

DAY 3 – Layers of Slate and Sunshine

Friday, November 7, 2025

Angers between heritage and harmony

We escaped the morning rain entirely—proof, perhaps, that luck favors curious travelers. The skies cleared to reveal patches of blue, and the day unfolded with that soft, autumnal light that makes everything in the Loire shimmer just a little more. Only by late afternoon did the clouds return, bringing an evening rain that turned Angers into a scene from an Impressionist painting—wet cobblestones glowing, reflections dancing in shop windows, and the air alive with the scent of rain on stone.

We began the day with breakfast at the **Odorico Restaurant**, where conversation flowed as easily as the coffee. The eggs were perfectly cooked—or controversially so, depending on who you asked. Perhaps we were all becoming a little French, finding passionate debate even in matters of breakfast.

We reached the striking **Maison Bleue**, an Art Deco masterpiece built between 1927 and 1929 by architect Roger Jusserand, with lavish mosaics by Isidore Odorico. Originally estimated at 70,000 francs, the project swelled to over 300,000—a reminder that beauty, in France, often comes with passion and excess. Its façade—an elegant cascade of beige stone and deep blue enamel—remains a jewel of modern craftsmanship.

We continued where city life gathers—at **Place du Ralliement**, the beating heart of Angers. We admired the grand 19th-century **théâtre** and its sculpted allegories, saw **Galleries Lafayette**, which continues to spark conversation about the arrival of fast fashion in a city proud of its artisans.

From there, we admired the graceful **Hôtel de Pincé**, a Renaissance mansion once home to Jean de Pincé, royal officer and collector. Its sculpted façade, filled with mythological figures and classical motifs, reflected the artistic ambition of its time.

We paused again before the **Maison d'Adam et Ève**, one of France's most elaborate timber-framed houses, dating back to 1419 and adorned with over fifty carved figures—some pious, some mischievous, some delightfully indecent. Angers' slate industry made such structures possible, and the city remains France's largest producer and proudest consumer of the shimmering stone.

We paused at the quirky Boléro building—home during the day to church organist Léo Danidéf, composer of the music for Chaplin's *Modern Times* (titled *Titine*), who famously secured the rights after legal battles.

The nearby **Cathédrale Saint-Maurice** rose above us with its distinctive Plantagenet Gothic lines. Its wide domes and luminous stained glass gave the impression of a sacred space made for music and light rather than austerity.

Angers is the largest slate producer in France—and the country's top slate consumer—supporting its many timber-framed houses, like the *Maison d'Adam* (1419), adorned with 50 statues, some delightfully risqué.

We crossed through the **Musée des Beaux-Arts**, whose tranquil courtyard and gardens offered a lovely contrast between old stones and living art. There we admired the exuberant work of **Niki de Saint Phalle**, her bold “Nanas” celebrating color, joy, and womanhood amidst the gentler tones of the Loire Valley.

Before lunch, Gwen introduced us to a sweet local secret: the **Quernon d'Ardoise**, a chocolate specialty from Angers. Beneath its signature blue coating—meant to resemble the city's slate tiles—lay layers of roasted almond nougatine and smooth praline. The combination of crunch and melt, sweet and nutty, left no doubt why this treat is beloved by locals.

Our tour finished at the mighty Forteresse d'Angers, the medieval castle built by Blanche of Castile in the 13th century. With its 17 massive towers, mile-long walls, and layers of history, it stood as a formidable reminder of the region's strategic importance. Inside is preserved the extraordinary Apocalypse Tapestry, a 14th-century masterpiece and the largest medieval tapestry in the world.

We then gathered at **Pont-Pont**, a lively neighborhood restaurant where the laughter rose as fast as the steam from the kitchen. It was one of those lunches that reminded us how travel bonds people: shared plates, shared stories, and a growing sense of belonging among new friends.

Afterwards, the afternoon opened wide for personal discovery. Some ventured inside the **Forteresse d'Angers** to marvel at the **Apocalypse Tapestry**, the world's largest medieval tapestry, with its vivid depictions of angels, beasts, and celestial visions. Others explored the new **Tapestry Museum**, visited the **Fine Arts Museum**, or indulged in a bit of shopping under the still-bright skies.

By evening, the rain returned. The reflections on the pavement shimmered like silver, and the façades of Angers glowed under their thin veil of drizzle. We reconvened for a gentle stroll to our restaurant, **Le Mail**, the sound of our footsteps mingling with the city's quiet rhythm.

Over dinner, conversation flowed easily, full of warmth and humor. The day had shown us Angers' contrasts—its slate and sunlight, its art and architecture, its deep roots and playful modern heart.

And as the rain tapered off outside, we toasted to another beautiful day in the Loire Valley—proof that even under a gray sky, France never forgets how to shine.