

Travel Journal – Day 11: Gréoux-les-Bains – Moustiers-Sainte-Marie – Route des Crêtes – Gréoux-les-Bains

A glorious Provençal day awaited us, with the sun shining and the air filled with the scent of herbs and flowers. The Verdon region was ready to reveal its wonders.

We set off from Gréoux-les-Bains in our faithful bus, its windows spotless thanks to Alex's diligent care. The route led us through the Verdon Regional Natural Park, one of France's most dramatic and biodiverse landscapes, crossing the charming villages of Allemagne-en-Provence and Riez, both rich in history and crowned with castles overlooking valleys and lavender fields.

As we approached Moustiers-Sainte-Marie, one of Les Plus Beaux Villages de France, our first glimpse came from a scenic viewpoint, where we took in the village clinging to the cliffs, its chapel perched high above, and the famous golden star suspended between two peaks, said to have been hung in the Middle Ages by a knight in gratitude.

We descended into the village and wandered its quaint, stone-paved streets, meeting Philippe, a local ceramic artist who has revived the art of *faïence*, an ancient tin-glazed pottery technique. With his team, he produces delicate, hand-painted pieces that carry the heritage of the region. We admired his studio and shop, and some of us couldn't resist taking a small piece of Moustiers home.

We browsed the jewellery shops, explored the 12th-century church, observed the source spring bubbling from the rock that gave life to the village, and paused by the stone bridge crossing the water. Everyone had their own small adventure, weaving memories in the maze of this unforgettable place.

Back on the bus, we made a short detour to catch a glimpse of the turquoise waters of Lake Saint-Croix, a man-made reservoir at the mouth of the Verdon Gorges.

Then came one of the most breathtaking drives in France: the Route des Crêtes, a scenic loop above the Gorges du Verdon. This dizzying road clings to the edge of the cliffs, offering spectacular viewpoints, with panoramas plunging down nearly 700 meters (2,300 feet) to the emerald Verdon river below.

Along the way, we passed lavender fields, and the *maquis*—a typical Provençal flora made of wild rosemary, thyme, juniper, broom, and holm oak, a dense and fragrant shrubland found throughout Mediterranean France. The slopes were dotted with wildflowers in pinks, yellows, mauves, and purples, including heather, wild orchids, and irises.

We stopped several times to take in the vistas, spotting eagles and griffon vultures soaring on the thermals. We crossed tunnels carved through the mountains, saw vintage cars purring along the winding roads, and fearless motorcyclists walking right up to the edge of the precipice to take in the view.

After this unforgettable ride, we returned to Gréoux under the same golden sun, happy and full of awe. There was time to enjoy the hotel's facilities—the pool, the spa, the garden, or just a nap in the sun.

Later, we gathered for a lovely *apéritif*, toasting to the day and sharing stories and laughter.

Dinner brought one of the most touching and joyful parts of the evening: we shared the memories of this trip through our five senses.

Touch:

- The cool water on our feet at the lake,
- The softness of the pillows at Hôtel de France.

Taste:

- Juicy cherries,
- Tartiflette and tomato soup in Loriol,
- Sour cherry chocolate,
- The legendary strawberry tiramisu.

Sound:

- The organ playing as if just for us,
- Laughter echoing at the winery,
- Birds singing in the woods,
- Southern fountains bubbling.

Sight:

- The stained glass at Sisteron's chapel,
- The elegant food displays at Galeries Lafayette,
- The rooftops from the department store's terrace,
- The iconic French trees lining the roads,
- Fields of Provence's blue flowers,
- The dramatic cliffside villages,
- The vivid hues of classic cars,
- The golden glow of old-vine champagne.

Smell:

- The warm scent of roses,
- The irresistible aroma of croissants baking in the Annecy kitchens each morning.

It was a moment of shared reflection and joy, highlighting just how much richness, beauty, and emotion this journey had given us. Full of gratitude, we turned in for the night, knowing we had more of Provence to discover tomorrow, before our journey begins to close.