

Le Marais Poitevin & Angles sur L'Anglin

May 26 - 28

The **Marais Poitevin** is a magical place and yet most Parisians I speak with have never been there. Many have never even heard of it. Not far from the more commonly visited **La Rochelle and Ile-de-Ré**, the Marais Poitevin is located just west of the city of Niort. The main town of the Marais, and launching pad for many of the boat trips through its vast network of canals, is **Coulon**, about a 20 minutes' drive from Niort.

It is about a 4 ½ hour drive from Paris to Coulon. Poitiers makes a good lunch stop along the way. The Marais Poitevin could be visited in a weekend, or combined with part of a **Loire Valley**, as we did, or La Rochelle and Ile-de-Ré for a long weekend or even longer trip. We chose to stop in **Angles sur l'Anglin** for our second night, in part to break up the ride home and in part to visit this medieval town that is one of **Les Plus Beaux Villages de France**.

Date	To	Flight/Hotel/Car Details	Cost	Comments
Sat, May 26	Le Marais Poitevin (visit Vouvant)	<i>Car:</i> Hertz, 45 ave de Maine, Montparnasse – pick-up 8AM (drop-off by 7:45AM May 29), via www.autoescape.com <i>Hotel:</i> Logis de la Mélissière Brigitte Maugé 79220 Xaintray Tel.: 05 49 26 05 33 Cell: 06 21 60 18 70 Email: lamelissiere@hotmail.fr http://www2.marais-poitevin.com/heberg-ch/logis-de-la-melissiere/gite_la-maison-de-margot.html	€98 (suite for 4 people, including breakfast) <i>Car:</i> £69.61 = €86.87	<p>We stopped for lunch in the old town of Poitiers, and had a wonderful lunch on a large and pleasant terrace at Vingélique (37 rue Carnot, 86000 Poitiers, Tel. Tél.: 05 49 55 07 03) for just €12 for a main plus dessert.</p> <p>We stayed at Logis de la Mélissière in the small town of Xaintray. I cannot recommend this B&B highly enough. The owners are very friendly and have painstakingly restored this old farm into an architectural and decorating marvel.</p> <p>In the late afternoon, we headed to Coulon just to scope it out. The only downside to our lodgings was that it's about a 25-30 minute drive from Xaintray to Coulon, the heart of the Marais Poitevin. But we were happy to be staying a bit out of Coulon, as the town is a bit touristy. Nonetheless, the town is lovely and if you walk just a short way past the main part of the town, you lose most of the other tourists. The tourist office in Coulon sells hiking and cycling guides to the region.</p> <p>After a stroll along the river in Coulon, we returned to the B&B for dinner with the hosts (<i>table d'hôte</i>) for just €24, which included pre-dinner appetizers and homemade liqueurs, a three courses, wine and dessert. Experiencing a <i>table d'hôte</i> also a wonderful way to get to know some people in the region you are visiting.</p>

Sun, May 27	Angles sur L'Anglin	<p><i>Hotel:</i> Artemisia 6, rue Traversière 86260 Angles-sur-l'Anglin Tel.: 05 49 84 01 83 E-mail: pioger@hotmail.fr http://www.chambre-hote.eu/pagelamaison.html</p>	<p>€75 (per double, including breakfast) <i>Note:</i> 50%, i.e. €75 paid in advance</p>	<p>On Sunday, after a wonderful breakfast at Logis de la Melissière, we returned to Coulon for 2-hour a guided tour of the canals in a small boat not much bigger than a canoe. You can rent your own boats, which allows you to get a bit more exercise, but the network of canals is confusing and the guides are able to share a wealth of information with you. Our guide, Benjamin, was extremely informative. We were extremely pleased to have toured with this company, La Pigouille, and not with one of the larger, more commercial outfits. La Pigouille (52, quai Louis Tardy, Tel. 05 49 35 80 99, lapigouille@free.fr) also runs a guest house and a pleasant restaurant, which could be an option if you prefer to stay right in Coulon. If you are able to call ahead and reserve a boat, it cannot hurt.</p> <p>We had lunch after the canal tour at an excellent Breton crêperie, L'Escale (72, quai Louis Tardy, Tel. 05 49 35 98 42) – just €10 each for a galette and a dessert crêpe and sharing a bottle of cider!</p> <p>After lunch, we visited the nearby village of La Garette, which we had also seen from the boat. La Garette is extremely picturesque and you can also start boat trips on the canals from here.</p> <p>The next stop was the medieval village of Vouvant, one of <i>les Plus Beaux Villages de France</i>. With an 11th century Romanesque church, medieval towers and ramparts, this Vendée town is definitely worth a stop. There also seem to be numerous bike paths in the area if you are planning to stay longer.</p> <p>Our final destination for Sunday was Angles sur l'Anglin, the second of our <i>Plus Beaux Villages de France</i> visits of this weekend. Angles is a larger village in the center of France (on the border of Berry and Touraine, in the southern Loire region) with castle ruins that look out over the medieval city and river below. At 3 ½ hours from Paris, you could even visit Angles as a 1-night getaway from Paris.</p> <p>Our B&B, Artemesia, was an attraction in and of itself: it's an ancient stone house decorated with an eclectic mix of traditional and modern accent pieces (including the paintings of one of the hosts) and includes (despite its location in the center of town) a wild English-style garden of flowers, several courtyards and a small fish pond.</p>
Mon, May 28	Drive back to Paris	--		<p>We took our time getting back to Paris on Monday, stopping at the Maison du Parc (park headquarters) for the natural regional park of Brennes. We took a 2-hour hike through fields and forests and by some of the many ponds in the region. The gift shop in the park has free trail maps, as well as a number of wonderful regional products for sale. After our walk, we ate on the lovely terrace of the Maison du Parc's restaurant.</p>