

Four Weeks in Foix

The skies were just clearing from the afternoon downpour as I left the train station. Crossing the Ariège into the medieval town of Foix, the cobblestone streets glistened in the glow of the late afternoon sun. With my luggage in tow, I made my way along rue du Rival until reaching Place Dutilh as instructed. From there I spotted rue St-Vincent in the historic sector. Here was my flat for the next four weeks, tucked away among shuttered row houses, most dating from the 16th century.

Securing the key from the lockbox, I felt both relief and satisfaction after nearly twenty hours of travel that included 3 flights, a train, and a bus. Opening the door I exposed a steep narrow staircase to what would become my writing refuge. Beautiful, except for one minor challenge. There was no possible way in which that amazing rolling duffel that performed so well thus far was going up those stairs – with me – while it was full. Hmmm...and so there right in the doorway, offering thanks for the invention of packing cubes, I unloaded my bag. After a few more trips up the stairs than my jet lagged body desired, the mission was accomplished.

Settling in was a snap. The space is cozy yet open and light-filled with gorgeous pine plank flooring, a modern IKEA-issued kitchen, and a loft bedroom and bath. Perfect. Well it would be perfect if there was a resident cat, but I can survive! Before long Philipa and Martin, the owners, came along to welcome me with a prepared vegan soup and bowl of fruit. What a delight! And then, since the unpacking had been accomplished upon my arrival there was time for me to set out on a quick city tour on foot before sunset.

Foix is really picture perfect and extremely livable. Home to 9,000 residents it ticks all of the boxes – with two lovely rivers, a castle with foundations dating to the 10th century, a train station, a Friday market that fills the streets, and a rebellious history. Shopping is easy on foot and made even better when I discovered the organic grocers literally outside my door.

Now that you know where I am, let me share the back story to my arrival. It all began with the sale of our Mary street home last June. Before departing for Europe we arranged a short-term term lease for a furnished home in South Austin. We were delighted to find one that met all of our needs; in theory. However, upon our late August move in it didn't take long before we began to question our logic. When the three of us, one being a 6'5' 16-year-old male requiring tremendous space, and a calico, a Great Pyrenees, and budgie, began to live, work and study in the adorable two bedroom house, things got just a bit tight.

By week eight, the walls began closing in on all of us and the harmony we were all accustomed to was difficult to maintain. It was all complicated by the fact that on top of my teaching and coaching, I had set this time aside to finish my book, *Restoring Your Immunity*. Connecting with this project in the tight quarters was becoming more difficult by the day. And so it came to be that during my pre-dawn writing one fateful Saturday morning, a nagging question would not leave me be. "Why are you not in France?" My logical brain was on it, France was not "in the plan". The "plan" was to finish my book in Austin in preparation for our move to San Marcos in January. That was "the plan" for months and so far the plan had served us. And besides, Joachim and I were working on establishing a rhythm in which we worked from Europe in the

summers and the rest of the year we would work in Texas to be near our children. The problem was, currently things weren't working so well...at least for my writing.

So I ponder this question further until sunrise when I wake Joachim with a cup of tea and my wild idea. What would you think, I say, if I were I to take my work and return to France until mid-December? I can finish my book, practice my French and further test our idea of a part-time life in the Pyrenees. I hadn't even rolled into the full pitch when he endorsed it wholeheartedly. There is absolutely no good reason not to do this, he told me, and within minutes I was booking a flight.

As writing was my primary goal and the Pyrenees were already dusted in snow, I chose the urban setting of Foix, which is just a 45-minute drive south of Toulouse and bordering the natural preserve for the Ariège Pyrenees. I could be car free, arrive by train and take care of my daily needs on foot which sounded delightful. I'll spend four weeks directly in Foix and then for my final 11 days, hire a car and venture to the very rural setting of a hamlet near Castelnaud-Durban.

I am filled with gratitude for this opportunity and plan to fill each day with heartfelt writing and walks to take in all of the breathtaking beauty, and if a little more French creeps into my vocabulary all the better. I look forward to sharing this adventure with you as it unfolds.

Be sure to follow me @LaurenHubele on Instagram for a daily feed of photos from #30daysofwriting in the Pyrenees.