

MORE TRAVEL 12-day tour from Provence to Burgundy

DAY 2 :

Orange is famous for having the best-preserved Roman theater in Europe and the best Triumphal arch in France. But let's start with our "**Mot du jour**": why is the town named "Orange"? They do not grow orange trees there; neither are the houses painted in an orange hue, they like pastel colors in Provence, but that's not the reason.

History again: in the 16th century, this was an independent territory given to the "Prince of Orange", heir to the Dutch king, at the time most of this region was under Papal influence, but Orange was independent...



Many Roman ruins have been forgotten and destroyed over the centuries in the world. Why is Orange's theater still standing with its imposing wall intact? When there is a new use for something, why destroy it... In the Middle Ages Orange, like most towns in France, was surrounded by protective walls. The Triumphal arch became one of the entry points into the town, and houses were built inside the theater for protection, and therefore these two Roman monuments got a new purpose and survived.

According to Louis the 14, the Sun King, the theater's wall was "*la plus belle muraille de mon royaume*" ("*the finest wall in my kingdom*").

→ Repurposing is also why we still have amphitheaters in great conditions in nearby Nimes and Arles. It makes me wonder about what parts of our urban surroundings will be left in 2,000 years...



Today, the oldest French music festival, 150-year old, still takes place every summer in the antic theater: it's called "*les Chorégies d'Orange*" (from Greek «*choreos*») and features opera and classical music. 8,300 people enjoy the acoustic quality of the original wall, sitting where people sat 2,000 years ago ([Listen to part of Carmen](#) at the theater in 2004).

My favorite moments in Orange:

Back in 2003 when I used to teach in Montana, we took our middle school students on a 12-day tour of France-Germany-Spain (yes... crazy foreign language teachers!). The local kids in Orange were having their talent show on the antic theater stage. I remember my students being amazed that 21st century students were using a 2,000-year-old monument. They were comparing it to their Bozeman's community center stage where they would perform later their talent show.... Was there more drama or comedy in Orange?

More recently and as a guide: I love exploring the shadowed back streets of this working town after another wow visit of the theater, finding a terrace and sipping on a freshly squeezed orange juice watching people, listening to their southern accent, debating their last "*pétanque*" or "*boules*" (similar to bocce ball) game. Any favorite moments in Orange you want to share?