

STUDY ABROAD



MAGAZINE

French mornings, Provençal markets, and lessons that stayed long after the plane landed

INTRO

I went to Aix not only to expand my knowledge of the French language, but to prove to myself that I could face this challenge and succeed. So many times in my life I have been afraid of change, so I stick to my comfort zone. Never did I imagine that going would change my life forever.



xoxo,
Mariana





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THE DAY OF

The night before I left was a swirl of emotions: joy, nerves, and every anxious thought in between. I prayed my host family and suite-mate would be kind, that I'd somehow keep up with the language, and not get hopelessly lost in a new country. It didn't help that my boyfriend's dad had me watch *Taken* a week before, so the anxiety in my head was alive and well.

On the plane, reality hit when I realized I only half-understood what the flight attendant was saying. For a moment, I thought this was a very expensive mistake. To make matters worse, a kid kicked my seat for hours while a girl next to me blasted Piano Tiles... a soundtrack of chaos I didn't ask for. Our connection to Marseille ended up delayed by four hours, testing every ounce of patience I had left.

By the time we had finally landed, my luggage was the very last to roll onto the carousel, and our taxi driver was already calling impatiently from outside. Climbing into the car should've felt like relief, but he didn't even have my address. I found myself trying to explain where I lived... in French, exhausted, and lost wondering how this adventure could possibly begin like this. I wish I could say my journey started off like a dream, but instead it felt like a scripted comedy of errors. And yet, in hindsight, I think it had to happen this way. My whole life I've worried about being perfect, not in a cute "perfectionist" sense, but in a deep fear of wasting opportunities or failing myself and my loved ones. That messy, chaotic arrival was the first reminder that imperfection leaves room for adventure.



Once I arrived, everything just... clicked. The fear of not having anything interesting to say to my host family vanished the second I sat down and recounted my chaotic journey: the flight, the taxi, the luggage, all of it. What I had been most worried about that morning became the very thing that broke the ice and made me feel at home.

The house itself was warm and welcoming, perched at the edge of town with a breathtaking view of Saint-Victoire - my mountain, as I began calling it. My suite mate was a little MIA that first day, which made me nervous at first, but the jet lag had us all in a daze. We finally met properly over dinner, where we bonded instantly over "France's water" (champagne) and plates of basil, tomato, and mozzarella. The perfect start to a friendship.

The next morning was our first day of class, and Beatriz and Arnoud made sure we didn't leave hungry, preparing a traditional French breakfast before Beatriz walked us into town. That was the day I began learning the small but surprising cultural differences, like how complimenting a stranger on her Haley Bieber nails earned me a bewildered look. In France, no one greets strangers, waves to random dogs, hugs are far too intimate (cheek kisses are the norm), and almost everyone takes the bus instead of driving. Each little shock felt like a nudge, reminding me that I wasn't just studying abroad... I was learning a new rhythm of life.

AIX MARKS THE SPOT



For four wonderfully beautiful weeks, I called Aix-en-Provence home. Bathed in Mediterranean sunshine with warm days and cool evening breezes, the city felt like it was always inviting me outside. Every stroll led me past gorgeous fountains trickling in hidden corners, each one a tiny piece of history.



Nestled in the heart of Provence, about 30 km north of Marseille, known as the “City of a Thousand Fountains.”

Life here moved at a softer rhythm. Mornings wandering and vibrant markets bursting with lavender and ripe fruit, afternoons tracing the footsteps of Cézanne, and evenings lingering over coffee or drinks at sun-drenched cafés. The light had a way of making everything feel painted, from cobblestone streets to café tables. In Aix, there is beauty and art in every moment.

LIFE IN MOTION



After classes, we often stopped at Monoprix, the French answer to a mix between Target and a grocery store. It became our go-to for road trip snacks, light lunches, or even last-minute supplies for weekend adventures. Every errand felt more charming when the checkout lines were filled with locals picking up fresh baguettes and bottles of wine.

At night, the city transformed. We were lucky enough to be there during Aix's music festival, when the cafés pushed their tables to the edges of the street to make room for tiny stages. Bands played everything from jazz to indie rock, turning the cobblestone squares into open-air concerts. You could dance with friends, and feel the heartbeat of the city in every note.

MY 5 UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS



● Saint-Victoire's First Impression

As soon as I stepped into my home for the next 4 weeks, I saw it. Saint-Victoire in all its magnificent glory for the first time, its jagged beauty painted against the Provençal sky. I'd never seen anything like it before, and to my surprise, I cried. It felt like nature itself was welcoming me to France.

● The "Latte" That Wasn't

My very first morning in Aix, I wandered into a café with Zoe called Le Novo, ready to order a comforting latte. Instead, I learned my first French lesson: lattes don't exist here. I ended up with a steaming cup of hot milk... a happy accident that made me laugh and set the tone for the small, delightful surprises ahead.

● The Bus Incident

One afternoon, an elderly woman yelled at me and Zoe for sitting in a priority seat I didn't realize was reserved. Before I could stammer out an apology, several passengers defended me, explaining there were no signs. It was my first taste of the warmth and protectiveness of Aix's community, even to a total stranger.

A Night of Music & Cosmos

During the music festival, Aix came alive with sound and laughter. Zoé and I found ourselves at a jazzy café, sipping cosmos like Carrie and Charlotte from *Sex and the City*, watching the night swirl around us. It was one of those moments where life felt cinematic.

The Last Day That Meant Everything

Although the sun was shining it was a sad day in Aix. Everyone was going around the table saying their favorite part about the trip. And I guess that's when I realized my favorite part was the friend I'd made for life. She is someone who felt like a long-lost older sister. I felt so incredibly blessed to have been able to meet such a kind soul who had the patience to guide me through my first time in Europe.



CULTURAL IMMERSION



THE COOKING CLASS

DINNER MENU

To Start

A small salad paired with a
Classic dijon vinaigrette with
baguette and butter

Main

Chicken Provençal en
Papillote with lemon

Dessert

A Dark Chocolate Lavender
Mi-cuit cake with coca
powder and fresh lavender on
top



THE RECIPES



Classic Dijon Vinaigrette

- For the dressing:
- 2 tablespoon vinegar sherry vinegar 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp of Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 1/4 tsp black pepper
- 1 half shallot finely minced
- Whisk together the mustard and the vinegar- whisk while pouring the oil in a steady stream to create an emulsion. Add the rest of your ingredients and whisk vigorously to combine. Taste with a piece of lettuce to determine if you need more salt, acid, or oil.

Chicken Provençal en Papillote



- 1 chicken breast fillet per person
- heirloom tomato slices
- tapenade - or black olives and capers chopped lemon
- olives
- basil
- olive oil
- salt pepper
- Preheat oven to 200C
- Prepare rectangles of parchment paper (roughly the size of an A4 paper). Fold papers in half. Open the papers and pile toward the fold two three tomato slices. Place the chicken on top and salt and pepper to season, spread about one teaspoon of tapenade on the chicken and top with basil, a thin slice of lemon and a few more olives. Drizzle with olive oil.
- Starting at one corner, fold the two sides of the paper together and continue to make small folds along the edge, sealing the contents in a half circle. The last fold should be tucked under the packet.
- Place the parchment parcels on a baking tray and bake for 15 minutes. Remove from oven and cut open sliding the chicken into a shallow bowl with all of the beautiful juices. Serve with fresh basil and a drizzle of olive oil.

THE RECIPES



Dark Chocolate Lavender Mi-cuit

- 2 tablespoons of dried lavender (baking quality) 20cl of cream
- 200g dark chocolate cut into small pieces
- 90 g sugar
- 4 eggs 90 g flour
- Cocoa for dusting
- Prepare the infused cream: Add the dried lavender to the saucepan with the cream. Bring to a simmer for 3 minutes. Take off the burner and let it infuse for a few more minutes. Strain the cream into a metal bowl and add the chocolate. Whisk until smooth.
- In a large mixing bowl, add the eggs and sugar and whisk until the mix starts to foam and lighten in color.
- Pour the melted chocolate into the eggs and mix well. Add the flour, a little at a time to avoid over mixing.
- Pour into a prepared metal cake tin and refrigerate until ready to bake.
- Preheat the oven to 180C
- Bake the cakes for 9 minutes. The center should still be a bit wobbly and concave
- (this will depend on the size and material of your cake pan). Remove from the oven and let cool a few minutes. Run a knife around the edge and then flip carefully to release from he mold. When you cut to serve the center should be of a custard consistency.
- Dust with cocoa powder and sprinkle a few dried lavender to serve.







OH THE PLACES YOU'LL GO

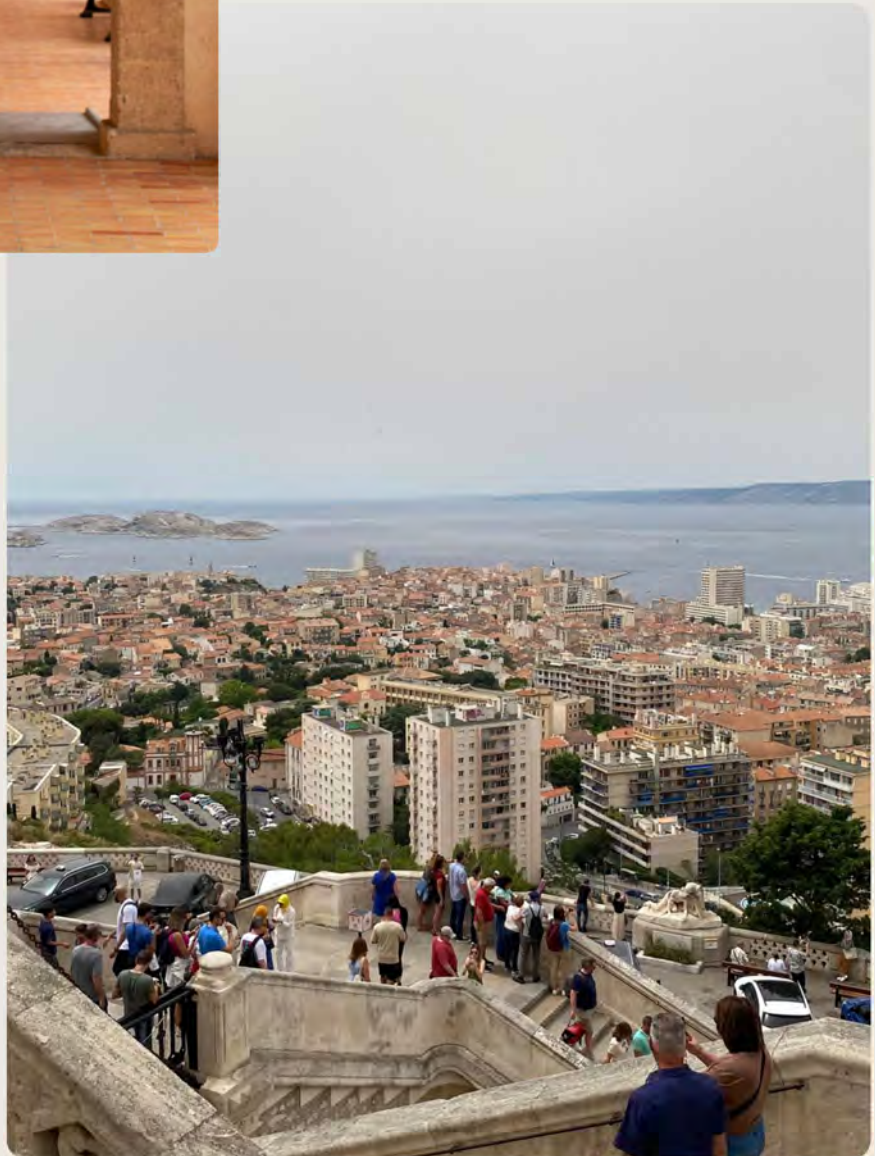




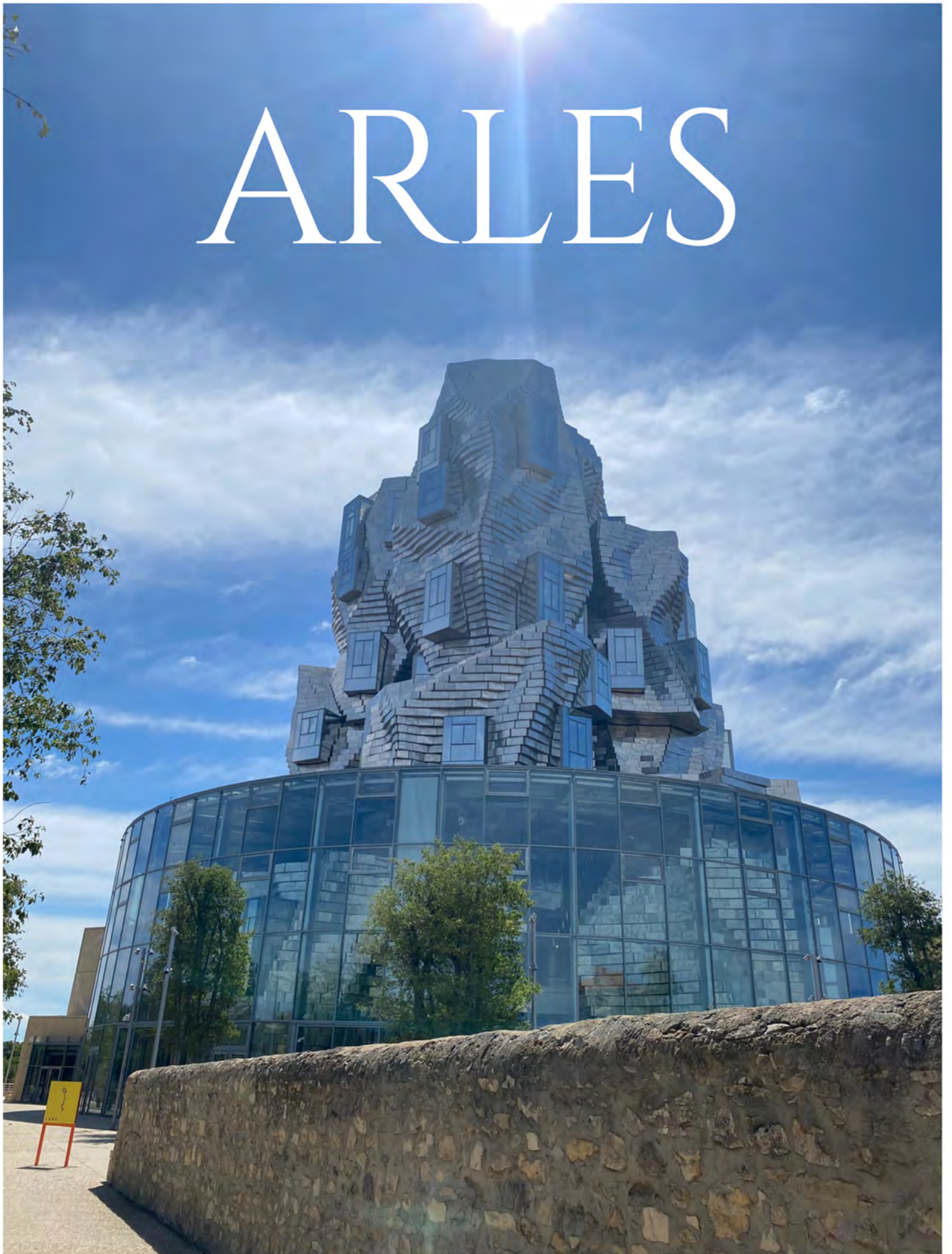
MARSEILLE

PORT

Marseille, France's oldest city, is a vibrant Mediterranean port known for its rich history, diverse culture, and stunning coastline. From the colorful Vieux-Port and lively markets, to the iconic Basilique Notre-Dame de la Garde overlooking the sea, the city blends old-world charm with modern energy. Not to mention its proximity to all of the islands, Marseille is a true gateway to southern France.



ARLES





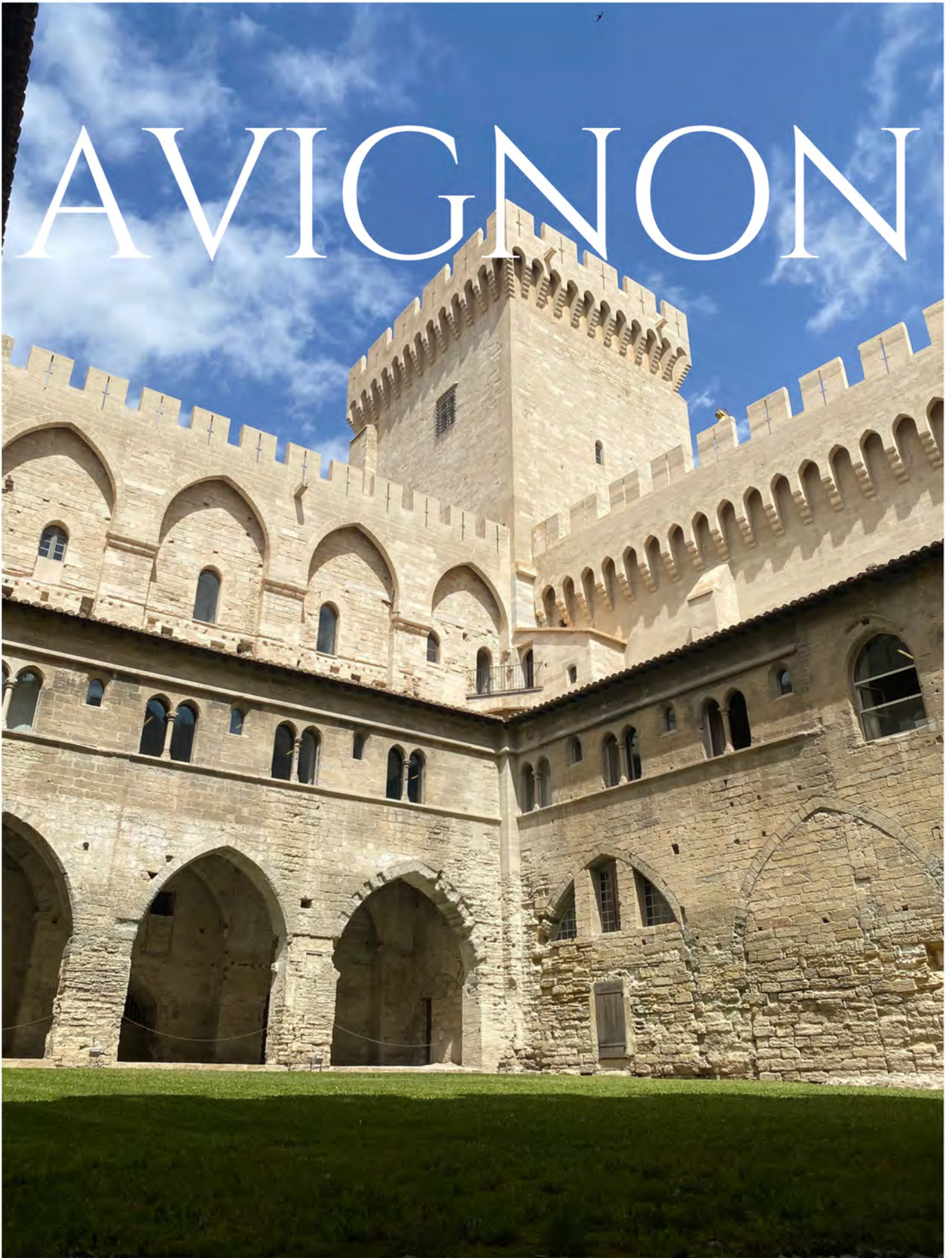
GIRLS TRIP

Arles, a charming Provençal town, is steeped in Roman history and artistic spirit. Its impressive amphitheater stands as a reminder of its ancient past, while winding streets lead to cozy local cafés and colorful squares. Museums highlight both Arles' heritage and its ties to artists like Van Gogh, making the town a blend of history, culture, and everyday French life.

Although known for its powerful winds, at times so fierce it felt like we weren't in Kansas anymore, Arles carries that energy into its atmosphere, giving the city an unmistakable character. The gusts sweep through the narrow streets, past ancient stone walls and lively squares, adding a touch of drama to afternoons spent at darling little boutiques.



AVIGNON



AVIGNON



POPE TOWN

Avignon, once the seat of the papacy, feels like stepping back into a medieval storybook. The city is crowned by the grand Palais des Papes and wrapped in centuries-old stone walls, with cobbled streets leading to bustling squares and charming cafés. From wandering the historic bridge of Pont d'Avignon to exploring lively markets and hidden courtyards, the city blends rich history with Souther French life.



CASSIS



CASSIS



BEACH FUN

Cassis, a picturesque seaside town, is the perfect spot for sun-drenched relaxation and coastal charm. Its golden beaches and turquoise waters invite long, carefree days by the sea, while the lively harbor offers fresh, local flavors... like the unforgettable fish burger that perfectly captured the town's Mediterranean spirit. With its mix of natural beauty and laid-back atmosphere, Cassis feels like a little slice of paradise on the French coast.



ÎLES DU FRIOUL





ÎLES DU FRIOUL

WAVES

The Îles du Frioul, just a short boat ride from Marseille, feel like an untouched escape in the Mediterranean. With rugged cliffs, hidden coves, and crystal-clear waters, the islands are perfect for swimming, hiking, or simply taking in the wild beauty of the coastline. Quiet and remote, they offer a refreshing contrast to the bustle of the city, making every moment there feel like a deep breath.





STUDY
ABROAD

Summer '24



XOXO, STUDY ABROAD '24

* You are the best
flatmate a gal
could ever dream
of having! 😊
Love you BUNCHES! ♡
WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE AIX!
♡, Jill

"" Mariana,
I will never
forget our month.
It was an amazing
experience to share.
Friends 4 life.
-Jamie ""

Princesa hermosa:
Gracias a DPs que te permitió vivir esta
oportunidad única y que supiste aprovecharla.
No hay nada más gratificante que verte
abrir tus alas para volar y alcanzar nuevas
horizontes.

Estamos muy orgullosos de ti.

mamá y papá.

NEXT TIMES

Regret has a quiet way of reminding you how precious a moment really was. Sometimes I wish I could step back into it just once more... when I go back, this is what I will do...

01

Sit and have a picnic in the local park

I always said I would do it but never got the chance to have a french picnic. Grab a bottle of wine from the Monoprix, chips, baguette, prosciutto, mozzarella, arugula, balsamic glaze, and just people watch.

02

Take advantage of the free bus pass to Marseille

Once you are there you can explore so many different small islands for a very cheap price. Remember to put your hands in your pockets and close your purse if you have one #PickPocketingIsReal

03

Take another cooking class

As listed previously in the magazine, a cooking class is such a unique and special experience. I would love to take a croissant class in Paris or a class for pasta in the south of France.

04

Visit Paris

Yes, the train ride was very pricey... I mean, 300 euros doesn't just grow on trees. But I do wish I would have had that experience with my friends that made the journey so enjoyable.

05

Visit more cities in the south of France

I always dreamed of going to Nice or Monaco, but we just didn't have enough time. When I go back I definitely want to experience the luxury of being there.

06

Trying different cafes

Yes, I have my favorites. But I wish I would have done a series on TikTok where I try all of the different cafes in Aix. Something local and small but that gives me new experiences to look forward to... even if it's just a cappuccino.

07

Visiting a vineyard

I have always wanted to go wine tasting... but in France! Talk about living the dream. Currently broadening my wine tastes from Barefoot because this is for sure a must when I go back.

08

Go to a jazz club

There was only 1 in the area when I checked, but I just never found the time. As a music lover this is something I definitely should have done but now I know for next time.

09

Taking more videos

I know I say I want to live in the moment, but seeing the videos I took during my trip makes me feel like I can step back into Aix for just a few seconds. To hear the distant chatter of people having their mid day coffee, as a light breeze brings a warm feeling, topped off with looking at the fountain in the center of town. Chefs kiss.



LAVANDE

“Travel makes one modest. You see what a tiny place you occupy in the world.”

-Gustave Flaubert