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Provence:

By MANNY GONZALEZ Plantation Bay Resort & Spa

Part 2: Aix-en-Provence (just say EKS) Town of Beautiful Women. Aix (eks) is the other major city in Provence. Now, I have always maintained that you can tell a lot about a city by the kind of establishment that predominates in its downtown. In Jackson, Wyoming, there are more art galleries than restaurants; this means that there are a lot of thin rich people there. In Hong Kong, there is a jewelry store every 10 meters; you can guess what this says about the men (I will not spell it out as I already have enough death threats, etc.). Well, in old Aix, there are cosmetics shops (not pharmacies, cosmetics shops) on each and every street. After mulling this over a couple of days, I decided that in Aix, there must be more women than men. You see? It's all so simple if you just think about it hard enough. Maybe because it is a university town with students from all over the world (this is why the women outnumber men - lots more women get into college), maybe because those handsome Roman legionnaires picked the best Gauls to grow grapes with, and maybe because some of those cosmetics actually work, Aix has some serious talent, female-beauty-wise. It's all concentrated in the small Old Town district, where, if you sit at just the right place, you can fall in love with a different woman every two minutes. Where is this "right place," you ask. Well, one edge of the Old Town is a wide boulevard called the Cours Mirabeau. and from there the old district extends northward about a kilometer. The Cours has a string of bars and restaurants that are always full, especially just when you are in need of dinner. However, this is not the "right place," because even though your café may be on a sidewalk, people pass by in a hurry. **Boulevard of Plane Trees and** Pigeons. The Cours Mirabeau is one of the best-known streets in France, largely because it is planted on both sides with ancient London plane trees (not sure what the French call them, but they're the same tree that populate much of Hyde Park in London). These are very big, very leafy trees whose crowns







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Unfortunately, I went in spring, before the leaves had come out. (See picture.) Just pretend these trees have leaves. Anyway, I am pretty sure there is a distinct downside to walking down the Cours in summer, and that downside is bird poop. Lots of birds. Lots of poop. Such was the evidence of the sidewalks below the trees, where, even though an entire winter had passed (snow and rain, etc.), one could still see layers of hardened bird-droppings everywhere.

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Alley from the Harry Potter movies (though of course the architecture is Olde Frenche instead of Olde Englishe, it is the atmosphere that counts, and the atmosphere is about right). On top of that there are shops of every description, from Hermes to GAP. There are more shops here than in the downtown of Marseille, which has six times more people. During my four days in Aix, I spent quite a few hours just window-shopping and wandering around its picturesque cobweb of lanes.

Why so many shops? Well, here is my theory. France's Court of Appeals for much of the southern half of the country is located here. And where there are juries and judges, well... I will say no more be-Town is that it looks like Diagon cause I hope to get my Schen- the Place des Augustins is an

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From the fountain, or for that matter any of the cafés around it, you can see up two or more of the lanes, giving you plenty of time to appreciate what is heading your way. And lots of good-looking women do head your way, though most of them are on a man's arms. Regardless, this is a great way to kill



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Provence: A Tale of Two Cities

By Manny Gonzalez, Plantation Bay Resort & Spa [suggested for publication in two parts]

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CAPTIONS

Related to Part 1

View from Villeneuve – From Villeneuve across the Rhone River you get a splendid view of Avignon and the Papal Palace.

Hotel – The author's hotel in Avignon was perfect. Almost.

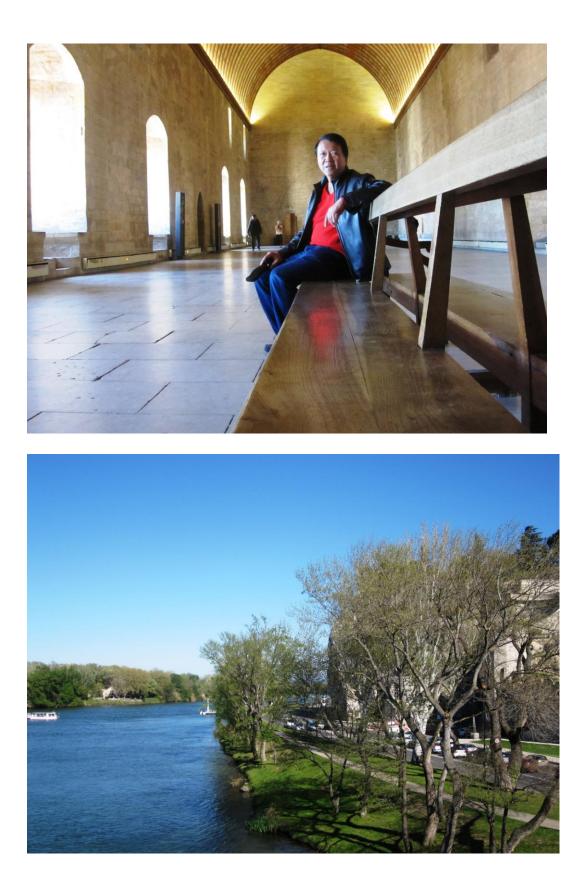
Empty Interior – This was the main dining hall in the Papal Palace. When the Popes left

Avignon to go back to Rome, evidently they hired an energetic moving company.

Town Plaza – Avignon is the *cleanest* city the author has ever seen.

Rhone – Once upon a time, the Kingdom of France was on the right bank of the Rhone (left in this picture), and the Kingdom of Provence on the left bank (right in this picture).







Related to Part 2

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Ste. Marie – The crypt of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene certainly looks 2000 years old. Legend has it that she fled here, in France's Camargue region, after Jesus's death.





