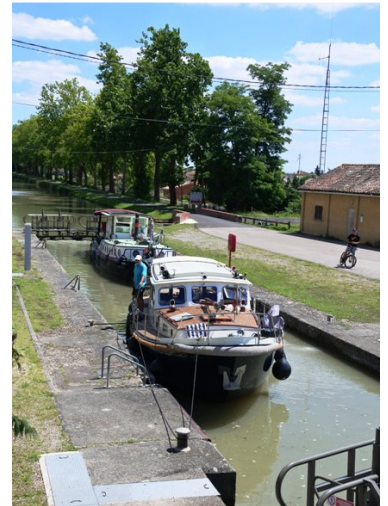


Gently along the Garonne



From Toulouse we entered the Canal Lateral de la Garonne, travelling westwards towards Moissac, our winter harbour for this year. Lee had enjoyed it so much that he rejoined us for another week, after a quick trip to Corfu! The Garonne is much quieter than the Canal du Midi, winding its way gently through farmland and kilometers of fruit orchards with stopping places at small, prosperous market towns such as Castelsarrasin and Montech. Sometimes there would be a market, a village celebration, a quirky piece of art or some other distraction between the many small locks, until finally we reached the canal's summit and started downwards.



From Montech we took a small diversion up a peaceful, small canal that branched off towards Montauban – barely another boat in sight. We actually went up and back twice – the second time with Kim & Ella. Montauban is a handsome town of red-brick buildings perched on the banks of the River Tarn with its formidable weir. It boasts a striking white stone, Baroque cathedral, an ancient bridge, the “Pont Vieux” from 1335, and the stunning 17th century Place Nationale – one of the most beautiful squares in France- with a gateway in each corner and elegant buildings in rose, supported by a double row of arcades. It also had a lively market where we stocked up on home-made jams! Along the Garonne, we also enjoyed the best pizzas anywhere- my favourite has become any version of the “pizza blanche” – the white pizza made with a sour cream base instead of tomato sauce.



Each town seems to have some little fact that takes you by surprise. During WWII, Leonardo da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa” was hidden here in a secret vault behind a wine cellar. As a rebel Protestant city- the town also withstood an 86 day siege by the Catholic King and still fires off 400 cannon shots each year in September to commemorate their victory. We will also remember it for its ultra-trendy restaurant/disco at the marina, packed with the young and beautiful, every night - in total contrast to the assorted mixture of rusting barges, scruffy houseboats and visiting motorboats moored at the pontoon. The oppressive heat culminated in violent thunderstorms. Very welcome at that point!

