

## **No particular place to go (courtesy of Chuck Berry)**

Some time ago, long before it was possible to book your accommodation online ahead of your journey, we decided on a summer road trip to France, but otherwise with “no particular place to go”.

“Riding along in our automobile”, we eventually found ourselves in the Loire Valley, having, as far as possible avoided motorways, in order to see more of the French countryside. This part of France is famous for its chateaux. We stopped wherever we wanted to and with the aid of a Logis de France book (remember those?) we had no difficulty finding somewhere to stay.

I particularly remember 3 of the chateaux we saw. Chenonceaux was quite a palace and had a beautifully maintained knot garden beside it. It was given by one of the French kings to his mistress. I wonder how such a role might be rewarded today? A smart flat in Mayfair? A race horse? Some diamond jewellery? Nothing as grand as Chenonceaux I’m sure. It was used during WW1 as a hospital for wounded soldiers like some of the grand houses in this country.



Another chateau that I remember was Azay-le Rideau, which on a beautiful day, seemed to float on the surface of a lake. As we got closer we could see the strip of land which joined it to the rest of the estate. We were taken round the chateau by a very enthusiastic guide who reminded us both of the actor Victor Spinetti. Unfortunately he spoke in rapid French so we only understood some of his commentary.



The third chateau that springs to mind from that holiday was Chinon - a large imposing structure set high above the river Vienne. It was occupied for some time by our King Henry II as, during his reign, much of France was English territory. Walking along the battlements gives you a wonderful view of the town and river below. Later wondering through that town, we came upon a busy market, with all the local produce and curiosities that make markets so interesting. I remember buying some delicious white fleshed peaches which were ripe and juicy. Did King Henry enjoy similar fruits during his time here? Plenty of the local wine for sure.



At last we had to make our way back to Calais, after a fascinating stay in this beautiful and varied country. Our last overnight stop brought us to the town of Forges-les- Eaux. We weren't there long enough to see very much of it, but did notice a museum across the road from our hotel which was dedicated to the Resistance during WWII. Our hotel was a bit tired looking (like us) but was clean and welcoming. What was even better was that the food was absolutely delicious and as it wasn't at all expensive and it was the last night of our holiday, we splashed out on a bottle of champagne.

Vive la France!