

Travel Journal – Day 4: Dole to Saint-Jean-de-Losne

A charming day of beauty, taste, tradition, and a little unexpected adventure — all gracefully embraced.

We left Dole in the golden early hours, as the MS Danièle glided smoothly away from the canal-side dock. The morning light shimmered on the water, promising another day of calm and beauty. Some of us relaxed on board, soaking in the slow rhythms of the river. Others walked along the canal path with Gwen, meeting smiling Sunday morning joggers and bike riders. Tom even took off on a leisurely bike ride, taking in the gentle Jura landscapes.

By mid-morning, we gathered back together on the sun deck for a very special surprise: a gourmet chocolate tasting hosted by Gwen — and what a sensory journey it was. We discovered the incredible history of chocolate in France:

- In the southwest, it arrived via Bayonne, where Portuguese Jews expelled from Spain brought their cocoa traditions, introducing the earliest chocolate-making techniques in France.
- In the southeast, Italians arriving through Lyon brought chocolate from the Medici-influenced courts, refining it into a luxury good favored by the aristocracy.

Gwen taught us how to taste chocolate like connoisseurs — observing texture and sheen, letting it melt on the tongue to reveal its layers of flavor and aromatic notes.

We savored three extraordinary pieces:

- A classic mendant — a disk of dark chocolate adorned with nuts and candied fruit, inspired by the robes of the mendicant monastic orders
- A raspberry caramel delight: 60% dark chocolate with a caramel duo, raspberry and bergamot coulis, balancing richness and bright acidity
- A zesty yuzu praline: 60% dark chocolate with a lemon-ginger coulis, bold yet refined, with an exotic touch

Each was paired with a carefully selected digestif: cognac, whisky, and a surprisingly elegant white port — illustrating the art of matching chocolate with complex, warming spirits.

Then came lunch, and once again Chef Bastoche amazed us:

- A dry pot-au-feu: the flavors of the French classic stew, served without broth, focusing on the succulent slow-cooked meats, paired with traditional Dijon mustard and freshly grated horseradish
- A creamy, melty cancoillotte cheese, served warm and flavored with vin jaune — delicate and nutty, typical of the Jura
- Ossau-Iraty, a firm, sheep's milk cheese from the Basque country, with toasty, buttery notes and a touch of spice
- For dessert, a gorgeous fraiser: a layer cake of soft sponge, creamy mousseline, and plump strawberries, finished with a mirror glaze and a touch of rose water — as delicious as it was elegant

As we moved from the quiet canal to the wide Saône river, the landscape changed — more open, grander — and we arrived in Saint-Jean-de-Losne, a small town with an outsized role in France's inland navigation history.

We were met by our engaging local guide, Sylviane, who walked us through this charming but important village, once the hub of barge traffic in Burgundy. We had the rare privilege of visiting the village's city council, stepping into the beating heart of local governance, where decisions are still made over long wooden tables.

The tour concluded with a regional tasting:

- Catfish and snail spreads, rich and surprisingly refined
- Berry, onion, and wine jellies, vibrant with regional produce
- A refreshing rhubarb syrup, tart and sweet

Some of us explored town, others relaxed on board with our delightful crew — and a few joined Gwen and our incredible first mate Sylvie for a game of pétanque, sipping Pernod like true southerners, learning the fine art of tossing the cochonnet and celebrating like locals under the warm sun.

Dinner brought another round of flavorful comfort:

- A winemaker-style salad: crisp lettuce, cervelas sausage, cheese, and tangy pickles
- Sea bream fillet with delicate ratatouille and steamed potatoes
- A light coconut mousse, airy and sweet, the perfect end to a warm day
- All paired by Oliver, with wines chosen with his usual precision and flair

As dinner lingered into the evening, the weather began to turn. We stayed at the table like true relaxed French people, sipping wine as the sky darkened. The storm arrived dramatically, the kind of summer tempest that turns everything vivid — and just like that, the day took a surprising twist.

In true traveler spirit, we embraced the unexpected: a unique adventure unfolded, one that would give us stories to tell for years. With impeccable calm and care, our Captain Alain, first mate Sylvie, hotel manager Timi and local authorities orchestrated a swift response to changing circumstances. We had the chance to meet the mayor, village foremen, and local police, all of whom showed us the efficiency, warmth, and dedication of these public servants.

The crew secured a local hotel, warm and dry, and even sent Margaux and Bastoche ahead to make our beds and prepare our arrival. Gwen kept us laughing and in good cheer. We arrived in comfort, with everyone safe, spirits high, and feeling like a true community of travelers, not tourists — bonded by experience and good humour.

And so, with full bellies, warm hearts, and the knowledge that the best adventures are often the unplanned ones, we settled into our impromptu hotel, ready for the new plans and new joys tomorrow would bring.

Voilà, voilà — onward we go.