

DAY 4 – Southward to Limousin under welcome clouds

Leaving Angers in Sunday silence

At a very French 8:30 a.m.—when shutters are still drawn and boulangeries only just coaxing croissants from the oven—we rolled out of Hôtel d’Anjou. Sunday in France is for family and long coffees, so the city slipped quietly behind us, its slate-and-tufa façades softened by low, pearly skies. Far from spoiling the trip, the cool drizzle felt like good fortune after a week of July heat—“une petite bénédiction,” as Isabelle the driver said with a grin.

Vineyards, rivers and rural threads

- Loire wine talk. As we crossed the sandy-banked Loire, here are some facts about a region that ships €200 million of wine a year—80 % of it sparkling and white. Chenin Blanc leads the charge (think quince, honeysuckle, vibrant acidity), flanked by Melon de Bourgogne for crisp Muscadet and Sauvignon Blanc for the flinty bite of Sancerre. Reds lean on Cabernet Franc—bright raspberry and a whiff of pencil shavings.
- School without pep rallies. Conversation turned to l’école publique: free from age 2, five stages from maternelle to lycée, long lunch breaks, but hardly any school sports teams—French kids join town clubs instead.
- “La France oubliée.” Wide fields and shuttered hamlets introduced the idea of the forgotten France—rural zones short on doctors, high-speed rail and jobs, yet rich in identity and electoral weight.
- Safeguarding farmland. Gwen explained the SAFER agencies: when countryside property goes up for sale, these public bodies can pre-empt the deal and resell to working farmers, curbing speculation and keeping soils productive. We also discussed subsidies.

Rain streaked the windows as Poitou’s flat croplands slid by—patches of corn, hedged fields, the odd stone windmill that once hid Maquis resistance cells.

A very French rest stop

Our pause near Poitiers yielded electric-car chargers, a wall of artisan jams and—best of all—a bread-vending machine dispensing warm baguettes. Many of us sampled the buttery broyé du Poitou: a giant shortbread scented with orange zest and meant to be shattered and shared.

Onward we crossed the Vienne River and debated nuclear energy: France’s 56 reactors still supply roughly 62–65 % of national electricity, with the long-delayed EPR at Flamanville finally slated for commercial service this year. The state is weighing new EPR2 builds while courting wind, solar and future fusion.

Government “bonus-malus” incentives, we learned, now reward low-emission cars up to €7 000 and penalise models emitting more than 113 g CO₂/km—part of the push to retire diesel and trim urban particulates.

Entering emerald Limousin

Clouds lifted just enough to reveal rolling green quilt-work as we reached Limousin. Tiny fields, stone barns and the burnished-red coats of Limousin cattle—a breed famed for lean, flavourful beef and efficiency—signalled we were in grazing country.

History whispered too: these woods sheltered guerrilla fighters, so Gwen re-threaded WWII themes—free (France Libre) versus Vichy-controlled zones, the 1940 demarcation line, and the Allied push that would soon make tragedy strike Oradour-sur-Glane.

Oradour-sur-Glane – remembering to prevent

Lunch awaited at Le Milord—slow-braised beef cheeks, bright garden salad, and generous desserts. Refuelled, we walked to the Centre de la Mémoire (opened 12 May 1999) for context on the 10 June 1944 massacre, where an SS unit murdered 643 villagers before torching the town.

The preserved village remains eerily silent: a sewing machine frozen in rust, a burned-out school bus, church bells stilled forever. Wandering those streets after rain amplified the weight of memory—an essential, if sobering, stop.

Sweet resilience and onward journeys

Back on the bus, a palate-cleanser: the mineral-bright pastilles de Vichy, digestive lozenges first concocted in 1825 from the spa town's bicarbonate-rich waters.

We then split into smaller groups, each bound for an overnight in heritage guesthouses—a chance to practise French, swap cultural anecdotes, and live the rhythms of the countryside.

We waved à bientôt to one another, hearts full of landscapes, hard history and the quiet luck of a cool, rainy summer's day. Tomorrow, new chapters unfold—à suivre...