

Travel Journal – Day 3: Troyes

We began our morning in Troyes under a bright, cloudless sky—perfect for a walking tour through the city's captivating medieval core. Once a thriving center for international fairs in the 12th century, Troyes was a place of commerce, exchange, and innovation, where merchants, craftsmen, and scholars converged in a bustling patchwork of alleyways and timbered houses.

Our path led us first to Place Maréchal Foch, where the Hôtel de Ville stands with classical grandeur. From there, we wandered into the Rue Champeaux, lined with ancient shops and crooked houses, before spotting the Tour des Orfèvres, a medieval tower once belonging to the city's goldsmiths' guild—a testament to Troyes' rich artisanal heritage.

At the Maison du Boulanger, now a cultural space, we admired the intricate corbeled architecture—upper floors jutting over the narrow streets, supported by centuries-old wooden beams. These crooked, leaning façades give Troyes its fairytale charm. The Ruelle des Chats, one of the city's most famous alleys, was so narrow the rooftops nearly touch—just enough space for a cat to leap from one side to the other. Hidden corners like the Cour du Mortier d'Or revealed the quiet intimacy of Troyes' inner courtyards, echoing with history.

We paused at the Maison Rachi, dedicated to one of the medieval era's greatest Jewish scholars, Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki), who lived and studied in Troyes. A pioneering mind in Biblical and Talmudic commentary, his work still influences Jewish study today and highlights the city's deep intellectual legacy.

Our footsteps took us next to the Church of Saint Pantaléon, before passing the impressive Hôtel de Vauluisant—now home to the Museum of Hosiery—and the Hôtel Mauroy, which houses the Museum of Tools, showcasing the craftsmanship that defined Troyes' working class. The Marché au Pain, once the bustling bread market, brought to mind images of daily life centuries ago.

The soaring Basilique Saint-Urbain, with its graceful Gothic lines, stood as a monument to faith and vision, and at Place de la Libération, we admired rose bushes in full bloom, a gentle contrast to the surrounding stone buildings. Nearby, the Hôtel-Dieu-le-Comte, a former hospital, now serves as a library and cultural venue—a site steeped in care and continuity. We ended this section of our tour at the Cathédrale Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Paul, grand and stately, where the weight of history seemed to hang in the air.

At one point, we chatted about the Prunelle de Troyes, a local liqueur made from sloe stones, with its curious almond flavor—but saved the tasting for another time.

In the afternoon, we visited the Cité du Vitrail, a beautifully curated museum dedicated to the art of stained glass. Troyes, once a major stained glass production center, holds some of France's most remarkable panels. The exhibit took us from medieval masterpieces to modern interpretations, showing how glass, light, and color can tell stories that span the centuries.

Our ever-reliable driver Alex joined us for the day's discoveries, making sure we remained safe and on track. Along the way, we learned more about him—his background, his journey, and his perspective on the regions we explored—adding another layer of connection to our trip.

We finished the day with some relaxed time in the town square near the carousel, reflecting on the beauty and charm of Troyes under the golden spring sun. Then back to our hotel to rest and pack—Bourgogne awaits us tomorrow.