DAY 2 - Bienvenue à Angers!

Settling in and savoring our first taste of the Loire Valley

We began our journey together in Angers, a charming city in the heart of the Loire Valley that will be our home for the next three nights. With its elegant blend of black slate roofs and white tufa stone façades, Angers immediately made an impression as a city both vibrant and steeped in history. It's often called a "black and white city" for this very reason—and with a population of around 150,000, it's just the right size for exploring at a relaxed pace.

Our base is the Hotel d'Anjou, a beautiful 19th-century landmark full of character, located just a stone's throw from the city center. After checking in and taking a moment to settle into our rooms, we gathered for a leisurely walk through town to stretch our legs and get our bearings.

We strolled down to the Place du Ralliement, Angers' central square and the heart of local life. Elegant façades, cafés with shaded terraces, and the soft hum of conversation gave us a taste of French city living. We passed by some of the town's iconic shops and soaked in the atmosphere of this accessible, walkable city.

As the golden light of early evening set in, we reconvened for a convivial welcome drink at the Odorico Bar, part of the hotel's restaurant. The name pays tribute to Isidore Odorico, the Italian-French mosaic artist whose colorful tiles now adorn the walls—each one a little piece of early 20th-century elegance.

We toasted our arrival with a glass of Crémant de Loire, the region's answer to Champagne. This sparkling wine—made using the traditional méthode champenoise—offered crisp apple and pear notes, a fine mousse (that's wine-speak for the bubbles), and a touch of toastiness on the finish. It paired beautifully with a classic French apéro spread of charcuterie, cheese, and fresh-baked bread.

We also learned our first key French words and phrases—the kind that go a long way when offered with a smile:

- Apéro (the beloved French tradition of pre-dinner drinks and nibbles)

- Santé ! (Cheers!)

- Bonjour (Good day / Hello)

- S'il vous plaît (Please)

- Merci (Thank you)

- Au revoir (Goodbye)

- Bonsoir (Good evening)

With new flavors on our tongues and a few phrases under our belts, we turned in for the night—some of us adjusting to jet lag, others simply unwinding after a week of earlier travels. Either way, we drifted off with the promise of a deeper dive into Angers tomorrow.

Onward to discovery!