

From Stupidity to Adventure

By Kenita Gibbins

When my friend Mickie called to ask if I wanted to go to France with her, it was like she was offering me the world. I had a passport. I set about talking to my boss who just happened to be my husband. I started packing using Rick Steves' advice of less rather than more, AND I found the means to take the trip.

Two weeks into our trip we decided to go to Provence. We had purchased first class train privileges for a month starting with day one. We decided to stay in Avignon and do day trips from there. Mickie got us tickets to go to Nimes about 20 miles from Avignon. We boarded the TGV train on time.

Soon after boarding we learned we were on the train headed for Paris, and we were on the train illegally. The conductor said we could go to Paris and then turn around and go back to Avignon. We tried to explain all of our things were in Avignon. It was cold in Paris and we had no coats. We only had a few days to enjoy the Provence area. The conductor was angry at first. I decided not to say women are directionally challenged. I didn't cry which I've been known to do when I'm scared. Then it seemed he became amused with our stupidity. The conductor and his supervisor decided they didn't really want two women on their train without the proper tickets. They took us to a shelf-like seat and didn't let us out of their sight. The train stopped at Valence. A man in a blue suit was standing at the exit of the train to meet us. Another blue-suit man guided us to the place to wait to catch the train to Nimes. He didn't leave us until we boarded the train. Everyone was extremely nice.

Before we knew it, we were going past Avignon and we stopped in Nimes. We had lunch and also found the Musee des Beaux Arts. The museum was not crowded. I liked a Rubens painting the best, but I swear the man in the picture had eyes that followed our every move. Next we went to the Maison Carree. We learned Thomas Jefferson admired the building's columns and had them copied for the Virginia State Capital in Richmond. We enjoyed the amphitheater of the Roman Empire. It is a smaller version of the Rome Colosseum, but in better shape.

Finally we ended our adventuresome day standing at the Nimes train station hoping we were waiting in the right place for Avignon? During the five days we went to Gordes, Roussillon, Arles, and Marseille. We headed back to Paris after we woke up a sleeping man in our seats. Thankfully there was a different conductor. We learned later from friends who said "You what! The French don't stop their commuter trains for anyone." To this day we still feel very special.