

## Travel Journal – Day 4: Troyes, Pontigny, Grange de Beauvais, Domaine Brocard, Beaune

We started our day with a morning stroll through Troyes, heading to Les Halles to gather supplies for our picnic. The covered market was alive with color and conversation—tables brimming with strawberries, fragrant herbs, fresh bread, cheeses, and handmade sweets. We tasted a few irresistible samples: rich local chocolates, bursting-sweet strawberries, and more. Among the many artisans, we met José, a basket maker proudly demonstrating his craft. It was clear: these were people deeply passionate about their produce and their traditions.

As we emerged with our bounty, Alex appeared right on time—ready to save our legs and take the wheel for the rest of the day.

Our first stop was the village of Pontigny, where we arrived just in time to stumble upon a surprise village fête. Classic cars, tractors, and trucks filled the town square, surrounded by food stalls and the buzz of community life. It was a charming glimpse into the spirit of rural Burgundy and how a small village can bring its history to life.

A short walk away stood the Abbaye de Pontigny, one of the largest surviving Cistercian churches in the world. Founded in 1114 as a daughter house of the Abbaye de Cîteaux, Pontigny reflects the elegant austerity of Cistercian design—soaring stone arches, unadorned beauty, and reverent silence. As we entered, the organist began to play—a haunting, unexpected melody that felt like a private concert just for us. Once again, Alex was waiting at the far end, having navigated hidden lanes and narrow gates so we wouldn't have to walk back.

From there, we drove to La Grange de Beauvais, just outside Auxerre, where we met Patrick and a group of passionate volunteers. Their project to restore this historic farm is driven by love for local heritage, and their enthusiasm was contagious. Patrick introduced us to the medieval garden, a vine conservatory, and stories of winemaking, vegetable markets, and cultural revival. The owner of the abbey and the whole team generously invited us to share our picnic with them—true Burgundian hospitality. We sat together in a rustic hall, exchanging stories over shared food.

We laid out all our treasures from the market: pâté en croûte, ripe tomatoes, strawberries, chocolate cakes, olives, Troyes cheese, crusty bread, herbed almonds, and their white wine—named “The Unexpected”, a crisp, floral expression of their hard work. At some point, they broke into a traditional ban bourguignon, a local chant with lyrics nearly impossible to follow but fun to try:

la-la la-la la-la-la-la-ler la-la-la la-la-la la-la-la!

Well-fed and smiling, we boarded the bus again and headed to Church of Sainte-Marie and then to Domaine Jean-Marc Brocard near Chablis. There, we were welcomed by Giorgia, our tasting expert, who guided us through a beautifully structured flight:

- The Petit Chablis was light and zesty, with notes of citrus and crushed oyster shell.
- The Chablis itself showed more body—green apple, wet stone, and a vibrant acidity.
- The Premier Cru offered more depth, with hints of white flowers, lemon peel, and a saline edge.
- The Grand Cru was stunning: textured, elegant, with layered aromas of hazelnut, ripe pear, and a long, mineral-driven finish.

During the tasting, we also met Raquel, a Brazilian artist living in the area, who shared stories of her work and her connection to the region.

The bus ride to Beaune lulled many of us into a nap as we passed through the Parc du Morvan, catching a glimpse of the fairytale village of Châteauneuf perched on a hill in the distance.

That evening, we took a short walk to Lazard Carnot, a cozy, elegant restaurant where we ended the day with a perfect Burgundy feast:

- Escargots de Bourgogne, garlicky and rich in their herb butter bath;
- A rustic terrine served with tangy pickles;
- The star: Bœuf Bourguignon, a slow-simmered dish of beef cooked in red wine with carrots, onions, garlic, and herbs—deeply savory and melt-in-the-mouth;
- Suprême de poulet with a generous slice of Époisses, the famously pungent local cheese, soft and creamy with a bold personality.

With full hearts and full bellies, we made our way back to the hotel, ready for a good night's rest before tomorrow's next chapter in Bourgogne.