

## DAY 2 – Layers of Light and Life in Angers

Thursday, November 6, 2025

*Settling in and savoring our first taste of the Loire Valley*

Some rain in the morning tested our optimism—but it stopped just in time, giving way to the most perfect autumn weather imaginable. The air was fresh, the colors warm, and Angers shone under a soft November light that seemed to bring its black-and-white architecture to life.

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 **Galleries Lafayette**, where even this temple of tradition has not escaped controversy—locals are debating the arrival of fast-fashion giant Shein, a reminder that even historic towns must negotiate the balance between heritage and globalization.

Our walk continued to the **Maison d'Adam**, its fantastical carved façade guarding a treasure trove of artisan workshops and local artists' boutiques; to the **Galerie David d'Anjou**, celebrating one of the city's sculptural masters; and to the **Musée des Beaux-Arts** and its serene **Jardin des Beaux-Arts**, a peaceful haven tucked within the city's old bishop's palace. The path led us finally to the mighty **Château d'Angers**, its monumental towers overlooking the Maine River and whispering stories of the Dukes of Anjou.

For lunch, **Gwen** brought us to a very special spot: **Marguerite d'Anjou**, a not-for-profit restaurant where we ate shoulder to shoulder with the locals, supporting a community charity. It was a first introduction to one of the values of this trip—sharing not only monuments but also the everyday lives of the French, and giving back along the way.

In the afternoon, we met **Sandrine Bourdon**, a local artist whose exhibition was opening that very evening inside the **Saint-Aubin Tower**. Her collages and ink drawings explored themes of memory and transformation—perfect echoes of Angers itself, a city where the medieval and the modern coexist like layers of a painting. Meeting her and seeing her creative world added a deeply personal touch to our discovery of the city's artistic soul.

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 earlier travels. Either way, we drifted off with the promise of a deeper dive into Angers tomorrow.

**Onward to discovery!**