

## Reliving the French Revolution in Marseille

Article by Larry Bridwell, photos by Lucy Komisar

Did you ever wonder why the French National Anthem is called La Marseillaise?

It is named after Marseille, France's second largest city. In 1792, the National Guard of Marseille adopted the anthem as its military marching song, and when the troops entered Paris to help defend the capital against foreign invasion from Prussia and Austria, it immediately became popular among the citizens. It was formally adopted as the French National Anthem in 1795.

"Allons enfants de la patrie, le jour de gloire est arrivé....."

Arise children of the fatherland, the day of glory has arrived....



This history is brilliantly portrayed in the multi-media Memorial de la Marseillaise on Thubaneau Street in old Marseille where the revolutionaries met and first sang the song. In one of the original buildings, the museum has created a 360-degree setting with powerful, sophisticated videos and special effects to recapture the emotions of the revolutionary spirit.



The other historical sights of Marseille are easily accessible in a half-day visit, especially if one stays near the city center. We chose a hotel close to the 19th-century St. Charles train station which was built to facilitate travel by ship to the Middle East and Africa. Reflecting this mission, the train station's great staircase has two statues inspired by the heritage of the Middle East and Africa.

The dramatic staircase leads downhill through pedestrian-friendly Marseille to the Vieux-Port. The name, old port, is appropriate because Marseille, the oldest city in France, dating from 600 B.C., began as a trading post for Greek ships. The port is lined with restaurants, including the

classically French La Caravelle, which features exquisite carpaccio, perfectly cooked local sea bass and excellent house wine from nearby Provence. The balcony view of one of the most interesting ports in Europe makes for a deliciously visual lunch.

Starting in the old port, a tourist train visits the main city sites of Marseille including a stop at the historic Notre-Dame de la Garde with stunning views down to the harbor. The Basilica began as a fort in the 1500's at the highest point in the city to protect Marseille against a siege by Emperor Charles V. Even today, the Basilica is viewed by many residents as the spiritual guardian of Marseille.



After the train ride, we boarded a boat to cruise France's largest shipping port. During the pleasant breezy journey, we passed fortress islands important to French history and culture, including Chateau d'If, which was a key setting in the novel, The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas. The Count of the story was falsely imprisoned on the island for fourteen years before escaping and planning revenge against his enemies. Published in 1844, it became the most popular novel in Europe.

Near the old port is the charming historic district of Panier with local artisan and food shops that reflect the heritage of Marseille. You can buy soap, Christmas crib figures, ceramic art, ice cream, chocolate, and Provence olive oil. After strolling through Panier, we took the underground metro from the old port back up the hill to the train station. From there the next morning, it was easy to continue by train to the French Riviera with pleasant memories of our short visit to one of the most important cities of France.



## **If you go**

### ***Eurailpass***

We had a railpass from [Rail Europe](#), which provides many options for one, two, three or more countries. Go to RailEurope's web site (or call a reservation agent) to decide whether your trip is best done with point-to-point tickets or a pass or combination of the two. Passes are sold only to non-European residents.

Tel: 888-382-7245.

### ***Memorial de la Marseillaise***

25 rue Thubaneau

13001 Marseille

Tel : 33 (0)4 9191-9196

<http://www.vert-marine.com/memorial-marseillaise-marseille-13/>

### ***Listen to [Édith Piaf](#) sing "La Marseillaise"***

<http://www.youtuberepeater.com/watch?v=90v8R3eVWq0&name=La+Marseillaise+Edith+Piaf+Qui+Chante+Et+Bon+Sang+Ce+Quelle+Vive+France>

### ***Watch the [Marseillaise scene](#) in "Casablanca"***

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HM-E2H1ChJM>

### ***La Caravelle***

34 Quai Du Port

13002, Marseille

<http://www.lacaravelle-marseille.fr/>

### ***Petit Train***

<http://www.petit-train-marseille.com/>

### ***Boat Trip***

[www.resamarseille.com](http://www.resamarseille.com)