



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF BAGNÈRES-DE-BIGORRE, MALVERN

Newsletter Autumn 2017 Edition 6

Vive l'entente cordiale!

Time does indeed fly! The golden hues of Autumn are now painting wonderful pictures all around us and I am sure we are all reluctantly adjusting to the darker evenings which this beautiful display heralds. So, just the time to reflect on the highly successful first visit which a group of 15 members of MBTA paid recently to Bagnères. This trip was timed to coincide with the first anniversary of Le Big Weekend of formal twinning ceremonies which took place last October and, although without the formal aspects of that initial occasion, this October's trip proved to be rich in fun, entertainment and friendship. Communication problems? You must be joking! – everyone contributed in their own inimitable style to a thoroughly wonderful few days with our French hosts. Co-ordinated by the French Président of the Twinning Association, **Maité Barrère**, the experience was pure joy.

But don't take my word for it – read below the informal report which has been compiled by some of our number, **Kay & Richard Beach, Lindsay Bracking and Diana Morgan**. It's safe to say they enjoyed themselves!

Visit to Bagnères-de-Bigorre October 12th – 17th, 2017

After a prompt 6.30 start at the Splash car park we travelled as a group in a mini coach to Bristol airport from where we flew to Toulouse. To meet us in the sunshine were a minibus and a couple of cars driven by some of the French twinning group. We had no idea of how wonderful the visit was to be. As we drove towards Bagnères the beautiful silhouetted ridges of the Pyrenees gradually came closer. Our drivers made a detour to show us the outside of the impressive chateau at Mauvezin, recently restored and with siege engines in its courtyard. We also briefly stopped to look at the Abbaye de l'Escaladieu before

continuing to Bagnères, some to hosts' homes and others to the hotel Carré Py on the southern edge of the town. The mountain views from the hotel were breathtaking.



Our French hosts had pulled out all the stops for us, with a whirlwind of activities. The Deputy Mayor gave us a tour of Bagnères, a town with beautiful buildings and townscape, and invited us to a welcome apéritif at La Mairie. We enjoyed shopping at the local market, followed by a wine tasting. We sampled delicious food from a variety of local restaurants with precious time to talk to the young proprietors whose were so enthusiastic about their work. One evening we were treated to a Gala Dinner and cabaret at Le Casino.

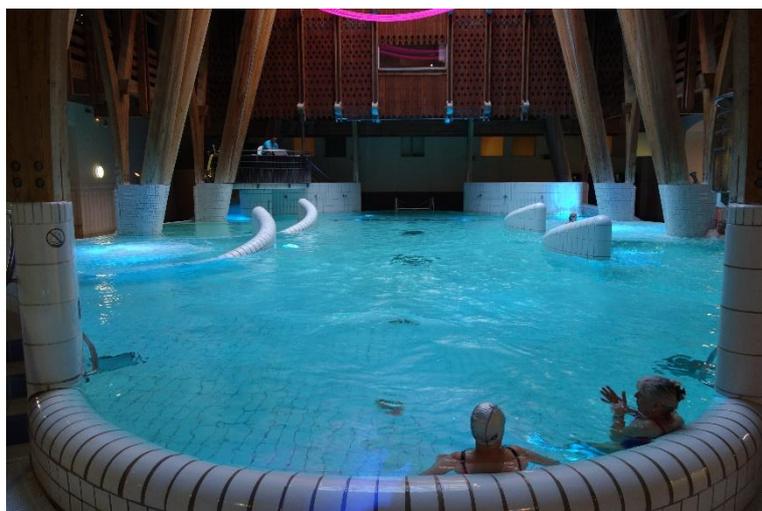


We were also beguiled by a kilometre walk through vast stalactite and stalagmite festooned caves finishing with a boat trip on the underground river, and on another occasion walked in the Forêt du

Bédat around Bagnères stopping to admire the wonderful countryside beyond.

Since Roman times, Bagnères de Bigorre has been known for its thermal springs and people come from all over France and elsewhere; indeed some French sufferers of rheumatism are prescribed treatment at the Bagnères Spa. So no trip to Bagnères would be complete without a spot of relaxation at the magnificent Aquensis Spa, designed to represent the mountains and forests of the Pyrenees. Several of us were able, as guests of the town, to enjoy an afternoon experiencing what it has to offer. The inside has an amazing larch wood structure reminiscent of a cathedral over the main pool. The thermal water comes in at 51 degrees C so has to be cooled to 32 degrees C, which is a very comfortable temperature.

We started in the large main pool with hot and cold mist jets, a water curtain and spa nozzles. After an hour or so happily wallowing, we progressed to the relaxation pool which has hydro massage devices and gentle music. We did not have time to explore the steam bath and other treatments but found our way out onto the superb roof terrace with open air jacuzzi and sun loungers. In the unexpectedly warm weather, it was an excellent place to do a little sunbathing and enjoy the views of the surrounding countryside. Having really enjoyed the experience, at the end of the afternoon we left Aquensis with a wonderful feeling of well-being.



The following day we journeyed to the summit (2877m) of the Pic Du Midi by cable car (no snow as it was so hot). At the summit there has been an observatory for many years, with additional tourist facilities

including large viewing areas to see the surrounding mountains, and a planetarium. Walkers on the Col mingle with alpacas and llamas on the old track and tunnel to the peak. Two of our hosts, Daniel and Elizabeth are great mountain guides. Elizabeth was born in Bagnères and knows the Pics well. One of them was the Pain du Sucre - The Sugar Loaf - which gave an unexpected link with Malvern.



After that highlight we zig zagged over the Col du Tourmalet (a regular Tour de France feature) and down to Luz St Sauveur. Waiting for us was a long French lunch with amazing food and wine at the Hotel des Templiers, and we even had time to visit the Eglise des Templiers with its ancient belfry.

We continued to Lourdes where it was interesting to see so many individuals and groups with banners following the steps of Bernadette. The church and castle are impressive with the backdrop of the Pyrenees. The one way traffic system which reverses every fortnight is not so impressive!

One evening we were invited to Maité's home for a buffet meal provided by the hosts and had the opportunity to socialise. The food was delicious and as ever they entertained us splendidly - and some of us joined in dancing.

On the final day they returned us to the airport. Throughout our holiday the sun shone from an almost cloudless sky, and this reflected the wonderful spirit of friendship and generosity shown by our hosts. Maité and her hard-working team had planned our visit with great

care and had looked after us royally. We are all grateful for the wonderful experiences they provided for us.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this genuine Tripadvisor report!

MBTA's first AGM

We hope to see very many of you at our first AGM, to be held next **Monday, 13th November at 7 p.m.** in the lower bar of the Foley Arms. If by chance you have not already received your Agenda, please contact Denise, who will be happy to oblige.

Apart from the opportunity for a pleasant social evening, we are anxious to know your views on how MBTA should be planning its future development and, particularly, what type of activities and social events you would be happy to support in the coming year.

If you have friends or acquaintances who might be interested to learn more about the Association and could be enticed to join the Friends, do please bring them along as guests.

Very best wishes,

Denise, Maité and Gina

(photobombing by John)

