

Day 10 – Carcassonne's Secrets

Friday, November 14, 2025 – The winds of Carcassonne

After a restful night at the Hôtel des Chevaliers, many of us still lingered at our windows, enjoying the rare luxury of waking up to a view of the medieval citadel. The morning felt wonderfully unhurried. Breakfast was a generous spread of fresh breads, local cheeses, and fruit — and for once, we weren't rushing out the door. The late departure set the tone for the day: slower, softer, very much in tune with the southern French way of life.

When we did set out, we were ready to step back into history.

Lydia explained how Carcassonne's origins go back to the Gallo-Roman period, when the first walls were built, and how the city became a stronghold of the Visigoths, then the Trencavel family, before being seized by Simon de Montfort during the Albigensian Crusade. Standing on the ramparts, we imagined the siege of 1209, when the population was expelled and the citadel handed to the French crown. From there, the fortified town became a strategic bastion guarding the border with Aragon until the Treaty of the Pyrenees moved the frontier south.

Inside the Basilica of Saints Nazarius and Celsus, we paused to admire the luminous Gothic stained glass — one of the earliest examples in southern France — and learned how the church marked the transition from Romanesque to Gothic style. Our guide brought the city's past alive.

After two full hours of walking through the citadel's streets, towers, and courtyards, we divided into small groups to explore on our own or taste some of the delicious delicacies Carcassonne has to offer at the crossroads of many cuisines.

We then explored the museum of fine arts, the school museum, walked to Lidl for some chocolate fix, took some well deserved naps after all that wind, and did our laundry, of course.

Towards the end of the afternoon, we indulged in a French tradition, apéritif with drinks and good company, discussing French subjects and tolerance.

As the evening fell on Carcassonne, we set on our way to le 37, a locals' favourite, to savour vegetarian lasagna, or cassoulet, or brandade de morue, and we recounted adventures of a wonderful day — a day that let us savor the past, the present, and the joy of good company.