

Marseille

May 25-26, 2011

We're in Marseille now in this cute little hotel opposite the Old Port. I found it on the Internet, and it was waiting for us when we got in late yesterday. I asked at the tourist office when we arrived to find the best way to get to the hotel, and the women told me to take the Metro. I asked about the taxis and they said they are all dishonest and not to trust them. Based on our experience when we arrived in Lisbon--when the driver tried to charge us €20 for a 10-minute trip from the port--I can believe it. (I vehemently protested, although he didn't speak any English, except for prices. Jack went into the hotel and found out that it should cost €13 at most; by the time he came back, the cabbie had relented and reduced his demand to that amount.)

We did take the Metro and could escalate all the way down and up except for just a few steps. However, this isn't really the high-speed TGV on the next track. Although this is just a full size graphic, the actual train does stop at the above-ground station a block away.



From the Vieux-Port station we walked about 5 minutes with our wheeled cases, and here we are--with perfect weather, sunshine all the time. This is the view of the old port from our window.



What a huge city! It's the second largest city in France and it's right on the Mediterranean, so we have gorgeous sea as well as city views. Although it has had a reputation as a dangerous city, today it's no more so than other big cities and the Vieux Port and shopping streets are tourist magnets. Surprisingly, according to Frommer, a 2007 survey of people under 25 years chose Marseille as the number-one French city in which they'd like to live, with Montpellier second. Paris tied for third with Bordeaux.

We walked and walked in the morning exploring the shopping streets and the markets, finally sat down at a sidewalk cafe and people-watched for an hour or so. Great fun. We stopped for lunch at a North African restaurant for grilled meats and veggies and a half bottle of a Tunisian wine. And saw the shuttle bus waiting to take passengers back to the elegant Regent Seven Seas Mariner every half hour.

Back to the hotel to rest for about 10 minutes, then back out to the Old Port to catch the little tourist train that wanders throughout the city and up to a famous Notre Dame de la Garde Basilica.



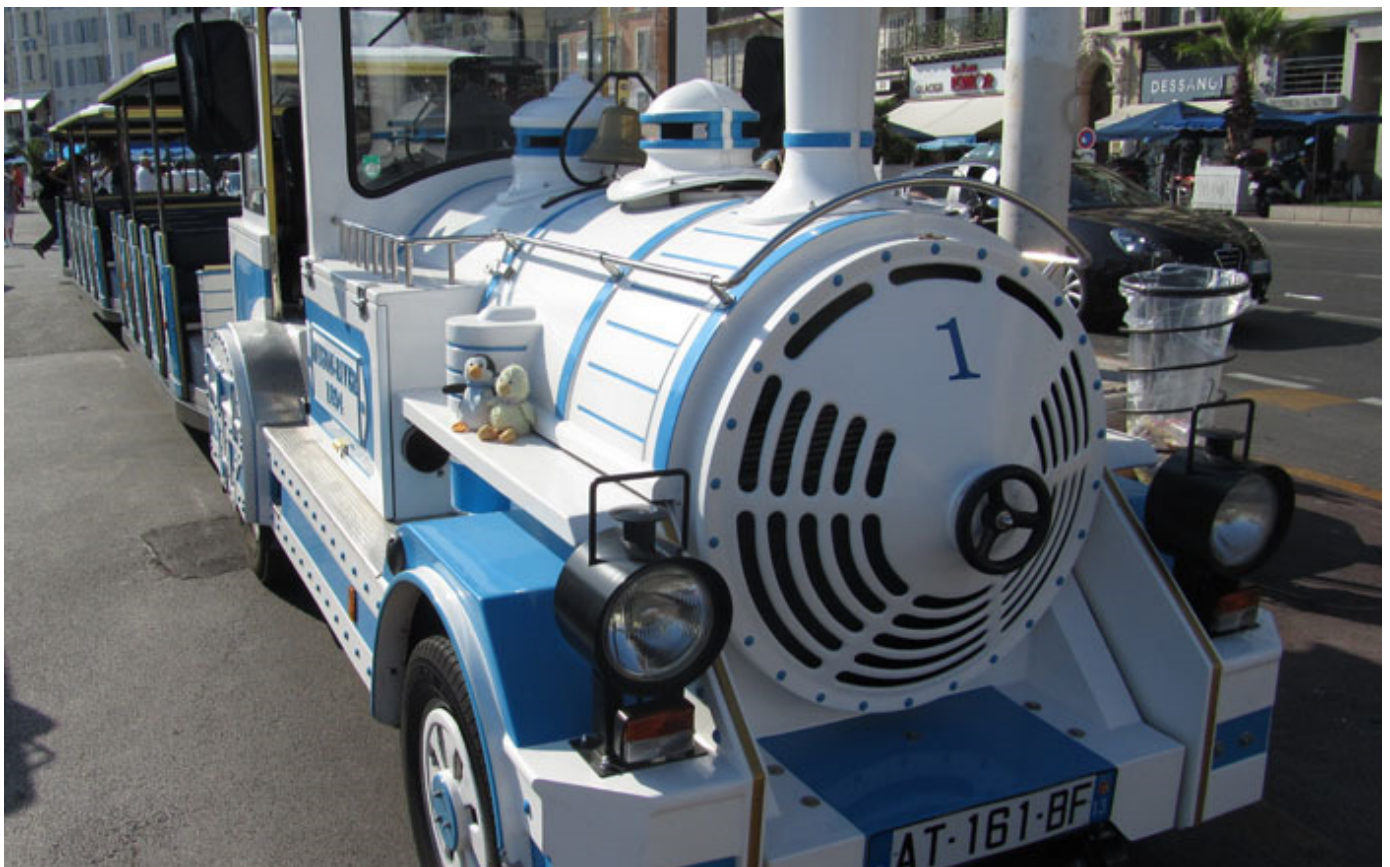
Peep and Flo were a little scared in the beginning because we were going so high up and there seemed to be water all around.



But they calmed down when we reached the base of the basilica.



And when it was all over, they asked if they could sit on the front of the train, so we let them.



We're resting again, and then we're off to "people watch" once more at a cafe and maybe grab some dinner at another North African type place. This time we might get a Doner Kebab--again grilled meat, on pita with veggies or a salad, and yogurt. There are so many of these shops around, and the locals tell us that this is what they eat for fast food. We saw several of these shops during our explorations, and fortunately the "Istanbul Kebab" was open when we stopped by around 10.

Although they called it a Doner Kebab, it was like what we'd call a gyro, and here they have a type of electric trimmer to slice off the meat. More efficient than the knife process we've always seen.



We leave tomorrow at noon and pick up another car to drive along the coast and end up in Ste. Maxine. Two days there and then we'll be in Cannes for 5 days or many more--the film people should be gone by then.