

We woke to perfect cycling weather on the last day of our tour; a cool fresh morning and brilliant sun and blue skies. After a strenuous climb we arrived in the charming town of Gigondas just before lunch. As we entered the central square it was as if everything was just coming to life: waiters were putting last-minute specials up on the chalkboard and opening up umbrellas, shopkeepers were preparing to close down for the lunch hour and the locals were headed home with baguettes and children in tow. We could not pass up an opportunity to have lunch sitting in the sun and soaking up the wonderful Provençal atmosphere. The salads we ordered contained unexpected delights: a sliver of duck confit, pine nuts, warm packets of chevre, shrimps, tiny marinated artichokes, and thin baby asparagus. A glass of local rosé and some crusty baguette completed the experience. People wandered trying to decide which restaurant would be best, local artisans displayed their wares on the sidewalk and a few fellow cyclists mingled with the bustling crowd. We reluctantly prepared to leave, downing an espresso to fuel the next leg of our journey. But another surprise awaited us. The mistral winds, a reality of spring cycling, were at our back and we flew down the next stretch of road. We were peddling at almost 50 km per hour on what appeared to be a flat road with no effort at all – a post lunch cyclists dream! As we reminisced over the final splendid meal that evening we decided that it was impossible to identify just one or two highlights of the trip. Rather it was all the small details and experiences which came together to make a memorable vacation. An omelet with truffles, the view from a hilltop medieval town (worth the winded climb!), a charming hotel situated in a narrow cobblestone street, encouragement of our often unintelligible French, discovering the perfect wine, quiet scenic roads with vineyards as far as the eye could see, a hawk soaring overhead as you climb a mountain road, picnic lunches with cheese and sausage from the market and being able to eat all the fabulous food because you had cycled all day. It doesn't get any better. We eagerly await our next out with Discover France.

-Patty Solomon