



# Lyon 2013

A week in the vieux Lyon

*Apartment Rue St Jean*

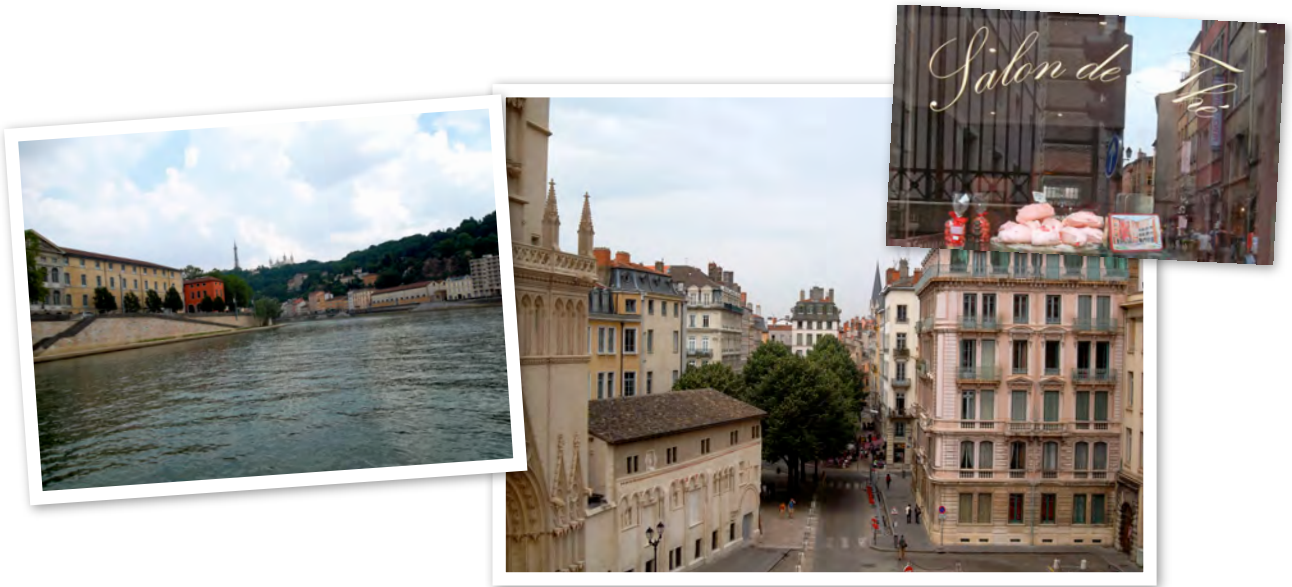
## One afternoon

It's pouring rain. A welcome change after the last 3 days of sultry heat and humidity spent exploring the touristic sights of Lyon. From our apartment in Place St Jean, in the heart of the [vieux Lyon](#), we do not have far to go to reach many of the historical sites, such as the basilica of [Fourvière](#), [Musée Gadagne](#), [Place Bellecour](#), and of course, the beautiful banks of [La Saône](#).

As the name vieux Lyon suggests, it is the oldest part of the city. The building where we are staying was built in the middle ages, caught fire 3 centuries later and was rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The original stones were kept. The walls are so wide in fact, that it is impossible to get wifi in some rooms. The stone steps are a metre wide, 25 cms high, and we have to climb 79 of them to get to our apartment. There are no lifts in the building, a test of endurance on day one, carting our luggage upstairs. We have come to accept them as the price to pay for being here.

The apartment has magnificent views over the Place de la [Cathédrale St Jean](#) on one side, and on the other, an archaeological site with digs of the first church built in the western world outside Rome. It has been dated as around 150 AD.





### *Place de la Cathédrale*

#### **The clock and the poets**

The Cathédrale St Jean is famous for its [astronomical clock](#), which was built in the 14th century, and is one of the oldest in the world. Its chimes, together with the regular tolling of bells, have been keeping time for centuries. From our lounge room window, looking down in to the square, it feels like time has stood still. I wonder if, all these centuries ago, [François Rabelais](#) had climbed the stairs to this apartment. And did of [François Villon](#) ever travel to Lyon, as suggested by the name of the restaurant in vieux Lyon.



#### **The vocalist**

Every afternoon, an old man comes to deliver a set repertoire of 1950s and 1960s hit tunes on the steps of the cathedral (he is standing by himself in the picture). He has a set routine - he plucks his adam's apple, shakes his head violently and trills, then taps the top of his head, takes a few steps back, a few forward, gyrates his hips à la Elvis, cups his mouth and utters a few roars as he embarks on his limited repertoire. Always the same songs, but given the transient tourist population, he can be assured of a new audience everyday. Maybe he was once a famous performer, and should be included in those icons that have contributed to the world heritage status of the old city. Who, otherwise, will remember him?

## Rue St Jean

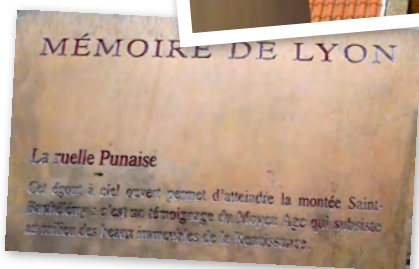


Rue St Jean, where we are staying, is the hub of Vieux Lyon, and throbs with activity from late morning to well after sunset, which at present is after 10 PM. We are surprised to be taking ourselves for dinner well past our Australian bedtime, joining the throngs of locals and tourists in one of the umpteen *bouchons* that line the cobble laneways. It is a delight to just stroll along any street around here and discover the *boulangeries*, *pâtisseries*, *charcuteries*, *fromagiers* ... one really wonders how the French manage to stay so slim. The food is extraordinary.

Of course there are also bookshops, and I have to restrain myself having just spent 2 months discarding half of my worldly possessions. I have no desire to start hoarding again but did find a couple of must haves, two novels set in Lyon, one modern, one medieval ... they are 'must haves', alas, as was the facsimile edition of *Cuisinière lyonnaise*, a *carnet* of local recipes written by an anonymous 19<sup>th</sup> century mother for her daughter on the occasion of her marriage, and recently discovered on a market stall. My copy, of course, is a reproduction - albeit a faithful one.

### Food

Since we have a well equipped kitchen, we alternate between eating out and preparing meals from the produce bought at the daily markets on the banks of the Saône – the vendors never let you forget that Lyon is the gastronomic capital of France (if not of the world), whether it comes to *charcuterie*, cheeses, fruit, vegetables. I have rarely seen such varieties of *saucissons* – venison, duck, beef, pork, with and without nuts, and would you believe donkey salami! ... but we gave that one a miss. It seems that anything that moves can get churned into sausage in the name of gastronomy.





## *The market on the Saône*

### **Food glorious food**

It is summer, so berries, cherries, stone fruit abound, the vine ripened tomatoes and cucumbers taste of the sun; the endives (‘whitlof’ in Australia) at 1 euro per kilo leave me gobsmacked. This is equivalent to 10 cents per endive, unbelievable compared to what we have to pay for them back home (almost \$3 apiece). Since it is my favourite salad, I am overindulging ... drizzled with virgin olive oil, a splash of red wine vinegar, soft boiled eggs, salt & pepper. Heaven in a salad bowl!

As far as cheeses go, the local *comté* with its sweet nutty taste is our favourite. And then of course, there’s the baguette, bought fresh with every meal. The *boulangerie* is downstairs across the road, only 79 steps between us or should I say 158, because we have to climb back home, but well worth the effort. We burn the calories before consuming them.

As for the *glaces artisanales* ... the ultimate indulgence as we stroll through the streets of vieux Lyon.



### **A gastronomic experience**

That night we dined at *l’Amphitryon*, a ‘*bouchon*’ specializing in pork products. The fare on offer comprises a range of dishes that sound so strange that it seems the menu is written in a foreign language. No part of the animal is wasted, every bit transformed into a gastronomic experience.

A young busker arrives with his violin and starts playing *l’Arlésienne*, French can can ... he sounds like an orchestra and a crowd soon gathers around him. The music is sublime, and the restaurant has gone silent with the sheer pleasure evoked by the music.

We are very relaxed, and also very tired. It has been an exhausting three months and Lyon suddenly feels like a stopgap between two stages of our lives. We have just relinquished the home where we have lived for nearly 30 years, and are now bracing ourselves for a new life ahead in a totally new environment. Lyon the ‘stopgap’. I like this description of the moment, which gives a totally new meaning to the term *bouchon*.

## *Dining out.*



*Photos of the Beaujolais region.*

We feel like we have been caught up in a vortex, and have in spite of ourselves landed in this medieval city. Discovering the view Lyon has left us with wonderful memories. On the day before leaving, we take a bus tour to the nearby Beaujolais region.

It is spectacular. But that's another story.

*Au revoir!*

