

Travel Journal – Day 10: Loriol-sur-Drôme – Luc-en-Diois – La Germanette – Sisteron – Gréoux-les-Bains

The second half of our journey began under a gorgeous Provençal sky, with ideal weather that stayed with us all day. As if to welcome this next chapter, the early morning sunlight danced across the hills and rooftops, and the gentle sound of the infinity pool at Les Oliviers, which had lulled us through the night, greeted us as we strolled the garden paths one last time.

Alex, always a step ahead, had risen early to clean and polish the bus inside and out, giving it a renewed sparkle after our rainy mountain travels. We boarded with smiles on our faces, eager for what was ahead—landscapes, picturesque villages, and the warm light of southern France.

Our route took us through Die, the small town nestled between the Vercors mountains and the Drôme valley, known as the capital of Clairette and Crémant de Die. These sparkling wines—Clairette being light, floral, and subtly sweet, and Crémant dry, crisp, with apple and white flower notes—have been produced here since Roman times.

As we drove south, we noticed the first appearances of the famous Durance pebbles, rounded stones from the ancient alpine river, used historically in cobblestone streets and traditional wall constructions. Their durability and natural beauty made them ideal building materials in the region, and spotting them felt like watching the landscape turn into architecture.

Our next stop was Luc-en-Diois, a charming Provençal village with a population of around 500 residents. Once a Roman settlement on the route between Vienne and Sisteron, it has preserved its small-town rhythm and stone buildings. We explored its tiny but lively market, picking up fresh bread, and fruit for our picnic. Many of you kindly donated to Patrick and Joëlle, who were collecting for the local Red Cross chapter, supporting vulnerable families and offering free first aid training to young locals. A small but meaningful gesture in a community that depends on local engagement.

Back on the bus, parked by the village fountain, we listened to its gently gurgling water—a sound that belongs to this region as much as cicadas and church bells.

We soon crossed Le Claps, a dramatic geological site made up of massive stone boulders. These were formed in 1445, when a portion of Mount Luc collapsed during a landslide, damming the Drôme river and creating a natural chaos that locals named “le Claps.” The stones, now sun-bleached and sculptural, stand like nature’s own monument.

From there, we entered the heart of the Baronnies Provençales, a landscape of contrasts and colour:

- Bright green trees,
- Limestone cliffs in shades of white and ochre,
- The crystal blue of the Buëch river,
- All of it bathed in a light that has inspired painters and photographers for generations.

We passed hikers, cyclists, and climbers, all drawn here by the beauty and energy of the region.

Lunch was a delight at La Germanette, a recreational lake surrounded by robinia and poplar trees. The air was filled with the rustling of leaves and the songs of local birds. We sat in the shade with our picnic:

- Vietnamese spring rolls,
- Baguette sandwiches,

- Fresh goat and cow cheeses,
- Ripe cherries,
- Chocolate squares
- and crusty bread, all shared under the trees in a perfect blend of cultures and flavours.

The road resumed, cutting between the Hautes-Alpes to the east and the Baronnies to the west, every bend offering a new perspective, a new hue.

We arrived in Sisteron, a town dramatically placed between mountains and known as the “Gateway to Provence”. Its strategic location also made it a linguistic crossroads. We discussed the old regional languages of France:

- Langue d’Oc, spoken in the south and named after the word “oc” for “yes,”
- Langue d’Oïl, from the north (which evolved into modern French),
- and Franco-Provençal, spoken in the alpine areas between Lyon, Geneva, and the Aosta valley.

Sisteron’s heritage reflects all of these, both in its speech and its architecture.

We explored the town aboard the Petit Train, climbing the steep road to the Citadel, a fortress built into the limestone cliffs. At the top, we took in panoramic views of the Durance valley, gazed at the stained-glass windows in the chapel filtering sunlight in soft rainbow hues, and traced the history of a place that has stood watch over this pass for centuries.

We walked through history, imagining what could have happened here, and learned about the hostages who were liberated during the Second World War, just before the bombing of the citadel. The atmosphere was powerful, made richer by the stories and silences. We descended into the village again for a gentle stroll through its quiet streets, reflecting on the layers of past and present.

Back on the bus, we drove toward our overnight destination, the edge of the Verdon mountains, through ancient villages and former fortified strongholds, accompanied by the comforting rhythm of our guide’s familiar “Ça va?” and “Voilà, voilà”, which have become the heartbeat of this trip.

We arrived in the picturesque thermal town of Gréoux-les-Bains, checking into our delightful hotel, Villa Borghese. Some of us dipped into the pool under the sun, others shared a glass at the bar, soaking in the atmosphere. As the light turned golden, we strolled into town for a relaxed dinner and returned on foot through the gentle evening warmth of Provence, ready to dream of tomorrow’s adventure in the dramatic Verdon Natural Park.