



**Your on the
Water Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Cruising the Northern Mediterranean
Marseille**

Cruising the Northern Med Report Four: Marseille

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One of my friends from many years ago told me of her times as a student in Marseille, France. I recall her stories of its history and beauty, with its proximity to the Med, shown in Figure 4-1.¹ It is the oldest city in France, founded in 754 BC by Greeks from Phocaea. It was a thriving city long before the Pilgrims came ashore to a pre-historic wilderness in future America.

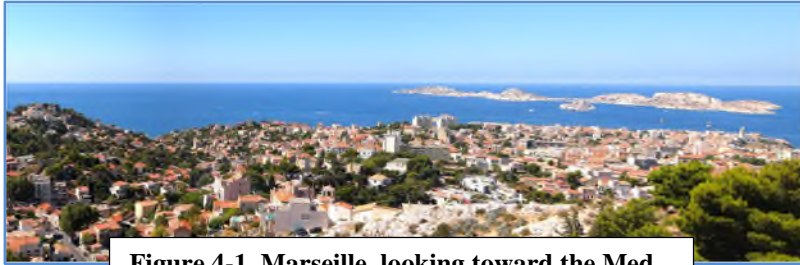


Figure 4-1. Marseille, looking toward the Med.

Viking had arranged several tours of the city and its surrounding areas. Having read about its downtown, I opted for a motored tour of this part of the region.

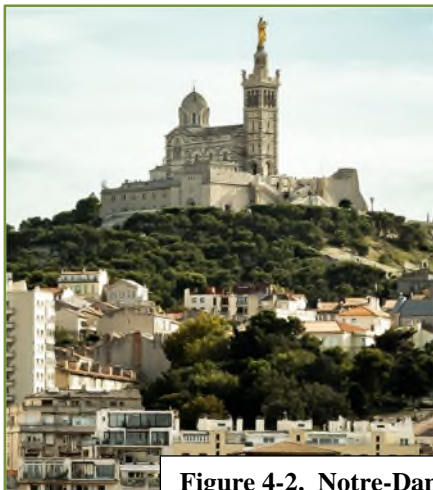


Figure 4-2. Notre-Dame de la Garde, a famous landmark.

I looked forward to visiting Notre-Dame de la Garde (Our Lady of the Guard), shown in Figure 4-2. I had seen photos and videos of the church. It is the city's signature symbol and its most popular tourist attraction. I recall National Geographic highlighting it in an issue several years ago.

The church was built on the foundations of an old fort at the highest natural point in Marseille, a high limestone outcropping, as shown in the figure.

Another old church to visit, which is one reason to visit Europe: its old-world architecture. This one was constructed in the 1850s.

During our night sailing to Marseille, we enjoyed the amenities of this fine ship, as we did each day and evening for the week. Several of them are recounted here.

On-Board Entertainment

Each day and night, the Viking offered a wide choice of entertainment, from piano tunes or guitar sessions in lounges, such as seen in Figure 4-3(a), to larger shows on stages, depicted in Figure 4-3(b). The choices were diverse; different styles of music for different tastes in music.

Light-hearted standup comedy shows were widely attended. Lectures on geography and geopolitics had fewer audiences, but provided diversity for the cruisers.

¹ Courtesy of Bing.

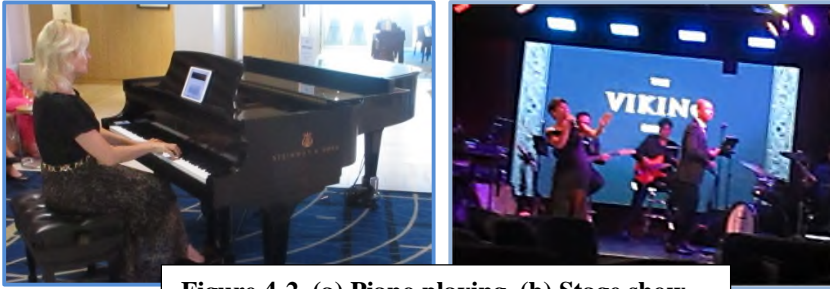


Figure 4-2. (a) Piano playing. (b) Stage show.

NATO Presentation. One of the presentations was a lecture/question-answer session about NATO. The speaker, a former senior military officer for the UK, presented a talk about the concept: *Is NATO still important?* That is, after the conclusion of the Cold War and the dismantling of the former USSR in 1991.

About 20-30 people attended this program. All that voiced an opinion, and all that raised a hand in answer to the question inherent in the presentation, resoundingly said yes. The main concern of this assemblage was the actions of Russia's Putin in Ukraine.

I raised the point of NATO's gradual envelopment around Russia since 1991, which in my view, influenced Russia's bellicosity in Crimea and Ukraine. But making no excuse for Russia's attacks, I also offered that the US should have deployed troops in Ukraine---at the invitation of the Ukrainian government---the *same time* Russia was massing troops on the Ukraine border. It was one thing to have invaded a relatively defenseless country. It would have been quite another to have invaded such a country with US military deployed as "guests" in that country. No one disagreed with my contentions, but no one agreed, either.

All agreed that most of the member countries of NATO were shirking their obligations to the alliance by not allocating their fair and required share to their defense budgets. We all agreed that Russia's actions were leading to the overdue strengthening of NATO.

We then all agreed to disassemble from this conference room and reassemble at another conference room: a bar down the a nearby passage way.

Marseille itself is a lovely town, with many old, beautiful buildings. But the central part of its downtown did not do justice to the surrounding areas of homes, businesses, museums, and churches. As our tour circled around this part of Marseille, we came across a large oval-shaped traffic circle, located in the heart of the downtown area.

As seen in the left photo of Figure 4-3, it had been paved over. What had once been a grassy park for downtowners to stroll, eat, and relax, was little more than a parking lot, without cars, or places to sit...except on the asphalt. The right photo in Figure 4-3 shows the center of this barren park is highlighted with a waterless fountain.

Our tour guide informed us the small hutches in this area were not yet open for serving fast food...for which there were no tables or chairs for the diners. Perhaps they were stored inside the huts.

Marseille's Chamber of Commerce could use some counseling about making its downtown a bit more user (tourist) friendly.



Figure 4-3. Downtown Marseille.

If you happen to be in the area, drop by to see some of Marseille's old buildings. Otherwise, save your time.

We headed back to the ship. The next stop on the cruise, Monaco, was high on my list of places to visit. I was looking forward to playing some Texas Hold'um at the famous Monte Carlo Casino.