



HAWAII'S BACKYARD

There is plenty to do but many ways to relax at Kukui'ula on Kauai >> D3

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Cruising the

Village-hopping through some of France's most charming regions can be enchanting

Photos and story by Julie L. Kessler

RANCE has had a tragic run of late, it started with the murderous rampage at the Charlie Hebdo magazine in January 2015 and contin-oed most recently with the Nice massacre along the busy Promenade des Anglais just six

months ago, on Bastille Day.

While these events give travelers great pause, statistically speaking, my demise will more likely come from a lightning strike or L.A. road rage. Thus, my husband, Casey, joined me on a long-planned Viking River Cruise in September, commencing with a pre-cruise land excursion in Dijon, analysication in Lyan for one week wearing through earth, embarkation in Lyon for one week weaving through capil-vating coastal villages and wonderful wine regions, finally ending in Avignon and Marseille.

We made concessions to safety. We agreed we would take no trains or visit any outdoor restaurants. Those compro-

mises ended our first morning when sunshine, cafe and people-watching beckoned.

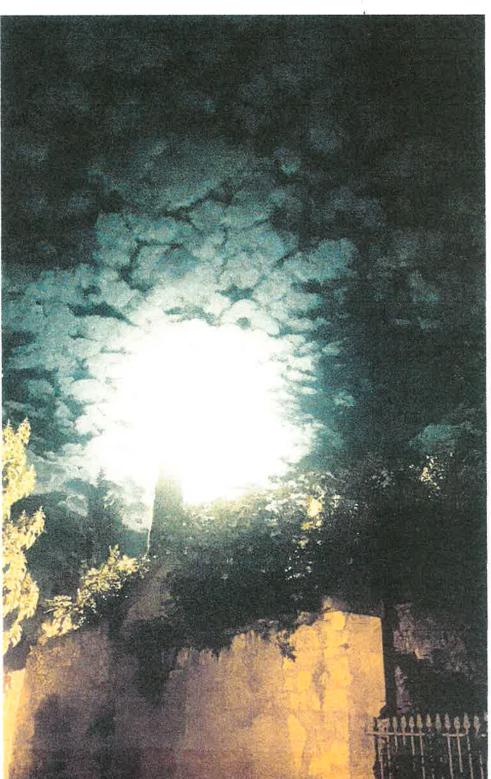
Delightful Dijon

The historical capital of Burgundy and Gustav Eiffel's birthplace, Dijon is a mecca of Renaissance and medieval architecture, gastronomy and great wine, Strolling Dijon's historic center is a visual feast. Its gar-

goyle-graced Notre Dame Cathedral and 15th-century, tim-ber-framed homes and stone mansions reflect its medieval past. And one of France's oldest museums — opened in 1787 — the magnificent Beaux-Arts, is housed in the Ducal Palace and contains art stretching from Egyptian to the 20th cen-

tury. No trip to Dijon would be complete without fasting its No trip to Dijon would be complete without fasting its choice condiment: mustard. Several specialty shops in the old city provide sampling with much the same reverence as wine, with bread and palate cleansers. Favorites were black truffle- and chardonnay-infused varietals.

A 45-minute drive through storybook villages of Volnay





At top left, Notre Dame de la Garde cathedral overlooks the Vieux (Old) Port of At top left, Note Daine de la Garde cameurai overlooks the vieux (Old) Port of Marseille with its boat-lined quays. At top, the village of Viviers by night from atop the town walls with St. Vincent's bell tower in the background. Above, in the small village of Vienne, France, the Augustus and Livia Temple was dedicated to Rome and later converted into a church.

IF YOU GO ...

Rhone River cruise

- The best way: Viking has several seven- to 15-day French River cruises com-mencing in Paris. Avignon, Lyon and Bordeaux sched-uled for 2017. Rates start at \$1,849 per guest, depending on voyage and length; in-cludes guided excursions. unlimited Wi-Fi, wine with meals and other benefits. Vikingrivercruises.com, 800-706-1483
- Where to stay: Marseille, Hotel Sofitel Vieux Port, 36 Blvd. Charles Lyon, 13007. Contemporary hotel with sumptuous beds, wonderful port views and ideally lo-cated within walking distance to important sights Mouthwatering seafood risotto and salad Nicoise are offered at its Le Carre Bistromanie: Rates start at \$205. including access to wellequipped gym, spa and pool. Sofitel.com. 800-221-

CRUISE

and Pommard brought us to Beaune, the breathtaking capital of Burgundy's wine making region, known for its mono-varietals, mainly pinot noirs and chardonnays. Beaune is also home to the annual, star-studded November wine auction where oenophiles the world over descend to bid on Grand and Premier Crus benefiting charities, last year raising 10 million euros.

The auction takes place at Hotel-Dieu. Built in 1443 with its notable geometric, poly-chrome roof, it served as a hospital for the impover-ished until 1971. Now its mu-seum houses Vauban's Last Judgment polyptych and ex-cellent displays reflecting the hospital's impressive past, All that history made for

ravishing thirst, quenched at day's end with our Viking guide fasting Grand Crus at nearby Clos Vougeot vineyard.

Picturesque Perouges

and lovely Lyon

En route to embarkation in Lyon, we stopped in Perouges, a medieval, 14th-cen-tury walled village. In this beautifully preserved cob-blestoned town perched atop a hill with stone church, houses and small shops em-ulating its artisanal past, it's easy to envision antiquated life. No small wonder parts of later movie versions of Alexandre Dumas' 1844 novel. "The Three Musketeers."

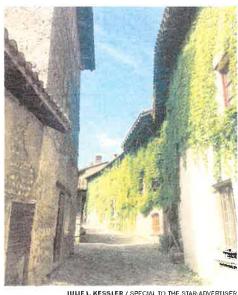
were filmed here. Thirty minutes later we boarded Buri, one of Viking's sparkling new "longships." built in 2014, with 90 staterooms. Happily, check-in took two minutes, and ou luggage was already in our nicely appointed balcony stateroom, Owing perhaps to its many American guests, staterooms came equipped with plenty of strategically placed 110V outlets. Of the 176 guests sailing that week, most were American, with some British and Irish conples. There were a halfdozen couples on board including us in their 50s, and the rest were in their 60s. In addition to longships

ability to dock in small towns along the Rhone, permitting guests to walk directly into villages and included excursions with excellent local guides. Viking's biggest assets are its staff: utterly impeccable, consis-tently attentive service, from the front desk and housekeeping to waiters. And, of course, there's the great food prepared by chef Dimitris Sidiropoulos and his staff

Lyon, France's gastronomic capital and third-larg-est city, perched at the confluence of Rhone and Sa-one rivers, is at once charming, calm and collegiate, with almost 100,000 students in its several universities.

To get my bearings, I rented a bike steps from Vi king Buri and rode along the Rhone passing flocks of swans and stationary riverboat restaurants to Parc de la Tete d'Or. France's largest park at nearly 300 acres, Be-hind massive ornate iron gates, this splendid park encompasses a botanical gar-den and picturesque lake surrounding an ideal natural habitat for the deer, reptiles primates and other animals

that live there. Lyon's historic center is quaint with cobblestone pe destrian streets, medieval architecture, artisan shops cafes and Theater Guignol, with traditional puppel



JULIE L. KESSLER / SPECIAL TO THE STAR ADVERTISE

The perfectly preserved medieval town of Perouges in eastern France is lined with cobblestone streets

shows. Although repeatedly told that France has more than 40,000 churches, few are as monumental or or nate as Lyon's Gothic and Byzantine Basilique No-tre-Dame de Fourviere, rising nearly 400 feet above the Saone River, constructed in the late 19th century after the Franco-Prussian War.

Between Lyon and Macon, on an excursion to Beaujou. home of Beaujolais, we stopped at Chateau des Rav-atys, owned since 1937 by the Louis Pasteur Institute where we sampled excellent appellations of Brouilly and

Beaujolais.

Another highlight was a visit with Viking chef Sidiropoulos to Les Halles de Paul Bocuse, Lvon's gourmet indoor market. There we sampled pork and beef sausages, various cow and goal cheëses, and pralines, accompanied of course, by Beaujolais.

Vlenne, Tournon-sur-Rhone and Viviers

Arriving in Vienne, we took a trolley up to the town's apex and were rewarded with sweeping views on the slopes of Mount Pipet. Vienne's center proudly displays its Gallo-Roman



patrimony. Nearby, the Augustus and Livia Temple, dedicated to Rome, was converted into a church in the fifth century and painstak-ingly restored in the 19th

century.

Returning to Viking's Buri, we were greeted with a wonderful "Taste of Provence" featuring strolling musicians, local cheeses, sausages, bouillabaisse, roasted lamb and an incredible dessert to

ble. In Tournon-sur-Rhone stands a statue of Marc Seguin, the 19th-century engineer and developer of the wire-cable suspension

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EXPEDITIONS

bridge and steam locomotive several times faster than the British then had. Nearby, a pedestrian suspension bridge is located close to the original that Se guin first installed.

We hopped onto a 125-year-old steam train built to get Doux Valley residents out of Ardeche plateau's isolation. En route there were dozens of bridges, viaducts and tunnels amid the conservation forest. To return, the locomotive was impressively turned around by two men on a swing bridge and placed in the train's front by hand.

In the lifth-century walled town of Viviers, a night walking tour led us through cobblestone alleyways and labyrinthine streets. We were rewarded with a full moon gracing the Romanesque and Gothic St. Vincent Cathedral with its fine bell tower.

Walking uphill in the com-pany of several meandering town cats, an eerily moonlit view provided medieval per-spective. Once down, we stopped at the Renaissance House of Chevaliers, with beautifully ornate carvings from 1546, which has been nearly restored to its earlier grandeur

The allure of Arles

and Avignon
Known as the "Pearl of
Provence." famous for inspiring more than 200 of Van Gogh's paintings, Arles was also ancient Rome's provincial capital. At every turn walking this pastel-colored town — a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1981 — Roman ruins abound, Chariot races took place at its 20.000-seat amphitheater, which was built in the year 90 and is now used for bull-fights and concerts,

In the Place du Forum we toasted Van Gogh's genius with rose and steamed mus-

sels. The problem with Avignon, dubbed "City of Popes" — as it was home to seven pontiffs, from 1309 to 1377 — is that once here, you don't want to leave. Ever. This glorious walled city is a haven of architectural treasures, including the Gothic Papal Palace.

diminutive cobblestone streets and excellent shopping for Provencal pottery, ics and spices,

With Casey engaging his inner sommelier by tasting wine at Maison Bouachon's world-renowned Cha-teauneuf-du-Pape. I joined a baking class at Maison de Fogasses, Located in an eclectic 16th-century mansion. Fogasses is owned by Corinne Guyon, who for the past 12 years has created a salonlike following, Along the way, she designed a restaurant on the grounds, a cooking school and has partitioned the massive man-sion to include five hotel rooms. As Guyon is a collector who admittedly never throws anything out, the mansion is a veritable gal-lery of diverse art.

Our group learned how to make a focaccialike bread with crushed olives and Provencal herbs. Fortu-nately for the class of six, chef Anthony Roussi made our delicious lunch of herbenergisted white codwashed down with chilled

After a great week aboard Viking Buri, it was time to say au revoir to our new friends. Heading to Marsellles, we spent our final day in the Old Port strolling the colorful French-African quarter, and caught the last day of a Guinea Baga art exhibit at La Vieille Charite, a former alms house turned museum.

Sitting on our balcony at the perfectly situated Sofitel Vieux Port, overlooking the picturesque boat-lined quays, we learned of the al-most simultaneous terrorist trifecta in Chelsea, N.Y.: Seaside Park, N.J.; and St. Cloud, Minn. In an utterly imperfect world, and glad we didn't stay home, we blessed our good fortune during our fabulous French formight,

Julie L. Kessler is a travel writer, attorney and legal columnist based in Los Angeles and the author of the award-winning book "Fifty-Fifty: The Clarity of Hind-sight, "She can be reached at Julie@VagabondLawyer.com





Tully Festival/Great Lakes, 5/4-16 ALOHA Tour! Tour Confirmed U of Notre Dame, Tully Festival, Mackinac Island-Grar Holel, MI & WI Upper Peninsula. Mall of America, Spain Museum

nu/Shlikoku Princess Cruise, 5/17-29

Western NPs & Vegas, 6/25-7/10 Banff, Woterton, Glacier, Arches Capyonismds Nat'l Parks

Quebec, Sept-Oct

Vegas & Canada's Polar Bears, Oct

stnam, Cambodia & The Mekong, 11/12-20 AMA Waterways Land & River Cruise

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