate us all comfortably -and at the end of a track with no neighbours to disturb! We have had reunions over the years in every country we each represent: England Australia Sweden Germany Holland....and now we have run out of representative countries!



France happens to be my favourite Western European country, but I wasn't going for just one week, so contacted my English friends & said I'd be in France if anyone would like to join me....And so they did!

I flew Emirates to Nice with a friend from Perth. We had 3 days together there, & then she went off to Monet's garden & I went to La Rochelle half way up the west coast, where I met 5 friends from England. My oldest friends, from ages 7, 13 & 21!



La Gare at La Rochelle

Then on up to Rennes, Brittany, where I met my French dance friend, (who I went to Gennitines International dance festival with). Sadly we only had 24 hrs together- Just time enough in the olde ville to devour a galette savoury crepe traditionally with wholemeal flour, followed by a sweet crepe with plain flour...



Pam and Jo at Gennitines - 2010



Jo and PaM - The 2024 edition

We drove NN/E to a fascinating small medieval town called Fougères, one of many fascinating medieval towns & villages I was to see on this journey.....

...and then on to the kibbutz reunion in St James, Normandy, from where Jo returned to Brittany & I stayed for a week with my kibbutz friends, during which time we visited Mt St Michel & St Malo....

Other than the fact that many of our group got covid, it went perfectly. I didn't catch it!!

Next stop St Lo, an hour further NNE up Normandy, where I met 3 friends who came over from Dorset where I'd lived when caring for mum. One night there, then up to the north coast of France to small pretty fishing towns along the coast, ending in Cherbourg, where I saw Debbie & Chris off on the ferry back to Dorset, which was a very weird feeling, knowing that shortly they would be landing 45mins from where I lived for 10 years....!

Next morning Sally & I caught the train(s) south to Saumur, & stayed in cabin no 24 at a campsite right beside the Loire, where a couple from mum's village were staying in their mobile home. She & I were in the village handbell ringing team together.....



Bell Ringers



Saumur is another medieval town, & it has a Chateau as well as the famous river!! We hired bikes....

Then I caught 3 trains via Bordeaux to Agen, where a couple I met & connected with in NZ last year have a Gite nearby....I stayed with them for 2 delightful nights, & their bed was bliss! Like sleeping on a marsh-mellow! They took me to another delightful medieval village called Penne D'Argenais. Besides being ancient & attractive, it was NOT crawling with tourists! We had it almost to ourselves!

From there I caught the train to Arles back down the bottom end of France. Here I met up with Sally again & after 2 nights around this interesting town we hired a car & headed north to the Vaucluse region of Provence. I say this was my very favourite part of France....but now I have so many favourite parts! We based ourselves in an air B&B for several days, & drove around from one beautiful village to another: Fontaine du Vaucluse, Gordes, & the extra-beautiful Rousillon....Here I had the best smoothie EVER!..... A lavender one!



NZ 'gitters'



Arles



Lavander - how smooth!



Eventually we returned the car to Arles where we stayed in a 149yr old chateau for a couple of nights. It had character, but was a bit shabby on the outside - Reminded me of the Adams Family house. I expected 'Lerch' to come out & meet us!

Then finally train from Arles back along the south coast to NICE! And very nice it was too!!

I had a Eurail train pass for all of this journey, & it worked well & was a cheaper way of travelling than buying individual tickets on the day. Booking trains on line for a luddite like me, was very stressful, but once aboard it was a breeze. The Fat Controller came through & scanned what needed to be scanned & went on his merry way....

My return flight Nice-Dubai-Perth took the scenic route at about 37000 feet above the Black Sea... It was the night Iran decided to fire missiles towards Israel....!

We did a u-ee & turned around & were told we were going to land in Istanbul.....Then we were told Istanbul runway was too full of other diverted planes....so we flew on to BUDEPEST!! There we sat on the tarmac for 2 hrs & refueled, as you might expect!! I'd never been to Hungary, but all I saw were a few lights in the darkness.....The man sitting behind me said he'd seen a missile!

We eventually flew back south to Dubai, by which time all of us had missed our connections....

I reckon Dubai airport is about as big as Perth CBD, and it was all heaving with misplaced passengers from various flights, who had all missed a nights sleep en route!

Emirates staff were all brilliant. They had to find us all alternative flights and overnight accommodation in Dubai! I was in a 2hr queue, & the man who served me said he'd been working since 5am & only had water to drink. Yet he was professional, patient, efficient & friendly, as were all the staff I came across.

My hotel room was no 2007!!! - and I was flown home via HONG KONG & another sleepless night there!! (No hotel).

C'est tout. You got the short version!!

Hope you enjoyed the trip!

Pam Massey

November 2024