

# Jenni's 2012 Wedding Trip

To my husband Jeffrey who stayed behind and looked after the cats.

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Une histoire (a story)

Tuesday, July 31, 2012

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In 2006, in Loumarin, a stunning village in Provence, I met a lovely lady by the name of Michele.

Preparing a meal in the cabin Michele shared with Francis & Simone. She's one of Sussie's (my sister) many friends & like all of Sussie's friends at her big birthday bash,

Michele made me very welcome on my first trip to Provence.

After my return to Oz, Michele & I kept in contact. When she visited OZ in 2008, Michele came to our place for a barby & a bike ride...

As part of planning our 2009 trip to Europe, I contacted Michele to ask for suggestions on accommodation for Jeff & me & our travel companions, Bonnie & Dennis. Being the lovely lady she is, Michele offered for the four of us to stay in her brand-new home. We gratefully accepted this fantastic offer, little knowing that our stay would set the scene for my returning to Alsace for a wedding in 2012

One evening during our stay, Michele invited us to dinner with her good friends, Nathalie & Denis. We had a great dinner at the local restaurant & returned to Michele's place for some scrumptious desserts, compliments of Michele's maman, Paulette.

## Jenni's 2012 Wedding Trip

During the dinner, Denis mentioned that his son, Nicolas, & girlfriend, Louise, were planning a trip to travel around Australia. When Denis asked if he could give Nico our contact details, we readily agreed with the result that Nico & Louise arrived in Oz 17

January 2010.

Louise & Nico stayed with us for about 4 weeks while they purchased a van & set it up for the trip with the help of our friends, Anne & Bob, Mary & John, & Alison & Bob.

We did a little sightseeing together but best of all, Louise & Nico cooked us some memorable meals...

And then they were off, travelling around Australia in their van on a pretty tight budget.

They recorded their adventures in a blog...it was a great way to keep up with their travels & taught us a new communication tool.

Jeff & I also had a fantastic trip in June & July 2010: we went to Germany & France. In France, we met more of LouNco's families: Nico's lovely mother, Chantal, & Alex her charming husband; Marcelle, Louise's lovely mother (unfortunately, Louise's father wasn't able to meet with us).

We also spent some time with Nathalie & Denis & met Nico's young brother, Maxime, who was getting ready to spend a year in the USA.

Shortly after our return to Sydney, Chantal & Alex arrived for a much too short stay at our place. We enjoyed showing them a little of our beautiful city & the wildlife in our backyard.

Louise & Nico shortened their stay in Oz so they could return to France to surprise Louise's sister for her birthday. So, it was time to say Au Revoir to our young French friends...

After 7 months of travelling to some amazing places (many places most Aussies haven't seen), Louise & Nico head home.

Jeff & I felt that Louise & Nico had grown much closer during their trip; their warmth & caring for each other was quite visible & we kept our fingers crossed.

During the fabulous JAMBA trip in September 2011, LouNco (with help from Chantal & Alex) treated we girls to a five-star Michelin meal; it was merveilleux.

Over the course of the evening, I wondered whether there was some exciting news to be shared...but no, just a wonderful meal with great company.

Needless to say, we were thrilled when Louise gave us early notice of their plans "faire le grand saut" & I started making my plans of my own. Now, it's just a little over a week before I head off to share in Louise & Nico's really big adventure. I am both honoured & very excited.

## The Trip Plan

### Wednesday, August 01, 2012

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Just for the records, here are my plans (bear in mind that the dates below are local & also that my plans are always flexible - except of course, the airplane rides):

- Sat, 11 August: fly to Singapore & spend 2 days with Katie, Dean, Sam & Oliver. I'm really looking forward to seeing the family; they've been in Singapore since early January & we miss them
- Mon, 13 August: fly overnight to Paris via Abu Dhabi on Etihad Airways. I have a 2.5 hour layover, so might have just enough time to do a little duty free browsing
- Tue, 14 August: 7:35am arrival at CDG Airport in Paris then make my way to the TGV Station to catch the TGV to Strasbourg at 12:28pm. I should have enough time for my first croissant et cafe en France...yum
- Tue, 14 August: arrive in Strasbourg just before 3:00pm to spend a couple of days with Michele & catch up with her parents, Paulette & Rene who I missed out on seeing during JAMBA's trip last year
- I have a few days before the big day, 18 August, & after spending time catching up with Louise & Nico, with Nathalie & Denis & Maxime, with Chantal & Alex, with Marcelle, hope to have some time to do some shopping - wouldn't it be great to buy a French outfit for a French wedding!
- Fri, 17 August: Louise & Nico's civil ceremony with family
- Sat, 18 August: Louise & Nico's special celebration in Bischoffsheim, Alsace

- Mon, 20 August: I meet up with our friend from Ulm, Claus for a couple of days of exploring more of beautiful Alsace (& especially tasting more of the delicious wines)
- Wed, 22 August: back on the TGV to travel to Antibes where I'll spend some time with my sister, Sussie
- I have 5 days with Sussie & I'm sure looking forward to seeing the changes she's made to her place since I last visited in 2006 as well as seeing more of Provence.
- Tue, 28 August: on the TGV again to return to CDG for my flight to Singapore via Abu Dhabi (this time, the layover is 3.5 hours).
- Wed, 29 August: at 10:20pm, I arrive in Singapore to spend another 2 nights with family.
- Fri, 31 August: back to the airport at for my 8:45pm overnight flight back home.
- Sat, 1 September: arrive back at 9:45am to my lovely hubby & hopefully a beautiful springtime Sydney.

One More Sleep

### Friday, August 10, 2012

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Mostly packed, just the usual last minute stuff to add in the morning. I can't believe the trip is already here. Time to say Au Revoir to Zulu & Kasha - Jeff's buddies for the next 3 weeks

- Pictures: The lorikeets who come for breakfast,
- and of course to my lovely hubby enjoying Selena's 1st birthday last weekend
- and to say HELLO to Katie Dean Sam Oliver in Singapore...
- A Lovely Morning in Windy Sydney

### Friday, August 10, 2012

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I spent a lovely morning with Alison at The Grounds in Alexandria ... very popular, a bit noisy but great food.

### Saturday, August 11, 2012 - At the Airport

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It's another miserable day in Sydney (only weather-wise, of course). Must be the why the airport is jammed full of people leaving!

Just over an hour to take off, then I'm on my way to see KDSO.

And there's my plane

### Saturday, August 11, 2012 - In Steamy Singapore

### Sunday, August 12, 2012

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Flight D7 223 from my seat at the back of the plane.

Arrived exactly on time in Singapore at 8pm. Gosh, Changi is a huge airport. Air AsiaX flight from Sydney was fine except that I wished I'd taken up the ESO (Empty Seat Offer) purchase I received before I left. The plane wasn't overly crowded but seats small.

Flying over Australia always takes my breath away...the size & colours of the landscape are amazing...

Somewhere over WA

The red centre?? Missed out on the Rock again

KL's LCCT the low-cost flights are a good, inexpensive way to travel but they mean what they say - low cost. When we deplaned at KL's LCCT, we walked down the stairs onto & across the tarmac (same for reboarding). Transferring to the next flight was easy & uncomplicated. The terminal is pretty basic but adequate. And then I was on my way again.

Dean met me at Changi & we caught a taxi to the apartment - the city scape is gorgeous at night & significantly changed since Jeff & I were here ??? years ago. It was lovely to see the family; really miss them. More later...

Sunday in Singapore - Part 1

[Sunday, August 12, 2012](#)

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I woke up this morning to be greeted by two little guys; Sam had stayed up last night, so this was my first catchup with Ollie - he was a little shy but it didn't last long. After a good catchup, a Sunday morning swim for the boys & some breakfast, we headed out to the Marina Bay Gardens. What an amazing place: it's a stunning place that apparently has examples of more than 90% of the world's plant life. We found it hard to believe that there were so many full grown trees. And the Australian grass trees!!!

Sam & Daddy in the pool

After swim Ollie

Sam & Ollie posing for me - aren't they handsome boys!

Grass Trees in the Australian section; some of the grass trees were at least 10feet high

My favourite flower, the beautiful fushcia

Katie, Ollie, Sam & Dean near the entrance to the gardens

Inside the Flower Dome

Inside the Flower Dome

The Tree Walk - we did this; Sam was not too comfortable with the height & doubted the strength of the wires holding the pathway

The view from the tree walk; Singapore has a fantastic cityscape

The Marina Bay Sands Hotel & Casino; when I return to Singapore, KDSO are taking me to the rooftop.

Inside the Cloud Dome; a created mountain & waterfall

Just a sample of the many orchids on display at the Gardens

Trying to get Ollie's cooperation for a picture was challenging

[Sunday in Singapore - Part 2](#)

[Sunday, August 12, 2012](#)

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After a break from the heat, we headed out again to have dinner in the Arabian quarter. Katie & Dean have decided not to have a car in Singapore, so they take advantage of the great taxi services available.

Katie has an app on her iPhone that makes booking a taxi very easy; the taxi usually turns up within 5 minutes.

The restaurant was very nice; it was funny having Lebanese food in Singapore but it was pretty good. The waitress delivered pencils & papers for the boys while we waited for our dinner. The drive back home took us through the city; I'm looking forward to a night tour when I return so I can take some photos of the fantastic city lights.

In Little Arab Street on our way to dinner

This market was specifically selling food for ending the day's Ramadan fast - delicious aromas

A mosque in the Little Arab area

This "shop" turned out to be a museum displaying artefacts, useful & not, mostly from the 50s & 60s

Out door eating is very popular everywhere

A Quick Post from CDG, Paris

## [Tuesday, August 14, 2012](#)

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After leaving Singapore a little late, the first flight landed early in Abu Dhabi. The flight was uneventful, fairly full &, as usual, I couldn't sleep. Chatted with the 'guy next door'-a geologist-very interesting. I spent most of the time in Abu Dhabi trying, unsuccessfully to make a blog update. The next flight was very full & we had the bane of weary travellers -a crying baby. Despite that I managed a bit of sleep. After another early arrival, I'm killing time waiting for my train. A plus tard, tout le monde...

At The Airport Jenni's 2012 Wedding Trip

Waiting on the platform at CDG

Mt TGV arrives; I had the aisle seat 41 in carriage 18

It's a good system; you check the displayed plan to find out which section of the platform you need to wait on & then you join the rush to get on the train as quickly as you can

## [Tuesday, August 14, 2012 - Tuesday Evening in Strasbourg](#)

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The TGV arrived exactly on time; it's always a little rushed when you board as everyone wants to grab the best space for their bags. A nice young man helped my hoik my bag up onto the overhead shelf.

I was very tired so, I think, I managed to doze a little. The train made 2 stops before arriving in Strassi 5 minutes early. It was great to see Nathalie's smiling face when she met me on the platform. After making some plans for the evening, Denis took me to their home in Neugartheim for a very welcome shower. I think I was a little stinky but my gracious hosts said no (I think they were being very kind).

Denis & I went to the supermarket to get some food for my visit; my extended stay at Nathalie & Denis' place was all a bit rushed. It's always interesting to visit supermarkets & compare the products on offer with those at home. The one thing I noticed was that food prices in Alsace are much better than in Oz; even meat is cheaper. And the fruit & vegetables on display - tempting to buy a whole cartful.

Since I was becoming very groggy, we decided to eat at home. After a lovely dinner on the terrace I retired to wonderful night's sleep.

## Wednesday, August 15, 2012 - A Wonderful Wednesday

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After a great night's sleep in a bed, I woke to be greeted by a yummy breakfast of fresh baguette, croissants, juice, fruit, yogurt & coffee...c'est magnifique. We three had a lovely casual breakfast, catching up on each other's news & talking, of course, about the upcoming wedding & Rene's funeral.

Nathalie planned a lovely surprise for me - a visit to the Musee Lalique in Wingen-sur-Moder. I had hoped that JAMBA could visit this museum last year but we did not have enough time. Another welcome surprise was the news that Michele could join us for the day. The museum is great; it houses a permanent collection of items by Rene Lalique as well as a temporary exhibition, in this case, works by Lalique's daughter. She was an accomplished artist in her own right & was a set designer & costumier for the theatre.

We had lunch in a nearby restaurant on the terrace & I had 'un plat du terroir' - Bouchee a la reine (like a vol-au-vent) with some large spatzele (like stretched gnocchi) - it was lovely. Then the girls ordered Cafe Gourmand; I said yes thinking I was to have a cup of coffee but instead received a tasting plate of desserts - yum! On the way back from the museum, we saw a flock of stork in a field; I'd never seen stork other than in nests on the top of buildings. Nathalie & Michele both said they'd never seen as many at the one time; Michele counted 15.

After dropping Michele home in Romanswiller, we returned to Neugartheim for a quiet evening & dinner on the terrace with Maxime; Denis made a traditional Alsatian meal -Bibeleskasse - more yummy food.

Driving through one of the many lovely villages on the way to Wingen-sur-Moder

White cows (I think they are lovely, I've never seen them before)

The museum's parking lot was full of old Citroens when we arrived

Michele & me

The restored chandelier at the entrance - stunning

Dragonflies

A small part of the collection of perfume bottles; Lalique started making these when he joined up with Coty

Nathalie & michele learning how to make Lalique vases

Au repas

Cafe Gourmand - yum yum!

Une cigogne

Maxime, Denis & Nathalie on the terrace; you can see Strasbourg Cathedral on clear days

Bibeleskasse

## Thursday, August 16, 2012 - A Very Busy Day

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Thursday started with another great brekky; Denis went to the local boulangerie & returned with warm baguette..there is absolutely nothing better than fresh French bread.

This afternoon, we will attend Rene's funeral & since I have no suitable clothing, Nathalie suggested a visit to the shops in Strassi. The shopping venture was successful; I bought a skirt, a couple of tops & a pair of sandal-shoes. I told Nathalie about Jeff's instruction to me - make sure you buy your Frey Wille this trip - so, since we had some spare time,

Nathalie took me to the Frey Wille shop. I was able to comply with Jeff's instruction & purchased my birthday & Christmas gifts (I will test my purchases by wearing to the wedding).

Then, it was back to Neugartheim for lunch on the terrace; Denis prepared a delicious smoked salmon salad.

After changing, we headed to Romanswiller for the Rene's funeral. I was honored that Michele asked us to sit in the area reserved for family. The church was full & the service very nice. Although I did not understand everything that was said, I understood most. It was very moving. The family invited everyone for drinks & snacks in the village restaurant that Rene & Paulette used to own. I met again some of Michele's friends, including Corinne & Elisabeth.

After a pleasant hour or so, we left Romanswiller & headed into to Strasbourg to have coffee with Maxime at his workplace, Paul. He works in the one of the Paul's outlets run by his uncle, Nathalie's brother. Denis had to do some fatherly stuff (buy Maxime some new "baskets" ie basketball shoes) so Nathalie & I checked out the shops at Rivetoile, a relatively new shopping precinct beside the river. I managed to buy some white sandals for tomorrow evening's ceremony.

We drove into Germany (just across the river) for dinner in Kehl; it was a very pleasant evening in a restaurant not far from the bridge that figured prominently in NATO's 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2009.

And then back to France & Strasbourg to catch the light show at Rivetoile. Parking was a challenge because there were so many spectators; however, Denis had some luck & we found a park not far from the display. It was a good show with some really good music; but probably not quite as spectacular as the show at Bellagio in Las Vegas (apparently, the designer for tonight's show works for, or did, the Bellagio Casino). When the show finished, we joined the throngs of people making their way to the light show at the Cathedral. This was also put to music & aimed, I think, to give people a view of the some of the Cathedral's many interesting features that are not so obvious in the 'clear light of day'.

By now, it was about midnight, so we three weary (& hot) people headed back to Neugartheim for a well-earned sleep.

After purchase smiles at the Frey Wille shop in Strasbourg; the experience was delightful, the young saleslady very professional, knowledgeable & pleasant. If she hadn't reminded me, I would have forgotten all about claiming the tax refund (got back 133Euros at the airport)

My lovely guide, Nathalie

Maxime at work; Nathalie's brother owns a couple of Paul's outlets & Maxime works at this one at Rivetoile

What a lovely couple

At dinner in Kehl

The light show spectacular at Rivetoile; it was a show of water fountains & lights to music & drew big crowds

Strasbourg at night



The light show at the cathedral allowed everyone to see the beautiful rose window in all its glory

Strasbourg at night

Alsacian pottery

## Friday, August 17, 2012 - A Civil Matter

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After another yummy brekky with Denis (Nathalie had to work today), I treated myself to a manicure & pedicure at a salon in Wiwersheim. With my poor French & their poor English, it was just as well Denis escorted me into the salon. After this, we had a quick catchup with Nico & Alex; they had come to collect the 300+ bottles of champagne & wine for the wedding 'vin d'honneur' & reception. It was great to see both of them & especially to see Nico looking so happy.

Denis's friend, Michel, who runs the local supermarket & is a basketball colleague, invited us for a drink. It was very pleasant; I had my first panache - French for shandy. I am understanding more each day, although I cannot keep up with the speed of normal conversation - I guess my old brain can't translate at the same pace.

All too soon, it was time to head back home for lunch & to dress for the civil ceremony. We met Nathalie & Maxime at the Mairie & didn't wait long before the bride & groom arrived. It was so great to see them & to see them so happy. I had only a couple of minutes with them before the rest of the family members arrive. I was very warmly greeted by all family members, many of whom know who I am, partly from LouNco's great blog & from Louise & Nico talking about their amazing trip.

Very soon, we are ushered into Strassi's Mairie for the civil ceremony that will be conducted by Nico's Uncle & Denis' brother, Serge. He is deputy mayor of Strassi.

Once all the family is seated (& I am honoured to be seated with Denis & Nathalie & Chantal & Alex), the ceremony begins. Unfortunately, I can't keep up with the words but I understand that there are formal words that must be spoken & once these are done, Serge makes some jokes. The whole ceremony is very relaxed & warm. And then...they are married!! All attending cheer, whistle & clap as LouNco celebrate with a kiss - it was truly lovely.

After many photos & hugs & kisses, we moved on to dinner at La Marronniere. In this gorgeous traditional Alsacian restaurant, we ate tarte flambee & drank some great wines.

Marcelle & Josef, Louise's parents gave me especially warm greetings & expressed their gratitude for all we & Anne & Bob did for their children. Chantal & Alex said the same; Alex said that Australia is especially meaningful for them because of the time they spent with Louise & Nico in El Vanino.

When we returned home at 1 0:30pm, we were feeling so full of delicious tarte flambee we went out for a walk; we walked from Neugartheim to Itlenheim & back!! A great day.

The bride & groom arrive

Maxime, Nathalie & Denis

Brothers - Maxime & Nicolas

Before the ceremony

On their way

It's official - Louise & Nico are married!

Celebrations & photos

Alex & Nico

Outside Strassi's Mairie

La Marronniere

The happy bride & her new brother-in-law, Maxime

Family toasts the bride & groom

Kids are the same the world over; Evan is showing the girls the games on his Nanny's

(Chantal) iPhone

Tarte flambee normale

### Saturday, August 18, 2012 -The Wedding Day - A L'Eglise sainte Aurelie

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As forecast, the weather is warm (actually, it's hot)...Denis, Nathalie & I have a nice, quiet & light lunch (yet another yummy salad created by Denis) sitting on the terrace. And then on to dressing for the wedding. I misunderstood about the time we needed to arrive & so we were a little rushed but we arrived on time & slightly before most of the other guests. It was great to see Marguerite & Freddy again (they treated us to a wonderful day on our visit to Strassi in 2010; Freddy has since sold the boat & they have been doing some travel - they are off to Alicante in September).

The wedding service is held in a lovely church, Eglise sainte Aurelie, in Bischoffsheim, yet another beautiful Alsatian village.

Very soon we are ushered into the church & the service begins.

Salad on the terrace with Denis & Nathalie

Maxime, JGR, Denis, Nathalie, Freddy & Marguerite

We had front row seats for the service - I was honoured to be treated as one of the family

Very simple & elegant decorations in the church

And arrives the beautiful bride

The couple are presented to everyone (with both mothers beaming in the background Chantal in pink & Marcelle on the right)

I loved Louise's shoes - they completed her gorgeous bridal outfit

Marcelle sings in her church group; it was magical.

This is not their "home" church, so it was wonderful that the pastor & the choir were all able to participate in another church.

Listening to the pastor talk of their travels in Australia & the growth of their relationship...

Pastor Michel is the pastor of Louise's family church. He is a warm & welcoming man.

Even though I could not understand all of his sermon, I could not miss the warmth & genuine affection he has for the couple.

Gabriel decided that Louise was the best person to talk to during the service...this delightful scene was typical of the service - relaxed, warm & full of love.

Exchanging rings

Somewhere in the crowd is the couple

Proud father of the groom, Denis

Beaming father of the bride, Josef ...on to the Vin d'Honneur & reception

## Saturday, August 18, 2012 - The Wedding Day - A l'Espace Culturel et Sportif

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And now the party starts with "Vin d'Honneur"...pre-reception drinks & an opportunity for many photographs. The photographer is Nathalie's cousin & he does a great job; Louise & Nico will have difficulty sifting through the 600 or 700 photos he took.

Back to the aperitifs...at the Sports & Cultural Centre, everyone was greeted with a wonderful range of drinks to choose from - champagne, wine, beer, water & soft drinks. It was so hot that I think almost as much water was drunk as champagne...the hors d'oeuvre made a welcome appearance. For my foodie friends, the selection was amazing: wafer-thin pencil-sandwiches, chocolate coated foie gras (yes, really - it was delicious), smoked salmon morsels, guacamole cornets, to name just a few of the delicious bites.

After chatting with their guests for a while, Louise & Nico gathered friends & family for a photo session. A little later, all the guests were invited to take their places at designated tables in the dining room (the stadium taken over for the evening & looking very beautiful); my designated table was 'the monkey' with Chantal & Alex & some of their friends (I had a lovely evening chatting with Bertrand & Jean-Luc, who both very kindly spoke English with me).

When Louise & Nico entered, the guests erupted again into cheers, whistles & claps...it was noisy & great fun. They took the stage to welcome everyone. I was overwhelmed when they welcomed me & introduced me to everyone & thanked me for coming & being a part of the start of both of their adventures...

Again, for my foodie friends, for entrees we could choose from 3 buffets (or, of course, all of them) - Asian, Italian & French (guess which one I chose); the main was a melt-in your-mouth veal medallion with pesto risotto & a tian of vegetables; then there was a cheese buffet (I tried a wonderful, sort of stringy cheese); & finally, the bit we all seem to wait for....dessert...two gigantic vases full of glace (ice cream) as well as a magnificent dessert buffet (I have to stop writing about it as I'm salivating).

The evening was organised so that guests could dance (Louise & Nico started the dancing with their version of the wedding waltz); have a rest & eat some food: & then dance some more. The dancing was fun to watch when Louise & Nico led everyone dancing to "??? Dance 3" (a very popular French dance TV show).

At one point during the evening, the DJ ran a video of LouNco's trip to Oz...again, I was touched & a little emotional to see pictures of me & of Jeff in this very personal video about their trip & the development of their love for each other. Louise & Nico have promised me a copy so I can share it with the Ozzies back home.

At about 12:30am, Denis & Nathalie asked if I was ready to head home; I thought it was a bit early, as Denis had said we probably wouldn't leave before 2am. So, I dawdled a little, said my farewells & then we were on our way. It was in fact, 3am...my watch had stopped

but I hadn't even noticed the passage of time...such a great time with many treasured memories.

To my many new French friends, please forgive me if I do not state your names correctly....

Pictures with friends

Aren't they a beautiful couple?

Nico & Chantal

Marcelle & her sisters, Claudine & Annie

I love this picture of Maxime, Nico & Louise - I need to talk to my photo expert friends who may be able to eliminate that darn something in front of Louise

With Nico's parents, his delightful mother Chantal & her husband Alex & his father, Denis & the lovely Nathalie

Nico's extended family

The beautiful bride

Chantal & Alex - doesn't Alex look great in his Gendarme uniform

With Louise's family (& an interloper...Gabriel)

Sister Celine, mother Marcelle, la belle Louise, brother Michel

Chantal & Marcelle - mothers of the happy couple

The main course - Medallion de veau roti et jus releve a l'essence de basilic et son risotto aerien au pesto, accompagnes du tandem tuile de paresan et tain de legumes

Les danseurs

It was hard to imagine the room as a basketball stadium when it was filled with partying people

My dessert choices: framboiserie, profiterole, creme caramel, cassis & mango ice creams, chocolate gateau (for my lovely hubby) & a fantastic caramel souffle-like cake

The Wedding Day - Some Videos

## [Saturday, August 18, 2012](#)

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Here are some short videos from the wedding ceremony..I'll add a couple more videos later...watch this space...

Lunch in Lingolsheim

## [Sunday, August 19, 2012](#)

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After our late night/early morning we all slept in & didn't rise until 10:30am. On Friday, Louise & Nico asked me to come along to the family lunch on Sunday at Louise's aunt place. They arranged with Denis & Nathalie for Nico to collect me & drop me to Neugartheim.

Denis & Nathalie couldn't come along as they were committed to watch Maxime at a basketball tournament.

Nico collected me around 2pm (he didn't sleep until 7am & then had to wake up at 10am to do some cleaning up at the wedding venue)!! It was really nice to have a little one-on-one time with Nico; it's such a pleasure to see him so happy.

After a drive of about 30 minutes, we arrived in Lingolsheim to join the lunch party at the houses of Françoise & Marie-Claire, 2 of Louise's 7 aunts. All the guests already were enjoying some leftovers from the wedding: foie gras, jambon et boeuf. And then the reason for lunch: Louise Grandpa's spaghetti - it was delicious. After eating our fill in the awful heat, we were offered some of the leftover desserts...oh no, I cannot refuse the scrumptious framboiserie & so I eat some more.

I got to spend a little time chatting with Louise but she was so tired she was falling asleep at the table; she took the sensible path & had an LLD (little lie down). I also spent some time chatting with Alex & with Evan (mind you, most of this time was spent admiring Evan's great kicks as he played soccer with his Dad).

All too soon, people began drifting away - mostly to somewhere they could have a swim.

I had many warm farewells from many people, especially Louise & Nico's families

Louise, Nico & I had arranged that they would drive me back to Neugartheim together so we could spend a little more time together. We planned to go to their apartment in Ittenheim but as it was so hot, Josef suggested we go their home because it is air conditioned. Fantastic!!

Marcelle & Josef's home is in Wolfisheim & is lovely. They recently completed renovations & opened up the ground floor; it is spacious & welcoming....& air-conditioned!

Louise showed me around the garden; Josef is a keen gardener & grows especially beautiful orchids. We chatted for a while, then Celine arrived to join us. It was a very enjoyable time & I even got to cuddle some pussycats - Marcel & Josef have 2 & Celine & Manu's 2 cats were visiting. The cats got on amazingly well.

Nico returned with Chantal so we could say our goodbyes. I was sad that we couldn't spend more time together this trip, but we agreed that there's always next year's trip (health & finances permitting).

Nico & I drove to Ittenheim to collect Louise & then it was back to Neugartheim. After a lovely chat (& some pizza - poor Nico had been so busy all afternoon, he hadn't had time to eat after lunch), it was time for the newlyweds to leave. They are a wonderful young couple & we (ie Jeff & I) wish them very happiness & a long & joyful marriage.

Cooking spaghetti in the garden

Eating spaghetti in the garden

The tired but happy newlyweds

The garden at Marcelle & Josef's lovely home

Louise in the garden

The rear view of the house

One of Josef's gorgeous roses

A Quick Post As I Leave Neugartheim

[Monday, August 20, 2012](#)

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I cannot believe I have been in France for only 6 days; it has been a lovely stay in Alsace for the big occasion - the beautiful wedding of Louise & Nico. It was a fantastic 3 days the civil ceremony in Strasbourg's Mairie officiated by Nico's uncle Serge on Friday evening, then the beautiful service in

Bischoffsheim on Saturday afternoon followed by the party & finally a lovely family Sunday lunch. It was a magical experience & an honor to share.

I will do my best to catchup with the blog & share some photos from the 3 days.

In a little while, Denis will take me to Romanswiller to meet up with Michele & her mother, Paulette. Michele will take me to Kintzheim to meet up with Claus, stopping on the way for lunch. What wonderful friends - I am very lucky.

Meeting Claus in Kintzheim

## Monday, August 20, 2012

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Denis takes me to Michele's place where I say a fond farewell to him; he & Nathalie were wonderful hosts. I especially appreciate Maxime for giving up his room for my extended stay.

As we get ready to leave, Paulette & Michele surprise me with another bottle of luscious Alsace wine & a mirabelle (plum) tart for Claus & me; what a treat. We head off to Dambach la Ville to meet with Paulette's friend, Paulette, who will join us for lunch. When we arrive at Paulette's home, she greets us & invites us to walk through her beautiful garden where she has set up a table for some aperitifs in the garden; yet again, I am overwhelmed with the kindness & generosity of the people I meet in France, especially in Alsace. Paulette's granddaughter, Agathe, joins us as does the dog, Griotte. Look at the pictures to see the treats that came with the champagne....yum...

Michele particularly wanted to take me to lunch at La Couronne in Scherwiller; her good friend, Marie-Christine, works there & it is another beautiful, traditional Alsatian restaurant. It is also a 1-hat establishment. We have a wonderful lunch, finished off with ice-cream (mouth-watering raspberry sorbet that is divine).

And then we are off to Kintzheim & Caveau Brunstein. We find a note on the door advising me (Reeves Family) that the entry code is 88666, we have rooms 4 & 5 & the owner will see us for breakfast. There's also a note advising Claus that I'll be late & then I see Claus's note that he'd arrived already. It is great to see our very special German friend & I'm delighted to be able to introduce him to Michele & Paulette; they can speak German amongst themselves because Michele is multi-lingual as is her mother.

All too soon, I must make my sad farewells to Michele & Paulette; they have been as wonderful & gracious hosts as ever, especially given the loss of Rene.

After a quick refresh, Claus & I head off to do some exploring. Claus visited the area around Colmar many years ago & was looking forward to rediscovering the things he enjoyed about the region before. Our first stop was Dambach la Ville; it is another beautiful Alsatian village. After walking our (ie my) feet off around the village, we head towards Obernai (last year, Nathalie told me about Obernai but JABA ran out of time).

Claus's navigator decided, against his wishes, that we should take the motorway. He spoke most sternly to it. We eventually made our way to Obernai via the scenic route & it was worth the slower drive; what a beautiful place. After an ice-cream & a wander through the streets, we headed back towards Kintzheim via Mont Ste Odile (we didn't stop here, but it's on my list for my next visit - there are great views from the mont).

Since it was getting late & we were getting hungry, we stopped in Ville for dinner. We ate in a medieval-themed restaurant - I had lamb (to die for) & Claus had a starter he didn't realise he'd

ordered & a salad. We got back to Kin tzheimer about 10:30pm; after uploading pictures, I fell into bed exhausted (this was due to the great day & the horrible heat - it was very hot again, all day).

Dambach la Ville - one of the 3 remaining towers of this fortified village (note the storks nest atop the tower)

Paulette (Michele's Mum on the left), Paulette, Agathe (mostly hidden) & Michele - at the side entrance to Paulette's beautiful home. She lives beside wine fields.

Part of Paulette's gorgeous garden that she maintains by herself

Agathe & our scrummy treats

Scherwiller

Scherwiller

Lovely ladies lunching at La Couronne in Scherwiller

La Couronne has an amazing loo (the Chiotilus) & Michele was keen to make sure I saw it

The floor of La Couronne's foyer - at Christmas this space is filled with a 15m Christmas tree!

Michele with her good friend, Marie-Christine, in one of the restaurant's many rooms (it caters for up to 400 guests!!)

Caveau Brunstein in Kintzheim - my home for the next 2 nights

And there's Claus - great to see him again

And back to Dambach la Ville ...

I love the decorative detail on doors & windows

Dambach la Ville

Obernai

Obernai - a lovely town but I prefer the smaller, less "touristy" villages

Alsacian countryside

Our medieval restaurant in Ville

## Tuesday, August 21, 2012 - A Day Out with Claus in Alsace

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It's another hot day already when we meet for breakfast. Our tariff includes breakfast, so we start the day with a simple French breakfast of croissants, baguettes, jam, juice & coffee. I get to meet the owner, Christophe Wolfe, who speaks good German but not so great English. He is however very friendly & welcoming & agrees to keep our mirabelle tarte in the fridge.

Our first stop is Ste Marie aux Mines; JABA visited here last year & really liked the village.

There is now a silver mine you can visit for a real mining experience; not for us today. We stop at Col des Bagnelles where we see a large group of cyclists with their support vehicle. We drive part of the Route des Cretes (the ridge drive) & come across Lac Blanc -this appears to be a man-made lake that now is a fish reserve.

There are many tourists & many "active" holiday-makers (ie cyclists & hikers). Claus wants to see Kaysersberg so we drive there passing through Orbey (& I remembered my very first tart flambee, had in a restaurant here in 2009 with Michele & the Percies). We had lunch in Kaysersberg &, of course, a wander taking many photographs. Claus had heard about a wine museum so we made our way to Keintzheim to visit the Musee de Vins d'Alsace. It was very interesting with many exhibits hundreds of years old. Most of the exhibits were donated by local wineries. The only downside: the heat was still high & the museum was like an oven on the upper floors.

Claus was keen to buy some white wine from Alsace so we found a winery on the edge of Orschwiller where we tried some wine (I, of course, tried the Creme d'Alsace) & Claus bought 10 bottles.

Since it was still so hot (31C at 4:45pm), we decided to return to the Caveau for a well-earned rest before heading out for dinner. Claus was interested in La Couronne (I'd shown him the brochure & waxed lyrical about yesterday's great lunch); so we drove back to Scherwiller to take a look. Guess where we ate...La Couronne. Marie-Christine was at work again, so I was able to introduce her to Claus. It was a great meal in great company...a great end to a great day.

Streetscape in Kintzheim

Stream running through Ste Marie Aux Mines

Town Hall (Hotel de Ville) in Ste Marie Aux Mines

Alsacian countryside

I wonder if these are the same cows from last year?

Lac Blanc

Kaysersberg

The Citroen is a popular advertising tool

Kaysersberg

Aren't these buildings gorgeous!

I was a good girl; I resisted the temptation

The reason the area is Route des Vins

The walls of Kaysersberg

The nest has grown since last year

Keintzheim

This press is over 500 years old!

The home of the Alsace Wine Foundation

In the Musee de Vins d'Alsace

Part of the walls surrounding Keintzheim

Swallows nest with bubbies

Waiting in the lovely tasting room for our samples

Just looking

La Couronne in Scherwiller



Great ending to a wonderful day with a good friend

### Wednesday, August 22, 2012 - TGV-ing to Provence

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Claus & I met in the Caveau's dining room for breakfast again; this time was different, however, because we had a special treat - Paulette & Michele's mirabelle tarte. Not your usual breakfast treat but we needed to eat some this morning as I couldn't take it on the train with me. After breakfast & paying the bill, we headed upstairs to my room so Jeff & Claus could have a 'Skype' chat.

Since we had to check out by 10am, we decided to head off to Colmar for my 1pm train.

We had a lovely chat in a nearby park, an ice cream in the station brasserie & all too soon, I had to say farewell to Claus. We had enjoyed a terrific two days together; Claus enjoyed Le Coeur d'Alsace so much, he plans to spend some more time there.

And so, the first of my 3 train rides started. This leg was on the local TER from Colmar to Mulhouse; then I joined a TGV to Lyon where I caught another TGV to Antibes. Total trip time was about 9 hours.

The most challenging bit of travelling on French trains is your baggage; moving it in the station area & then onto & within the trains. For these 3 train rides I had an additional 'challenge' - 3 bottles of wine: Denis gave me a bottle of champagne from the wedding & Michele gave me a couple that Claus & I didn't get a chance to drink.

Lyon is a huge station & really busy; it seemed to me that there was a train arriving &/or departing at least every minute. I grabbed something to eat & tried, unsuccessfully, to find some free wifi.

Onto the next TGV for the final leg; it was just after 6pm when I left Lyon & about 10:30pm when the train arrived in Antibes. Being the novice I am, I was really surprised at how busy Cannes & St Tropez were...I had expected the train to become emptier the further it went, but not so; it filled up in Cannes.

And then I was there...and my lovely sister Sussie there to meet me. It was great to see her. We drove straight back to her place for a chat & a shower (the latter badly needed).

Skyping/Skype chatting with Jeff

A last look from my window at Caveau Brunstein

In the distance, you can just see Claus leaving the Colmar station; he was such a gentleman, insisting a carrying my suitcase all the way to & onto the train. Thankyou, Claus :-)

My last view of the Vosges

At Lyon Part Dieu

You can see another TGV next to the end of this one

Interesting twilight

Graffiti is a popular form of expression at every railway station

Somewhere between Marseilles & St Raphael

### Thursday, August 23, 2012 - A Lazy Day in Biot

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After the long day's travel yesterday, I slept & didn't wake until about 9:45am. Sussie had come in to see me before she left for work but said I was sleeping very soundly so she left me with lots of notes...where to find things, etc

After showering (what bliss) & washing my hair (even more bliss), I had a lovely, lazy day catching up on emails & my blog posts. I can't believe I've been away from almost two weeks; in some ways, it seems like hardly anytime; in other ways, I can't believe all the things I've done...

Sussie planned a bbq dinner with a few friends tonight...she'd prepared some of the food already, so I was able to help by getting the table ready...Sonia, Sarah, Anne-Marie & Tandy all arrived & we had a lovely evening...delicious food, great wines & interesting conversation. It was another late night but well worth it!

Sussie's kitchen. Note the marble statue on the bar...one of Sussie's...she's a very talented sculptor, see [www.slkidd.com](http://www.slkidd.com)

View from "the pit", a cosy reading area in front of the fire. The stairs to the upper level are just beyond the dining table.

View across the terrace to the medieval village of Biot where Sussie used to live

Another view across the terrace; the village is beautiful. I didn't visit it this time as I just ran out of time (& didn't have the energy to climb the stairs to the village in the heat)

## Friday, August 24, 2012 - Antibes & Beyond

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We both slept in a little after last night's dinner & then headed into Antibes. Sussie had to call into the office (on her day off) to try & sort out a few client issues (her phones never stop ringing).

I walked down to the Vieux Ville & wandered through the streets with the other gazillion tourists; I'd only briefly seen this part of town when I came over for Sussie's birthday, so it was interesting to get a better look. The old town area is really nice, filled with cafes, galleries & gelaterias (& guess what I treated myself to...).

I found my way to the Musee Picasso; what a great location. The upper level has a really good collection of his works & a fabulous series of photos of the man - he had a fascinating face & dark, dark eyes. The lower levels houses collections by a couple of modern artists, some of which I liked.

When I left the museum, the Cathedral's bells were ringing...I was in time to see another just-married couple appear on the steps of the cathedral. Like the other gawkers, I took a couple of pics before moving on.

When she finished at work, Sussie called & we agreed on getting out of town for lunch; we went to the pretty village of Mougins. It is an artist-centric hilltop village; we had a lovely lunch (I had melon au jambon...I just love the melons here...so juicy). Then, at my request, Sussie took me to Grasse...sort of a disappointment because it's not at all what I imagined; crowded, large...not at all the romantic placed I'd envisaged.

Then to Valbonne; Sussie had saved the best til last...Valbonne is a gorgeous village -Sussie describes it as lived in. We wandered around the village after a panache or two; I bought some poterie including Sussie's birthday gift. We visited the Lakavanou wine bar owned by her friend Karin; it was really nice, very friendly & very relaxed. Karin recommended a restaurant, La Coin de la Rue, for dinner & it was great. After a lovely day of sightseeing & eating & chatting, we headed back to Biot for a good night's sleep before venturing out again...on the agenda are Musee Renoir & Rousselin.

Old Antibes near the square

Antibes streetscene

Haven't translated this yet but thought it might be interesting or funny!

Isn't this stunning! The tower houses part of the Musee Picasso

This is one of the smaller boats around the Cote d'Azur

This puppy made me think of Kasha - this is her classic pose

Antibes rooftops from the Picasso Museum

View over the Med

Patio at the museum

The outside viewing area

Aww...isn't this lovely

Antibes Cathedral

Marche Provençal in Antibes

Le Marche Provençal

The fort

Part of the walls that once fortified Antibes

This building, looking a little worse for wear, is opposite Sussie's office in Antibes

Part of the port area & one of the reasons there are a bunch of Yacht Brokers in Antibes

While waiting for Sussie, I realised that the train station (the reddish building in the distance) is just up the road from her office

Mougins

Mougins

Mougins, lovely cobbled streets full of galleries & other interesting shops

Mougins

Mougins

Overlooking Grasse

Dessicated sunflower

Driving through Grasse

The old part of Grasse

Sussie can't escape the work phone

An olive oil mill; this wheel is decorative but there is a working one

The old granite crushing wheels; the base is also granite

Valbonne

One of the many Provençal village pussycats

Panache time in Valbonne

Just love the windows & doors in Provençal villages

Valbonne

Karin's bar logo

Me'n'my gorgeous lil sis

Dining in style

Love the colours of the fruit & vegie shops

## Saturday, August 25, 2012 - Saturday in Provence

---

I slept in again; & it's w arm again.

We had a nice, leisurely start to the day. The plan was to visit St Paul de Vence (on my must-do list for this trip) & also the Musee Renoir. We took the scenic route that included Sophia Antipolis; Sussie told me that Sophia Antipolis is the Provencal equivalent of Silicon Valley. It's quite pretty & I noticed that the the buildings are a little reminiscent of California's hi-tech areas. We had to stop here to pick up some some stuff for me from the pharmacie.

As we leave Sophia, I notice that it's hot again...today, I remembered to bring some sun screen, especially important driving around in Sussie's cute car.

We drove through Vence on the way to St Paul de Vence. Sussie told me that Vence holds a great music festival each year. Vence is also where one of Louise's aunts lives. I wish I'd have enough time to contact her. Oh well, next visit.

When we arrived at St Paul de Vence, we joined the line of other tourists trying to find a park in the undercover parking lot. Sussie said she'd never had to go down so far before (to the 5th level). But when we got out of the lift, I understood why this village is so popular: it is beautiful. This hilltop village has heaps of galleries & interesting shops (nothing junky or schlocky at all) & a great choice of restaurants.

We walked around for a while & Sussie showed me some of her favourite galleries. Eventually, we found our way to a restaurant for a late lunch. Sussie had been trying to surprise me with lunch or dinner at La Columbine d'Or, an historic & ultra-popular restaurant, & her favourite place, but she was unable to get a booking. Our lunch was lovely anyway - sitting on a terrace, eating great food & enjoying a glass of Provencal rose is a pretty good way to go.

We took another walk around the remparts for some photos & then went on to the Foundation Maeght, a wonderful art gallery run by the Foundation Maeght (established by the Maeght family in the 20th century). The gallery holds works by Giacometti, Miro, Leger & Chagall (as well as other artists I am not familiar with); the gallery & gardens are lovely.

It was too late for the Renoir Museum (another item for the next visit list) & I was feeling a little weary, so we went back to Sussie's place for a quiet evening, chilling out & enjoying the fact that the temperature dropped a little. Tomorrow's plan is now in place: head off to Roussillon tomorrow; it's about a 3 hour drive (& in fact, not far from Grambois where JABA stayed last year). Hopefully, we'll find somewhere to stay Sunday night & have a leisurely drive back on Monday.

On the way to Vence; a glimpse of the gorgeous white cliff faces so prevalent in this area.

I'm not sure what village this is, but isn't it beautiful

A quaint chapel near the main entrance to St Paul de Vence

This is the restaurant at which we later lunched. The statue of the horse in the background is made of horseshoes.

In St Paul de Vence

I never tire of the twisty cobbled streets

Closed shutters help keep the heat out

The village fountain

Another view

I bought a piece of this pottery for Sussie's birthday (& of course, a small piece for me)

This door fascinated me; it looked older than the village.

We both liked these dresses; Sussie bought the orange & grey version. The shop owner makes the dresses & her father paints the fabrics (we later checked out his gallery).

Sussie & her lunch (the prawn salad is served on a plate of watermelon)

My warm goat's cheese salad (I will try replicate this at home)

Some views from the ramparts of St Paul de Vence

Some rather lovely looking (& large) homes over there

Sussie has made some amazing fish sculptures, so she naturally gravitated to this interesting piece on display

Just in case you need to know...

Last look at St Paul de Vence

Fondation Maeght

The walls in the background are covered in mosaics

Just love the colours in this stained glass (I paid an extra 5 Euros so I could take photos; I thought this was better than banning photography, as do many museums & galleries)

Flooring in many of the galleries rooms; the design & construction of the gallery is almost as artful as the works on display

Sculpture by Giacometti; mural by Miro (I think)

Water & sculptures feature in the gardens

There is a very small chapel in the garden & this stained glass window is just one of four

Mosaic by Chagall

Detail of the mosaic

Kinetic fountain - mesmerising to watch

On our way, the beach is still buzzing

That's the Med back there

Sussie's local fruit & veggie shop

Sunday in Roussillon

Sunday, August 26, 2012

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After sleeping in (yet again), I was greeted with a fresh lemon juice to get me started for the day. Fresh fruit (I guess I haven't yet raved about the magnificent melons here) & a coffee, bags packed & we were on our way to Roussillon.

Sussie's friend, Angleika, suggested we see this village, renowned for the red ochre in the surrounding earth; when Sussie mentioned Roussillon as an option for the weekend, I jumped at it because JABA missed out on seeing it last year.

Sussie decided we'd use the Autoroute to get there quickly, so we headed off & joined quite a bit of traffic returning to other parts of France (in July & August, people from all parts of France, especially from Paris, spend their summer vacation in the South of France).

All was going well until George (the TomTom) decided we should go in a direction that Sussie didn't agree with; wham, we hit a huge traffic jam. This time, it wasn't just traffic; we later found out that a huge bushfire near Cavaillon had caused closure of (or at least delays on) the Autoroute & delayed trains for a couple of hours. George wasn't too popular, so like Claus's navigator, had to earn back some brownie points; he did this by helping us find a scenic way to Loumarin for lunch.

It was lovely to revisit this beautiful village; it has special memories for me because I met Michele, Francis & Simone in Loumarin in 2006 & JABA had a great time there in 2011.

But, we could not dally as the day was rushing by (thanks to the traffic jam), so back in the car & on to Roussillon. Sussie had booked us into Hotel Reve des Ogres, so we decided to check in first & explore second. When she booked the hotel, she read the Trip Advisor reviews about the hotel & they were very mixed. What we found was a quaint, very clean hotel with very nice rooms & friendly & helpful staff (must remember to put such comments on Trip Advisor).

We found our way to Le Sentier des Ogres &, after the paying the huge entry fee (just joking, it was a mere 2.5Euros each), we began the walk. It was a bit challenging in bits for me with my dodgy knee & feet as well as the late afternoon heat; but it was well worth it. I'll leave the pictures to speak for themselves.

We rewarded ourselves with an icecream: mine was a scoop of lavender (OMG) & a scoop of raspberry-rippled yogurt (OMG x 2); Sussie had lemon-basil sorbet (she loved this boule) & mango. Then we explored this beautiful village some more.

By now, it was around 7pm & we were pretty tired so we chose a restaurant for dinner & had a great meal (including a great bottle of red wine as a special treat) on a terrace in the sunset. It was an early night for us; only 11pm by the time we returned to the hotel, me to load photos & then to sleep, Sussie to try & sort a work problem for a while.

On the motorway; it's a pay road &, like us, Sussie uses the tag system (in France, a large t signifies the t-lanes at the payage points)

I love the white rock formations (must find out what it is)

The traffic jam. We were stuck in this for 20kms before the next turn off. We later found out that the fire that caused the traffic snarl was started by schoolkids - seems bored kids on holidays are world-wide phenomena).

Aqueduct near Aix en Provence

Approaching Loumarin

Hey ABA, does this look familiar?

Loumarin

No idea what this is about but just loved the poster

Loumarin is a beautiful & popular village

Back on the road on our way to Roussillon, we came across Le Pont Julien

The road has been diverted to ensure the bridge doesn't fall down

Roussillon, walking up towards the village from our hotel

Many of the village walls & houses use red mortar - very attractive

Sorry, I can't resist the cute windows

Roussillon's Mairie

Roussillon

Great postcards

Cliffs near the start of Le Sentier des Ocres (the walk for which the village is famous)

Roussillon

The cliffs & the red ochre remind me of parts of the USA we've visited

It's a popular walk, despite the heat of the day

The colour & texture of the ochre is amazing

Sussie told me that this is the fruit from the chestnut tree

I admired this plant's fortitude

Some cliff faces are lighter ochres...whites, yellows & pinks

Back in the village, we head towards the viewing areas

The village church tower

I love the detail on some of the houses...the birds are porcelain

Looking out from the high point of the village

The bare mountain in the background is Mont Ventoux, one of the Tour de France challenges

Rooftops

More rooftops, from the terrace of the bistro where we sipped an aperitif (mine was a pastis - yum)

Decorative trompe l'oeil

Next trip, I might buy a painting

Beautiful glassware - just as well the shop was closed

The church tower in the evening light

Our restaurant selection for dinner

Loved the potted hydrangeas

The upper terrace of the restaurant (by the way, we had the cutest waiter - he was charming & helpful...& handsome!)

## Monday, August 27, 2012- Last Day in Provence

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Woke up to a beautifully cool morning in Roussillon. We had a simple French breakfast (croissants, baguettes, juice & coffee) in the hotel's dining room. Chatted with a young Australian couple who were on a 4-day cycling tour of the Luberon area. We admired their fortitude.

A last look at Roussillon & we were on our way to the L'Occitane Museum at Manosque.

The road there took us through Apt. When we arrived in Manosque I thought things looked familiar & as we got closer to the Museum, I realised that we JABA drove through Manosque on the way back to Grambois from Moustiers.

The L'Occitane Museum & Factory is in a ZI (Zone Industriel); not exactly a romantic location for such lovely products. Nevertheless, the museum was really interesting; we found out that L'Occitane has a foundation that aids people with sight problems & women in difficulties. They also work with women in Burkina Faso; these women produce the ingredients L'Occitane use in their shea butter based products.

Since we were on a bit of a deadline (Sussie's friend, Angelika, had invited us for lunch), we left L'Occitane & headed for Aups, a village Sussie wanted to see. The drive took us over & beside the Durance River, over the Verdon River & through some beautiful fields of sunflowers. We didn't have enough time to stop in Aups, a fortified Provencal village, but I think it'll be on the list for my next visit.

Angelika lives on the outskirts of Vidauban & welcomed us with a great smile, despite our being a tad late. Mind you, Angelika had to wait while her gorgeous dog, Dante, greeted Sussie - what a smoochie dog. We had a lovely lunch on Angelika's patio while the breeze wafted over us & the water in the pool tinkled & Dante tried to entice us into playing with him. Sussie & Dante had races in the pool while I just relaxed. We left about 5:30pm & are now back in Biot, both on laptops - Sussie (unfortunately, having to work on her day off) & me trying to catch up on the blog.

I can't believe that tomorrow I'll be starting my trip back home...I've had a great time with Sussie, she's a very special person.

Our hotel

The two upstairs windows are our rooms

Brekky

One of many plane-tree flanked roads we travelled on

Front of L'Occitane's museum. You can visit the factory as well but you have to book ahead.

Les tournisols (sunflowers)

We stopped at one of Sussie's favourite wineries for a few bottles of rose

Dante, the smoochie

Lunch - Angelika made mussels, watermelon salad, potato tart & bbq meats

Angelika & Sussie hard at work at the barbie

The swimming pool sparkles



Angelika & her husband own this beautiful stone farmhouse. They rent it out during summer for a couple of months. Any takers??

The living fireplace adorned with one of Sussie's fantastic sculptures (the sculpture's name is Judy)

The farmhouse is surrounded by maritime pines

Biot from the road, my second last view of this gorgeous village

## Thursday, August 30, 2012 - Back to Singapore

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The start of my long travelling day began with a brekky chat with Sussie. She had to get to work to resolve her 'client issue', so we agreed that she'd come back for me around 11am. This gave me time to repack, have a leisurely shower, do some washing for Sussie & finish photo updates & maybe some blogging.

Well, that was the plan. 11am rushed up & Sussie was there, so we piled my bags into her cutie pie car & drove to the station. For some reason, I was really edgy...& felt as though I would not settle until I was on the plane at 10pm that night....

We had to say our goodbyes very quickly as the station was really busy...so all too soon, Sussie was gone. The platform was quite crowded so I was pleased to find that my place on the platform was right by the station entry (you have to wait at a designated area on the platform where your carriage is expected to stop; if you don't, you will never make it in time).

I had arrived in plenty of time, so I was a little more relaxed now...but became somewhat re-stressed when the departure time for train passed & I was still on the platform.

Bugger!! A train delay; the train had a technical problem & was 'retarde indeterminee' ie late, no expected time available....now I started to worry...although my plane wasn't leaving Paris until 10pm, Paris was still a 6-hour train ride away. I eventually found out that they expected the train to arrive within an hour (it did) but this did not ease my nervousness. I let Sussie & Jeff know what was going on; Sussie organised her PA to find out about flight alternatives should things worsen.

Anyway, the train did arrive & I had a great seat thanks to Michele (a single seat in first class). I didn't have any trouble getting my bag in the baggage area (Antibes is only the 2nd or 3rd stop after the start, so there was plenty of space).

Dozed a little, got some lunch, took some pics...basically, whiled away the 6 hours until we arrived at Paris CDG. When I grabbed my bag, I noticed it was upside down (I'd carefully put it right side up so it'd be easy to get out) & then found that the cable tie I'd locked it with was gone: bugger, the bag had been opened & ??? I was pretty angry about it but no-one at the station was interested, not even a little. I subsequently found out the nothing important was missing; my jewellery was the only thing of value in the bag & it was safe.

CDG is huge so it took me about 20/25 minutes to find the Etihad desk & check in. I had checked in online (& changed my seat) but wasn't able to print the boarding pass; so had to collect that piece of paper at the check in desk. Then I went to the Customs office to claim the tax refund; this meant waiting in 1 line to get a stamp on the paperwork & standing in another line to get the money. The latter line was a pain & I saw all my spare time tick away while unprepared, painful tourists gave the workers a hard time. Finally, I had my Euros & went straight the boarding area to find it full of people!!

When I changed my seat online, I had hoped the seat beside me would stay empty....no luck. Another passenger joined me; so I asked one of the flight attendants if I could move. She kindly found me another location....next to 2 lots of babies! Oh well, at least I had 2 seats to myself. It wasn't a great flight...sore legs, sore feet, crying babies...so I was glad when the flight landed in Abu Dhabi a little early.

Wow, what an amazing airport & unbelievably busy at 7am! I went straight to the transfers desk & asked if I could change my seat & gain a little space. The woman at the counter moved me towards the back of the plane in the centre & said I had the last row of 4 seats - yee hah!!

The airport has free wifi, so I was able to Skype Jeff & let him know I'd made it to Abu Dhabi. A little shopping, a little breakfast, a bit of waiting around & then onto a bus to be taken to the plane (a badged plane - Manchester City Football Club) & into my 4 seats. I didn't realise how tired I was until I sat down; so I stretched my legs across 3 seats & promptly fell into quite a heavy doze. After take-off, however, I lay down & fell asleep. Another passenger thought better of trying to share my 4 seats, so I spent the whole flight (almost 8 hours) stretched across the four seats & pretty soundly asleep.

The plane touched down in Singapore exactly on time at 10:18pm. By the time we taxied to the terminal & unloaded passengers, it was around 10:30pm. Dean was flying into the same terminal about 11:40pm after a business trip so we'd arranged to meet & taxi home together. It was great to see his smiling face at the airport & we had nice time chatting in the taxi before arriving at the apartment about 12:30am. A bleary-eyed Katie appeared to say HI before we all fell into bed...I was asleep before my head hit the pillow...& no wonder, by the time I reached Katie & Dean's place, I'd been travelling for over 30 hours!

Cote d'Azur - pretty hard to get good photos from the train, but I try anyway

Cote d'Azur (might be Cannes or St Tropez)

There are boats everywhere

Brief glimpse of an aqueduct (some of these are used for canals now; Rick Stein's barge trip through France had him barging on an elevated canal something like this)

Palais des Papes in the distance - brings back memories of a great day in Avignon last year with ABA

Middle of France - all the countryside is lovely to see

My last views of a French village...

...and now something completely different, the departures lounge at the terminal I arrived in, Abu Dhabi International Airport - spectacular

Shopping in the terminal

The walkway to my departure gate...it reminded me a little of the mosque Jeff & I visited in Malaysia. I had the same sense of space & serenity - amazing given the business of the airport

Another busy departures pod - the airport seems to be designed around the concept of tents used by the nomadic desert peoples...very attractive

How's this for a control tower - wish I could have managed a clearer, closer photo

[Thursday, August 30, 2012 = Second Last Day in Singapore](#)

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Thursday sleep in...missed out on seeing the boys before they left for school (Katie & Dean figured I needed the rest after the long journey)...

After the much needed sleep & shower, we headed out to Dempsey Park. This area, very popular with expats, was a military base & is now full of restaurants, bars, galleries & home shops. We had a very nice breakfast at Jones the Grocer (this company has a shop or two in Sydney).

Before I left France, Katie said that Singapore had been raining the last few days; & it did again today...when we left a terrific furniture/home shop she wanted to show us, the heavens opened. It reminded me of the sudden & furious downpours in Kuala Lumpur.

We then collected Ollie from kindy. It was such a treat to see his big smile & his excitement at seeing me again....back at the apartment, I gave Ollie his cap from France & was pleased that he liked it (I'm sure he'd have been much happier with Lightning

McQueen or Pancetta Borgnolli...for the uninitiated, these are two of the characters from Cars2).

A little later, we took a drive along Orchard Road; my goodness, there are shopping malls side by side all the way along the road. And they aren't tiddly little malls...they're huge, many full of high-end shops like Louis Vuitton, Prada, Gucci, etc. Katie wanted to show me some of the papercraft shops she's found; these shops carry a huge range of embellishments for cards & scrapbooking...but I was very restrained & didn't buy anything.

We both commented on the popularity of these shops; one store had a line of people waiting to buy sale items. By now, it was time collect Sam from his after-school karate lesson & we walked back to apartment in light drizzle.

The boys were a little antsy & soon the attacks on Daddy began...at first, Sam decided it would be good to practice karate kicks on Dad; then Ollie thought Sam was having too much so he joined in too...funny how boys always love to wrestle "the old man".

We had a very nice dinner in; Jovi made a great (but a little too hot for me) chicken curry & a fabulous chocolate birthday cake for Dean (it's his birthday on Monday).

After settling the boys into bed, we 'big people' called it quits as well; I managed to catch up on the blog with 1 post & then didn't get to sleep until 3-ish!! Darn!

The veranda at Jones the Grocer in Dempsey Park

Tropical surroundings

Before the downpour

Spidey Ollie in his French cap

Singapore

It's a very green city

Let the games begin...

practicing karate??

How come daddies always win?

[Friday, August 31, 2012 - Oh No...The Trip is Almost Over...Last Day Away](#)

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At about 6am, I heard the chatter of two small boys & eventually made my way out to be greeted with lovely smiles from Sam & Ollie. After breakfast, the boys dressed & were ready for school & kindy. Katie normally walks the boys to school & kindy (about a 15min walk), but this morning it was raining

quite heavily with a storm threatening (thunderstorms are not uncommon at this time of the year & can be rather dangerous).

So, Dean tried calling a taxi. There are 30,000 taxis in Singapore but when there is a storm, in particular, during peak hour, it is impossible to book one. Thus, Dean & Katie walked the boys to school in rain. They then had to take shelter from the fierce thunderstorm that finally arrived.

Dean had a work appointment so Katie & I took advantage of the absence of men to do some browsing in the shops; we went to Marina Bay Sands so I could buy some bling shoes for Remmi & Katie could browse for some more gifts for Dean. We visited 'Au Chocolat', a French themed chocolate shop & of course, had to indulge in some small purchases.

By now it was time to collect Ollie at kindy. Once again, I was greeted with his gorgeous smile & pleasure at pointing me out to his kindy teacher. With Ollie in tow, we headed into the city to ION, one of the many large, glitzy malls. Kate was keen to take me to the food court; wow!! What a fantastic range of choices & so cheap. We both had lunch meals for \$5.

Ollie put himself to sleep, so we strolled a little more & visited a couple more malls.

We met up with Dean a little later & then headed back to collect Sam from school & back to the apartment to prepare for my departure.

I received an exciting email about 4pm: Air Asia's seating options partner advised me that I'd been granted the ESO (Extra Seat Option) I'd applied for. This meant I would have 3 seats to myself on the flight from KL to Sydney - woo hoo!! Now, I was little less "trepidacious" about the long trip home.

Jovi made hamburgers for a light meal that was perfect for me...I don't like to eat anything too heavy before travelling. All too soon, it was time to say bye bye to KDSO...it's been wonderful spending time with them in their home away from home...

Brekky time

Good time for a chat

Aren't I just the cutest?

Getting ready for school

Ollie all ready for kindy

Sam all ready for school

Skyline from the front of Takashimiya Centre

Paragon on the left; Orchard Park (?) on the right

Inside Paragon - most of the malls are different versions of this glamour; beautiful floors, usually of polished granite or sandstone; lots of windows & lights; lots of shine everywhere; spotlessly clean

Downtown

I think this is the Indonesian Embassy; there are several embassies near KDSO

[Saturday, September 01, 2012 - And So, The Wedding Trip Ends](#)

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Dean kindly escorted me to the airport. We left the apartment at 6pm allowing plenty of time to arrive for my 8:45pm flight to KL. The taxi arrived; we loaded up; headed off & then hit a "massive traffic jam" (this was the actual wording on the overhead public notice

-Dean said it's the first traffic jam he has experienced in the 7 months they've been in Singapore). The jam was caused a 3-car pile up; once we passed the crash scene, traffic flowed freely. But the effect was that a 20-minute taxi ride took nearly 50 minutes.

Nonetheless, I arrived in plenty of time & having said goodbye to Dean, headed for the boarding gate. Singapore Airport is massive; I left from Terminal 1, one of 3 terminals at Changi. There is heaps of shopping for those wanting to stock up on duty free (doesn't seem all that competitively priced to me) & many eating places. I bought a couple of small gifts for grandchildren & then boarded my plane.

Being a low cost carrier, Air Asia does not offer anything other than the seat & toilet facilities for free; you must buy everything else, including water. This is okay as long as you remember to bring the right currency. When the plane landed at the LCCT in KL, it was a walk of about 1km from the plane to the terminal. When we boarded the flight for Sydney, it was a walk of about 500 metres. Nonetheless, the flight home was uneventful & reasonably relaxing given my 3 seats (I paid AUD\$36 to request the extra seats; if I didn't get them, I'd be refunded \$35. Mind you, if I didn't get them, I'd be really \*#!&%#!); it's a good service, but I expect may become ineffective once too many people start using it).

So, 14 hours after leaving KDSO's place, I landed in Sydney to be met by my gorgeous husband. After stopping for a delicious cappuccino on the way, we arrived home & I got to say Hiya to my kitties.

It was great trip & wonderful holiday...thanks, as usual, to our fantastic friends in France & Germany, to my lovely sister in Provence, & to our great family in Singapore.

The highlight was undoubtedly Louise & Nico's wedding...I was very honoured to be part of such a special occasion. The wonderful welcome from Louise & Nico's immediate families (Marcelle & Josef, Chantal & Alex, Nathalie & Denis) & their extended families; the hospitality of Denis, Nathalie & Maxime; the kindness of Michele & Paulette (& their friends) especially at this difficult time in their lives; the delightful company of Claus; the magic of spending one-on-one time with Sussie; & the pleasure of spending time with KDSO at home; all these things added up to making my 3 weeks away truly a special time.

Thankyou.....