

Travel Journal – Day 3: Ranchot to Dole

We enjoyed a restful night in the quiet village of Ranchot, lulled to sleep by the gentle rustle of leaves and the stillness of the canal. As the sun began to rise, we could hear Captain Alain and first mate Sylvie preparing the MS Danièle for departure. The first soft movements of the ship, pushing off into the morning stillness, stirred us gently awake.

Outside, the world was bathed in a golden light, the Jura hills glowing softly as we slipped toward our first lock of the day. Morning unfolded with quiet coffee rituals in every form — espressos, cappuccinos, black teas — enjoyed in peaceful reflection as the scenery glided by.

We spotted herons poised like statues, a rare night heron nestled in the brush, glimmering dragonflies darting over the water, and even a fleeting kingfisher, its iridescent blue a flash of magic against the lush green backdrop.

Breakfast was, as ever, delicious, served with an ever-changing view: fields, forest edges, and the limestone cliffs characteristic of the Jura region. The morning was a time for calm pursuits — reading, soaking in the hot tub, enjoying good company and conversation, and simply watching the world pass by.

Later, Gwen gathered us for a fun and useful French lesson. We learned how to sound French with a little style, a bit of flair, and a good dose of laughter — discovering quirky expressions that only make sense when delivered with the perfect pout and shrug.

On deck, Oliver surprised us with colorful cocktails of vodka and curaçao, raising spirits just in time for another exceptional lunch by Chef Bastoche, who continued to delight:

- A starter of traditional céleri rémoulade — crisp grated celery root in a tangy mustard-and-mayo dressing (a classic French bistro dish)
- Tender pork, perfectly cooked and seasoned
- A decadent cheese selection featuring:
 - Brillat-Savarin: creamy, buttery, and indulgent, with a bloomy rind
 - Délice de Bourgogne: triple crème cheese with rich texture and slight tang
- And an assortment of ice cream and sorbets, light and refreshing

The meal was paired expertly by Oliver with a Bordeaux rouge and blanc, deepening the flavours and relaxing the mood.

Meanwhile, Margaux had quietly tended to our cabins, leaving everything pristine and cozy, another layer of comfort in this seamless experience.

Then came our approach to Dole, truly breathtaking: a long row of century-old numbered sycamores lining the canal, perfectly framing the hilltop Collegiate Church of Notre-Dame — the crown jewel of Dole. We docked just below it, aided by a cheerful couple of locals who lent a hand with the ropes.

In the afternoon, our guide Noémie joined us for a walking tour filled with insight and charm. She brought the history of Dole to life:

- The childhood home of Louis Pasteur, and his early experiments that would transform medicine
- The once thriving tanning industry, which gave rise to the phrase “tanner la peau” (to tan one’s hide)
- The Chat Perché stories of local author Marcel Aymé, whimsical tales of two children and their cat leaping across the rooftops of Dole — a sculpture trail now follows their adventures
- The source of the river, bubbling beneath the town and feeding the old washhouses
- The former convent, now a prestigious high school, and the former Hôtel-Dieu, today transformed into the city’s public library

We climbed the gentle hill to the Basilica, just in time to witness a wedding — a joyful scene — before stepping inside to admire the grand organ, the radiant stained glass windows, and a beautifully serene side chapel.

After the tour, we dispersed to explore Dole on our own. Locals filled the streets, enjoying the long Ascension weekend. We joined them: relaxing at cafés, strolling along the river, enjoying ice cream, shopping, and watching the energy build toward the evening’s Premier League final between Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Milan.

Back onboard, Timi, ever thoughtful, welcomed us with pre-dinner drinks and a briefing about tomorrow. Then came a truly elegant dinner:

- Forest mushroom pastries, earthy and buttery
- Confit de canard — slow-cooked duck leg, tender and crisp, a classic of southwestern France (the duck is salt-cured and slowly poached in its own fat for hours, resulting in a rich, silky texture)
- Served with creamy polenta and vine-roasted tomatoes
- A luscious crêpe brûlée, with a perfectly caramelized top and silky custard inside
- All paired with a refreshing rosé de Provence, light and floral, just right for a summer’s night

After dinner, we gathered in the lounge to watch the football final, and celebrated Paris’s victory with the locals — fireworks burst in the distance, car horns blared, and joy filled the streets.

A day full of sunshine, learning, discovery, and celebration, as our slow journey through France continued to surprise and delight at every turn.