

Travel Journal – Day 2: Besançon – Rancenay – Ranchot

We woke up to a gorgeous day aboard the sparkling clean MS Danièle, thanks to the early morning efforts of our amazing crew. Over a tasty breakfast of fresh pastries, fruit, and strong coffee, we began our journey on the water, gliding gently under the imposing Citadelle of Besançon.

Our captain Alain and first mate Sylvie expertly navigated us into one of the engineering marvels of the region: the Besançon canal tunnel, also known as the Tunnel du Canal du Rhône au Rhin. Constructed between 1878 and 1882, this 394-meter tunnel cuts beneath the citadel, allowing barges to bypass the river's tight loop around the city. Its creation was a feat of 19th-century engineering, blending the region's strategic military history with modern navigational innovation.

We disembarked and met our cheerful driver Hassan, who drove us through the lush green countryside of Franche-Comté, where forests and meadows roll gently under the Jura foothills. Our destination: the remarkable Saline Royale d'Arc-et-Senans (Royal Saltworks), a UNESCO World Heritage Site designed by visionary Enlightenment architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in the late 18th century.

Ledoux imagined a utopian industrial complex — not just a place of salt production, but a harmonious architectural and social model. The semicircular layout and monumental neoclassical buildings speak to his idealism and innovative spirit. Our guide Sébastien, with great knowledge and excellent English, brought the story of the Saltworks and Ledoux's radical ideas vividly to life. We also explored a temporary exhibition on Corto Maltese, the legendary sea captain and adventurer created by Italian comic artist Hugo Pratt — a romantic, anti-hero figure who navigates global intrigue with wit and independence.

We returned to our boat at the double lock of Rancenay, just in time for apéritifs on the sun deck, where we admired the serene Jura countryside and a 12th-century tower perched high on a nearby hill.

Then came an outstanding lunch by Chef Bastoche, who truly outdid himself:

- Tender lamb, perfectly seasoned, with caramelized Brussels sprouts and a silky-smooth potato purée
- A selection of Jura cheeses:
- Comté, aged and nutty, with complex caramel and hazelnut undertones
- Morbier, creamy with a delicate blue vein of ash, both earthy and gentle
- And for dessert, a decadent tiramisu, airy and rich — every plate was wiped clean.

As we ate, children on bicycles rode along the towpath, waving and calling out “bon appétit!”, adding a charming village energy to the afternoon.

The rest of the day unfolded in classic canal cruising style — peaceful, scenic, and full of small, joyful moments. We glided through lock after lock, guided smoothly by our skilled crew, as green reflections danced on the water. Some passengers chose to walk along the towpath, where we greeted nearly everyone we passed with a cheerful “bonjour!” — at least a gazillion times!

It was a hot day, perfect for cool drinks on the deck, watching the pastoral landscapes drift by. One chatty lock keeper even joked about hopping on with his dog and joining us for a week.

In the early evening, we enjoyed a sunny apéritif with prosciutto toasts, and a briefing from Timi, who laid out tomorrow's Jura adventures with her signature warmth and precision.

Dinner was another delight:

- A refreshing tomato and mozzarella carpaccio, full of fragrance and colour
- Curried cod, delicately spiced and served with a creamy risotto
- A zesty panna cotta with tropical fruit coulis, tart and smooth in perfect harmony

After dinner, some guests took a leisurely stroll into the quiet village of Ranchot, where we had docked for the night. Others lingered in the lounge with a glass of cognac, or chatted with the crew — and even with the local amphibians, whose croaks punctuated the peaceful night air.

We settled into our cabins, rocked gently by the calm water, for a good night's sleep in this hidden corner of Jura — refreshed and ready for more discoveries tomorrow.