



Town of Water, Town of Art

They say the identity of Aix-en-Provence has developed around water and art. The water dates to Roman thermal baths and continues from the 17th century through today with the refreshing fountains in the squares of Aix.

The art? Enter Paul Cezanne, Emile Zola and legions of artists, writers and musicians through the ages. There is a quiet, reverent pride in this native son, Cezanne, who drew his life and inspiration here and in the Aixois countryside where vibrant hues of blue skies, golden stone and rich, red earth explode through the land.



“A stroll around the streets of Aix invites you to discover the areas and quarters in which Cezanne lived.... Studs with the initial ‘C’ mark the circuit, from his native home to the last residence of the painter at 23, rue Boulegon.” -- L'Office de Tourisme

We play, dine and delight with the Aixoise for four days. But, let's begin with an Aix 'welcome party' beyond imagination! Perfect timing, as we arrive to a summer music fest. We don't know that, of course – not until we find a table for two at the end of the central boulevard, Cours Mirabeau. Nice table, pleasant Italian menu. We overlook a plaza and notice activity, platforms – and amplifiers?

For the next three hours, we celebrate into the night, pampered by a friendly server and entertained by a wild and talented group of musicians. Through multiple costume changes, they beguile the crowd as aliens, choral groups, rousing patriots and sombrero-clad Latinos. Fantastic fun – nothing less!



And for any who buy into that “The French aren't friendly” nonsense, you need to experience a warm Aixoise welcome!

Through the next few days, we discover a wonderful blend in this historic capital of Provence. Visionary leaders and involved residents fuse different eras and cultures. While gilded with past genius, Aix is at once sophisticated but human, reverent of the past yet looking to the future. Today the stylish Maire (Mayor) Maryse Joissains-Masini, sustains Aixois traditions and leads the way with encouragement and support of emerging and seasoned artistes.



During our stay, we are fortunate to experience one of nine Summer festivals – les Metiers d’Arts. Spread along several blocks of the Cours Mirabeau, artistes from all of France display their wonderfully diverse creations. Hand-painted silk scarves dance from lines in the soft summer breeze. Potters demonstrate their skill at the wheel. Silversmiths and weavers, wood craftsmen and water colorists carry on quiet conversations with interested visitors.



A small display of chic shoes captures my attention. We stop to visit the designer, Veronique Baron. She is one of those charming, soft-spoken French women blending her shyness with a pleasant grace. Born in la Drome, Veronique continues proud traditions – her father and grandfather were shoe stylists and milliners. Early on, she designed shoes in her father’s workshop. After a degree in shoe design and freelance work, Veronique realized her dream with the birth of “Dans la garrigue” (In the scrubland). She creates each shoe and purse, piece by piece, by hand in her Provencal workshop. Take a moment to enjoy her creations at (<http://danslagarrigue.free.fr/>)



When we record our unmapped journies through Europe, the people, the hospitality, the simple meals and serenity mean the most to us. We are ready, open and accepting. So are our wonderful hosts.

The Year of Cezanne

On the occasion of the centenary of the death of Paul Cézanne (1839 – 1906), 2006 has been dedicated to the most famous artist of Aix-en-Provence. For full details, visit <http://www.aixenprovencetourism.com/>

[Return to Home Page](#)