

# Traveldiary Brigitte & Heinz

Having a good time between Germany and  
Southern France



## Chapter 28

December 2015 - October 2016

# Having a good time between Germany and Southern France

A new year, new ideas! Initially, we intended to satisfy our discovery-spirits with a big trip around Alaska, Yukon and the US-National parks. However, we had heard about too many bad experiences, even well integrated, bog-standard commoners had with the US-immigration. So, we felt two crazy Swiss, globetrotting for already 17 years, are probably not the first ones, the American authorities are keen to issue a generous visitor-permit.

While wintering on the shore of Lake Constance, we took some time for brain-storming and altered our priorities. After we had explored so many countries and regions, new or little known to us, in 2015, we felt now, taking it easy this year would be better. We concluded, it's best for this summer just to have a good time at well known naturist places. As the following travelogue is going to cover predominantly places we had been describing in detail in previous years, we will keep it short and sweet.

## Immenstaad: our wintering quarter on Lake Constance

On December 1<sup>st</sup> 2015, we moved into a nice holiday flat on the German shore of Lake Constance. We had rented this bright modern apartment in **Immenstaad** several times before, and enjoyed its excellent location once more. Countless walking paths started right at our doorstep. Not even for shopping we needed the car. Only for outings, for instance to **Meersburg**, where we visited several times the pleasant thermal bath. We enjoyed the generous sauna landscape, built in stilt dwelling style, right on the lakeshore. Further excursions brought us to **Konstanz, Stein on Rhein, Tuttlingen, Salem and Heiligenberg, Ravensburg, Tettngang, Wangen in the Allgäu** and **Friedrichshafen**. On foot, we reached **Kippenhausen, Hagnau, Bermatingen** and once, even **Meersburg**.



Theoretically, our apartment offered superb vistas over the lake to the Alps. However, in the first month we mostly had foggy and wet winter weather, though without snow. So there was ample time to complete our travel story and other work at computer.

Although our winter residence was in Germany, many of our Swiss friends found it close enough to pay us a visit. So we enjoyed quite a few times hosting guests for a few days. Heinz wanted to spoil them with his cooking skills, but soon realized that German supermarkets offer relatively limited choices, if you look for quality items. If those Swiss folks who think everything sells at rip-off prices in Switzerland, would be forced to buy EVERYTHING in German supermarkets only, they would soon become desperate to shop in Switzerland again.

In Germany, cheap products are often "cheap and cheap", but quality products are very hard to find and if you get them, they are often not cheap at all! To us, German meat-counters often look rather unappealing and from some prime cuts

you're lucky, if you find one single piece at all. Back in Switzerland, even the smallest supermarkets feels like a land of milk and honey. Everywhere, you find fillets of lamb AND fillets of beef stocked in the fridges; several hundreds, if they're on special!

Retrospectively, we understand now why some German friends judged Migros supermarkets a luxury chain, similar to KDW in Berlin. To Swiss people, Migros is just the country's cheapest supermarket chain.



Friends who returned to Germany after living for 10 years in Switzerland, told us that they too miss the wide choice found in Swiss supermarkets. They also felt, it's not really overpriced if you consider the quality and earn your living in Switzerland. However, bargain hunters happily drive 100km with their expensive fuel guzzlers to save a few pennies...

## Switzerland: a bit of snow please

On the beginning of March 2016, we drove to Switzerland, where we had the privilege to house sit Heinz' sister and brother in law's place during their skiing holiday. Even in the mountains, snow hadn't arrived before mid February, not to mention in the Lake Constance area. There, it had only snowed a bit three times. Therefore, we too were keen to go up to the mountains, to get at least a glimpse of what's left of the winter wonderland. So we arranged a nice holiday flat in **Ulrichen**, a small Valais village of ~220 inhabitants in the [Upper Goms Valley](#), on 1,350m of altitude.

Arriving on March 30, 2016, just after Easter, we were surprised that nearly all tourist businesses were already firmly closed, hearing how bustling it had been, only two days ago. At least, the snow masses didn't leave with the tourist-masses, though they melted quickly now. From up to two metres on our arrival day, only about half a metre was left a week later.

Winter hiking tracks were not being groomed anymore, yet the first summer walking tracks were cleaned of the snow. This offered a wide array of pleasant walking opportunities between the ever slumping snow walls. However, in the small charming Valais villages, with their typical wooden houses full of character, the snow piles still heaped up, sometimes 5 - 7 metres high! Obviously, there is little space to put the excess white stuff between houses.



Despite having a wonderful and very modern holiday apartment in an old, smartly renovated building, and despite the lasting overcast weather, we went daily for a lengthy hike. We also loved to stroll around the many picturesque Valais villages and hamlets. After having visited all the neighbouring places like **Obergesteln**, **Oberwald**, **Geschinen** and **Münster**, we walked even further afield to **Reckingen** and **Biel**, from where we rode back with the train. That's also how Edith, Heinz' sister arrived, when she paid us a spontaneous visit.

Afterwards, WE paid a two days visit to our friend Anne in **Vevey** on Lac Léman (Lake Geneva) from where we started our summer-trip.



## Germany: ten days full of experience in the south west

It was April 9<sup>th</sup> 2016, when we crossed the border into [Germany](#) and continued to the partly still snow covered Feldberg. We were now in the **Black Forest** region, which we crossed on our way north. We passed blooming spring meadows and forests in which the leaves just started to open. In the evening, we arrived at the cuckoo-clock obsessed town of **Triberg**, where we stayed overnight. The next day, we stopped at the pretty village of **Zell am Harmersbach**, before reaching the "Hochschwarzwald" (High Black Forest) that offers splendid views over hills and raised moss.

## Heidelberg: a pretty town nestled to the Odenwald hills

On April 10, 2016, we reached [Heidelberg](#), our first major destination in Germany. With some good luck, we had found a new holiday apartment on the outskirts. It was better value than a hotel room and still in walking distance of the centre.

Thanks to Heidelberg having been spared from shelling during WWII, it still has an intact old town spreading for several kilometres along Neckar River. The hills on both sides of the river bank invite for strolls, offering wonderful vistas of the historic town. Splendid landmarks are the ruins of a once giant castle enthroning the city, as well as an arched stone bridge.

The main road across the old town happens to be the longest pedestrianized road in Germany, and is busy with locals and tourists alike. Sure enough, many eateries try to sell simple fare as overpriced German specialities, but Michelin starred-, as well as good ethnic restaurants, can also be found in the touristy centre.



Heidelberg sits on the junction between the lavishly green [Odenwald](#) and the very industrialized towns along the Rhine. The same can be said of several pretty villages nearby, of which we visited **Ladenburg** and **Schriesheim**, both with well restored half-timbered houses.

It's easy all across Germany, to find good and cheap snacks and even meals at bakeries and butcher shops. More often than not, they provide a few tables and chairs. At the other end of the scale, haute cuisine seems to be on the rise.

Surprisingly, we found many restaurants that offer gastronomic cuisine. At one of those rising stars, we didn't indulge in an excellent gastronomic meal by coincidence; the Strahlenberger Hof in Schriesheim. The chef has taken the chance of opening an own restaurant, after many years abroad, including 12 in Switzerland, where we had met him a few years ago.



As we had a second, even bigger city on our agenda, we felt a bit of green in between would be a nice change. Furthermore, we were already in the area of the forested hills known as Odenwald. For two days, we based ourselves in **Fränkisch-Crumbach**, a small village with good hiking opportunities. On the way to and from there, we visited a number of pretty places: **Eberbach**, **Erbach** and **Michelstadt**, as well as **Heppenheim**, **Bensheim** and the town of **Darmstadt**.

## Frankfurt am Main: where modern skyscrapers tower over a small old town

On April 16<sup>th</sup> 2016, we reached the [Frankfurt](#) Downtown hostel, where we had reserved a room and parking. While discovering this city of 700,000 for four days, we admired the dozens of hyper modern skyscrapers. As the entire town has been bombarded during WWII, it attracts now visitors fond of modern architecture. Around the square called "Römerberg", a number of historic buildings, or their façades respectively, have been, and are still being re-constructed. They give the centre an old-town feel with half-timbered houses. Also very worthwhile, is a walk along both shores of the River Main. It rewards with great views of the city's skyline, boosting predominately very modern, but also some older landmark buildings.

Though, Frankfurt attracts many foreign visitors, most are rather involved in the finance business or in the many trade fairs, than visiting as tourists. In fact, the city has become not only an important financial centre, but has also the world's second largest trade fair grounds by size (592,127m<sup>2</sup>).

With so much money around, shopping-, fitness-, and wellness-centres seem to mushroom. To find Swiss banks well represented, was no surprise. But we were astonished to find that Switzerland's largest (officially non-profit-) retailer Migros not only operates a good number of food-, and home-accessories stores, but also three huge fitness-centres, of several thousand square metres.



After leaving the big city, we continued again to the countryside. First, we visited the charming village of **Elville on the Rhine**, with its many half-timbered houses. The place name sounded already like villages in the French Alsace region and that's where we headed to next. There to, we crossed the swollen river Rhine with a car-ferry, and passed many intensely green meadows gay with flowers.

## Alsace: France, but a bit different

On April 20<sup>th</sup> 2016, we crossed the border to France and arrived in the [Alsace](#), a region distinctly different from the rest of the country. Neighbouring Germany and Switzerland may have influenced its language and its kitchen. Although we didn't hear Alsatian spoken that often, Sauerkraut and Sausages were ever present on the menus.

We were looking forward to see many more charming villages full of half-timbered houses, as we remembered them from several previous visits to Southern-Alsace. This time, we arrived in the far north in **Wissembourg**. If we thought the character of the villages is the same all over the district, we were now proofed wrong. We don't want to say, places like **Wissembourg**, **Haguenau**, **Saverne** or **Wasselonne** are not nice, they are just different from what tourists think, the Alsace must look like. We enjoyed them all the same, but the picture perfect Alsace planted into our memories, started with **Obernai** and further south. We were most charmed by the villages of **Barr**, **Ribeauvillé**, **Riquewihr** and **Kaysers-berg**. In our opinion, they outshine **Sélestat** and **Colmar** by far, though there are quite a few more places worth visiting.



Sure enough, the prettiest villages attract also busloads of tourists. Not surprisingly, local chefs developed unique skills to advertise simple traditional fare as local specialties for the price of a gastronomic meal. Think about green salad, crispy thin Flammkuchen, or Speck and Sausage on Sauerkraut, and a scoop of no-brand ice cream, followed by a nicely peppered bill. In many touristy Alsatian villages, like Obernai and Ribeauvillé, this is the rule rather than the exception.



However, we were lucky, as we spent our first night in Haguenau, which is not all that touristy, the second in Obernai, where we coincidentally sniffed out an exceptionally good restaurant, and our last five days in Riquewihr, a remarkable foodies heaven. There, many restaurants serve creative high class dishes, others traditional fare, but at fair prices.

On one day, we were invited by Sonia+Tony, an Alsatian couple we had met a few years ago at Sablière. They showed us around their neighbouring village **Vieux-Thann** and invited us for a meal at their house. A perfect finish of our travels through the Alsace.

## France: Revisiting some of our favourite naturist places

As mentioned before, we intend to spend an easy summer in the buff. To keep kicking back at a maximum, and collecting new experiences to a minimum, we stick to some of our favourite places we know for a long time. That way, we should have plenty of time to ourselves, which probably sounds ironic for us roving spirits. However, it's all relative: we remember a story from the owner-family of Seehof, nowadays probably the best restaurant in Immenstaad on Lake Constance. After WWII, the French sized the hotel to host their officers. The former owners were employed according to French labour laws; he as maintenance man, she as a chef. After the occupation, the French renovated the building and gave it back to the former owners, who, in the aftermath said, they had never ever before had such an easy life. They had had less work, allowing them more leisure time to spend with their children. They also concluded, they had to adapt to totally different eating-, and food-habits, but after all, they had never before eaten as well, as during French occupation.

This brings us back to our summer in France: just "vivre nu et manger bien"



End of April, the weather turned again cold, and the hilltops of the Vosges, as well as the Black Forest, got covered in white again. Nevertheless, we stubbornly drove south, as we had a reservation in a naturist resort.

The first day brought us via Belfort to **Lons le Saunier**. The next morning, we continued over lonely roads through pastoral landscapes, climbed the viewpoint at St.Laurent la Roche, and visited the pretty village of **Crémieu**. After overnighing in **St. Jean de Bournay**, we crossed the Rhone River at Tournon-sur-Rhône. From there, our way led along the impressive road D578 through picturesque gorges (without stopping bays to take pictures...), and over the 1,350m high pass Col de Mézilhac. Soon, we reached the Ardèche and Gard Districts, where our lazy summer was to start.

## Domaine de la Sablière: distinctive rocks towering over a small river

On April 29<sup>th</sup> 2016, we arrived at [Domaine de la Sablière](#), situated roughly 30 km north-west of Orange. This nice naturist ground offers a spectacular setting in a forest clad, rather steep river valley. There are altogether about 250 lodgings of various standards and about the same number of pitches, mostly hidden between trees. Sun-seekers find more than enough sun around the big pools, of which one is covered. Sunny sand and gravel beaches can be found along the small river Cèze. Sablière's landmark are certainly the two rock outcrops towering above the river.



This time, we stayed in two different mobile-homes; the first one offered great comfort, the second great views. We relocated, because Heinz' sister and brother in law, Edith and Karl, spontaneously decided to join us for a week end of May. All four of us enjoyed Sablière the way it's meant to; we gave the car a rest and took advantage of the many kilometres of walking- and hiking paths. For cooling down, we just jumped into the Cèze River and for warming up, the indoor pool or the sauna came in handy.

Sablère organizes a weekly welcome-apéro for newcomers - or so we thought! Well, there were almost only permanent tenants present, and most of them arrived exactly after the lukewarm short introduction speech. As a group, they took advantage of the offered booze, and raided the buffet, yet moaned about how much better it had been last week. After the nibbles were cleaned completely, and nothing was left to wash it down with, they staggered to their cars and navigated back, no matter how near their place was. Now we know, why e.g. Arna advertises it's welcome-apéro clearly "to new arrivals only"! Normally, when talking to naturists, we got the impression they sound more mature than commoners, but seeing that, we start to doubt it!



The vicinity of Sablière offers a big choice of sight-seeing possibilities, be it picturesque villages or natural sites. The week with Edith & Karl wasn't enough to see all the caves of the Ardèche, but we visited the villages of Barjac and Goudargues, the Cascades de Sautadet, and the natural rock arch near Vallon Pont d'Arc. Naturally, we timed our excursions to be finished off with a delicious meal in one of the many gastronomic restaurants.

## La Grande Cosse: lovely despite lots of rumours, but...

On May 31<sup>st</sup> 2016, we drove straight to the Mediterranean, where we had reserved a small mobile-home at [La Grande Cosse](#) near Béziers. We love this excellent naturist ground because of its setting in midst of the nature reserve "étang des pissevaches". As we had heard many rumours following the successive sale of the resort, we were curious to find out for ourselves.

At the reception, we were welcomed by a few familiar faces despite having heard that everybody had been sacked and replaced by rubberneckers... Next, we were given an upgrade to a better and bigger mobile-home.

For a good week, we were joined by our Swiss Friend Anne. Being at La Grande Cosse for the first time, she wanted to explore it all, and so we meandered about even more. She liked the place very much as well. However, Sonia and Tony, who had come here for decades, feel some changes are negative.



We observed that the new parent-company invests lots of money to make La Grande Cosse a more family friendly campground. Yet, the number of pitches were greatly reduced, as almost one hundred additional mobile-homes, all with dish-washers, were brought in. Children have certainly loved the new bouncing castles, the many additional playgrounds and especially the tall cork screw waterslides.

Many of the regulars and permanent tenants who came here for a long time, worried about the noise to be expected from the "new target group" families WITH children. To us, la Grande Cosse had become attractive as never before. Its location in the nature reserve along a great beach, is as beautiful as ever. Again, we were lucky to spot lots of water birds, including many flamingos. The walking path through the marsh lands with its various ponds and channels, some spanned by bridges, is very scenic. Depending on the water level, many worthwhile detours invite to explore the unique eco system - no clothes required.

Following a second change of ownership in 2016, money was generously invested. Thanks to the new facilities, La Grande Cosse will be an even more family friendly naturist paradise...

## (Heart-) Breaking news

... so we thought! However, the new owners thought differently! They decided that La Grande Cosse shall become textile as of the season 2017. According to a newspaper story from "ladepeche.fr", the town hall of Saint Pierre la Mer (commune de Fleury) decided that the beach stays naturist, but textiles will be tolerated in a 100 meters wide strip.

We discovered La Grande Cosse in 2012. To us, it is, resp. was, by far the nicest naturist resort we got to know along the Mediterranean, so we're certainly saddened. However, we can also understand the managements' decision.

The founders, two French couples, had to sell the place in 2000, due to health reasons. They had run it as a paradise for contend naturists, who loved the peace and quietness of the site, and would have loved to keep it like that. However, the new owners, and also those who subsequently bought the resort at the beginning of 2016, invested lots of money, to convert La Grande Cosse into a modern family friendly naturist resort with top notch facilities.



To us, the new management of La Grande Cosse did an excellent job. However, to many of the "pre 2000" old time regulars, any improvement appeared to be just another coffin nail added to their vanishing paradise. So they started to moan about everything, be it the bouncing castles, the water-slides, the new mobile homes, the noisy children, or just the prices in the shop. Even a boycott of the supermarket was organised by regulars! Finally, they plastered the internet-forums with bad reviews like the following one, a "1 out of a 5 stars" rating: "Not the same anymore, we had been here several times, but unfortunately, they target now families with children, too much noise, too much animations..." and so on. Today's rat-race gives little time to read reviews properly, people just see the low star rating, be it justified or not, and book elsewhere...

Logically, if the old-time regulars don't return, but do everything they can to give the resort a bad reputation, the new owners have to look for a new clientele anyway. So the biggest commercial argument to keep La Grande Cosse naturist, melted into thin air.

To say it bluntly; the ever nagging regulars did probably unintendedly put the last nails in the coffin of La Grande Cosse as an naturist resort. Some older folks just don't want to understand that the younger generation ensures the future of the naturist-movement and resorts, not those in the waiting room for heaven and hell.

There is still a modicum of hope. In all honesty, we don't think many textiles will be delighted, to walk some 700 meters down to the strand, just to find out, it's actually a naturist beach, with a small "cloth optional" section. Therefore, we wouldn't be surprised, if Franceloc (renamed to Capefun), the new owner of La Grande Cosse, would reverse its decision for the season 2018. Let's trust for the best...

## Foix and Auch: charming towns between the coasts



We left the Mediterranean on May 24<sup>th</sup> 2016, towards the Atlantic Coast. We started by driving through the spectacular Corbière Ranges. After visiting the villages of Durban, Tuchan and Saint-Paul-de-Fenouillet, we continued along the Pyrenees. The landscape alternated between rocky gorges and wide, green valleys, dotted with vineyards. We overnighed in the picturesque town of Foix, where we fund an extraordinary dinner.



After an unseasonably hot period during the previous weeks, we had found relief in a thunderstorm. However, the rains didn't stop the next day. Therefore, we decided to get further away from the mountains. After visiting the charming old quarters of Samatan, we came into pastoral landscapes with golden cornfields.

Once we reached the town of Auch, we found ourselves a hotel again. Like Foix, also Auch has a fortress enthroning the town. However, here it's not a castle, but two bold churches. We ventured many stairs up and down, some of which have gotten quite famous in history. Our chosen restaurant was already worthwhile for its unique name: Jeff, envoie du bois (Jeff, send us some wood).

## **ARNA: large, happening, but still cosy and quiet**

On the next day, May 26<sup>th</sup> 2016, we arrived at [Arna](#), about 50km north of Biarritz. We love this naturist ground because of its great lively ambience, its comfortable accommodations and its top notch facilities, right on an extremely beautiful beach on the Atlantic. Due to the Gulf Stream, the sea here is warmer than the Mediterranean.

Part of Arna's unique atmosphere is, that guests can choose, whether they want to have a quiet time, or the contrary. All animations that could disturb others are either held underground, like the disco, or smartly positioned in a swale, like the open-air theatre with its professional shows. No noise is caused by the fee based Wi-Fi network that has been greatly improved. As the camping is situated in a pine forest, they must have invested a lot to make sure the signal is now reliably available everywhere.



Again, we were impressed about the big night market that is set up every Monday evening. It was nice to see that some of the stall keepers meanwhile became naturists as well, and wear no more than an apron. If we found the 30-40 market-stalls at Arna to be a big market, we were proofed wrong when visiting Molliet Plage. This village, about 8km away, probably only exists during the summer holiday season. But then, the entire place is packed with market stalls, souvenir shops, eateries and holiday makers. Yet, the season is extremely short. Quite a number of eating places didn't open until the end of July. Luckily, our new discovery opens early in season: Restaurant Globetrotter. A small simple, but excellent eatery resembling the many traveller's hang-outs all over Asia.

## **Baines, the inviting, yet very dangerous traps**

Arna's vast naturist beach is certainly the crowd-drawer, though it poses also the biggest risk to the many holiday makers. Luckily, the live-savers do an excellent job, and bathers who get in trouble can normally be saved, often even before a reanimation is necessary.

However, those who swim outside the supervised areas, expose themselves to a very high risk. According to the statistics, more than 80% of fatal bathing accidents in France occur outside supervised areas.

Especially the Atlantic causes many victims. Contrary to common belief, the beach sections with the most agitated waves are the safest whereas sections with calm water are the most dangerous. Even harmless looking puddles on the shore can suddenly become deadly traps. Sandbanks, visible or under water, create countless inviting looking lagoon-like natural bathing ponds.

However, the Baines, how those tidal ponds are called in French, claim several victims during the summer months almost daily. The effect of the tides and the waves regularly



create sudden strong currents. Even experienced swimmers will almost certainly lose their lives, if they attempt to swim against those currents. If no life-savers are present, the only real chance of survival is allowing to get drifted out, against the instinct! After a while, the current gets weaker and you can leave it by swimming sideward. The detour may save the energy needed to reach the shore again.

Sure enough, the supervised sections are always set up in segments where no strong currents should appear. Only next to them, there can be a Baïne, putting thoughtless swimmers at high risk. Naturally, you could argue, those who are aware of the risk and are ready to face the consequences, shouldn't be stopped to swim on a lonely spot. However, if something happen, they take also the fun of everybody who swims where it's meant to do so.

A German couple staying at ARNA found it more peaceful to swim some two kilometres north of the supervised section and we agree, the natural lagoon between the sand-peninsula and the shoreline looks calm and inviting. However, they got trapped in sudden currents. The woman was lucky to escape narrowly with her life, but for him, help arrived too late. Life savers and a helicopter were called, who sensibly, first ensured that everybody on the supervised section leaves the water, before attempting to save the lives of those, who bathed somewhere else. Due to this incident, swimming was banned for three hours at the naturist beach, and for 1½ hours at the nearby textile beach and everybody realized, an ambulance wasn't necessary anymore... an unnecessary tragic end of an holiday.

## Domaine Laborde: uniting holiday makers from far and wide

It was July 31<sup>st</sup> 2016, when we changed from the Atlantic coast, famous for its vast beaches, to the Dordogne Region, famous for its gastronomic restaurants and pretty villages. We chose to stay at [Domaine Laborde](#), a well equipped naturist ground with two swimming ponds. It is situated exactly on the border between the Dordogne and Lot-et-Garonne districts. With about 125 campsites and 35 rentals, it's rather smallish, but big enough to have daily animations, a restaurant, a small épicerie, sauna and hammam, as well as an indoor- and an outdoor-pool. The two large waterslides are certainly the crowd drawers in this family oriented holiday camp.



Laborde is one of the few Dutch owned naturist grounds that manages to attract a truly international clientele. Surely, they attract many compatriots, but during August, nearly half of their guests were locals. Many French families spend their summer holidays at Laborde for 10 years in a row. Also many English naturists come here, and this year, we met even four holiday makers, all the way from China. Despite the cultural differences, they didn't seem different from us Europeans. When we asked the 20 years old Chinese woman, whether it's her first naturist experience and if she likes it, she confirmed, as did her boyfriend. When asked whether the older couple were her parents, she replied in a totally "un-Asian manner": "Oh no, no. I would never come here with my parents. Yet, they are friends of my father and live in France".



Apart from making new acquaintances, we also met Gudrun and Uly again, passionate travellers from Germany. They gave us a surprise visit, and we were surprised they wanted to join us to a gourmet meal. We had a great time at Laborde, and visiting some fine restaurants, was a perfect change from our stage at the Atlantic coast.

## CHM Monta: the nudest naturist village

On August 13<sup>th</sup> 2016, we changed back to the seashore, this time to [CHM Monta](#) (Centre Hélio Marin Montalivet), just outside the summer holiday village of Montalivet. As the cradle of naturism, CHM Monta is by many still considered being a simple naturist village with poor amenities. However, it has long become a modern resort with top notch facilities. Sure enough, the beach on the Atlantic Ocean is why so many people come here. Though, when the water is too rough or too cold, luckily there are two very big pools, both heated to 29°C. One is now covered, and the larger one is a beautifully landscaped lagoon-like water park with big slides.



When we arrived mid August, the resort was fully occupied, probably with some 18'000 naturists. The atmosphere was really great; somehow beyond description. Naturism is lived up to the full, which means also nude life savers on the

beach and on the pools, unclad animators, restaurants with topless waitresses, nude musicians and lots of holiday makers shopping and dining in the buff. Or in short: nude living as natural as it can be, and even the adolescents join in.

Despite being now a modern, attractive well appointed holiday resort, CHM still attracts predominantly true, self-content naturists. You definitely feel a difference to other naturist resorts. We totally agree with Ted, our mobile-home neighbour from the United States, who said: "I don't know any other naturist-resort, where nudity is so natural and practiced so self-understood, by so many people of any age and gender, as in CHM-Monta".



## Le Couderc: our extended summer

Towards the middle of September, it got noticeably quieter on the Atlantic Coast. On September 17<sup>th</sup> 2016, we joined the leaving crowd and went back to the Dordogne Region. When we arrived at [Le Couderc](#), the picture was a different one. On this pleasant naturist resort near Beaumont-du-Périgord, all rentals, 22 chalets and 6 furnished tents, were occupied, as were about half of the 160 campsites. A combination of excellent equipment and service, together with attractive pricing, extends Le Couderc's season until mid October.

A small supermarket, take-away counter, pizzeria, bar and the restaurant were still open daily. The restaurant was very popular and in addition, some neighbours joined in regularly for evening meals, and sometimes even for re-unions. This prove the quality of the kitchen, and the acceptance of the naturist ground in the neighbourhood. Various people living in the area hold season passes and like to take advantage of the generous opening hours. Unlike many bigger resorts, Le Couderc's large sauna, new splendid hammam with starry sky, the jacuzzi and also the pool, are kept open daily until 10 P.M. - once a week actually until midnight. What better service can you ask for at the beginning of October?



An "open podium" is on the agenda every Wednesday night. In peak summer, guests are queuing to perform something. Then the stage is open air, with the audience sitting on a big lawn. In colder times, like now in autumn, the stage is in a big barn with a bar and fire place. We learned that many of Le Couderc's guests, are professional artists from the Netherlands. Naturally, in off-season, people get fewer; whether spectators or artists. Never the less,

from the three podium nights we witnessed, the last two were more cheering. It is absolutely impressive to experience, how an ad hoc band can play such top class music. It was always like a free concert and spectators sang and danced along.

Our time at Le Couderc was a perfect extension of the summer, a storybook Indian Summer. Many Naturists took advantage, and therefore all rentals remained occupied until beginning of October, only the pitches were thinning out. During the day, we enjoyed hiking around the ground and the bordering forest. Sometimes, we even paddled a round in a canoe on the tiny pond. In the evenings, the superb sauna and pool-complex were waiting.

Though we had rented a spacious chalet with a good kitchen, we sometimes drove out to sample French haute cuisine. The time was also ripe to collect new ideas about our future travels. In short: we were really busy and barely had time to prepare our trip to Ireland, which theoretically started on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 16 when we left Le Couderc.

## La Rochelle and Vannes: worthwhile stops en route to Roscoff

On good country roads, we moved north towards Brittany, giving ourselves three days to cover the 750km to the ferry port. This allowed time for some detours to worthwhile destinations. First, we visited the pleasant and quite touristy harbour town of **La Rochelle**. Here, we spent one night in the brand new "Hotel Première Classe" near the city centre where we loved to stroll around in the evening, and again the next morning.



After cruising some more country roads and crossing the impressive large suspension bridge "Pont de Saint Nazaire", our chosen destination was **Vannes**. The old town with many half timbered houses is very charming. We were very pleased with our Hotel "Manche-Océane", bang in the centre. We took time to wander around the town within and outside the city walls, and also around the pretty harbour. Though we stayed two days, we could easily have spent two weeks, only to sample the most outstanding restaurants.



On October 14, 2016, we hit the road again and crossed the "Brittany Peninsula". For lunch, we stopped at the charming village of Huelgoat on Lake Fao. We were lucky to find our chosen Crêperie open, despite arriving after 2 P.M., the time when most lunch-places in France close. The widely known version of thin pancakes, called Crêpes, as well as the savoury version: Galette, originate from Brittany, so we felt "obliged" to indulge into some. Luckily, one is never enough for a filling meal.

After a predominantly sunny and warm summer, there was thick fog upon leaving Vannes. At first, we thought; "that's it, the last impression we get from France is probably the same, we can expect during the coming months in Ireland". However, long before arriving in the port village of **Roscoff**, it cleared up and so we could enjoy the picturesque fishing harbour in the best of light. At sunset, we boarded a large vessel of Brittany Ferries that brought us during the night to a new island with new adventures...



Brigitte & Heinz

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