

An open letter from Chef Tom

Now is the perfect time to get away.

Enjoy a very long week in the South of France, April 22 to May 1, for a slow, meandering, relaxing cruise on a beautiful barge up the gorgeous Canal du Midi. Plus, you have the option to spend another five whole days of freedom – to explore Paris! – from May 1 to May 6.

Savoring. Savoring is a good thing. Strolling. Lounging. Savoring. Sipping. All those ‘in the moment’ type of activities one barely gets to experience. We’re taking an extended – and well deserved - break from the intensity of everyday schedules, appointments and obligations. Time to breathe. You could even call this a Slow Food Tour.

This is my second time leading this adventure in France. I learned a lot the first time and this one will be even better. Better itinerary, better views, better excursions.

The most important lesson I learned, from my very first adventure to Tuscany, was that we need two things: a good long weekend to catch our breath from having traveled half way around the world, and to pace the adventure a LOT more slowly.

After landing in Paris, we board the TGV for a nice, relaxed ride through the French countryside, to Carcassonne, a gorgeous medieval city in the Languedoc region. This is where we’ll spend the weekend. Two days to relax and stroll a sleepy city, sip some wine, sit at a long table with old and new friends and savor the wonderful cuisine of Southern France. Then six long days of a slow barge cruise on one of the most beautiful waterways anywhere – the Canal du Midi. Nothing to do but sit and watch the other boats drift by, and wave “Bon Jour!” to folks enjoying their own leisurely cruise.

During our week on the Canal, you can opt to join the group for a visit to a Fleur de Sel factory. Or an olive oil maker. Or a local winery. We’ll even pay a visit to Les Halles, the big open market in Narbonne. Or you can just relax on board and have some wine and allow yourself to be served by an attentive staff. Nap. Read. Take a photo or two. Have another nap. Do some more sipping. You get the picture.

Once we’re completely relaxed and living a slower pace, we’ll board the TGV for another first class ride back to Paris. You can fly home that afternoon, or stay the night and fly back the next day. Or, you can opt for a five-day extension in Paris at the Hotel St. Paul near Blvd. St. Germaine and St. Michele; the Latin Quarter. Exciting restaurants, winding avenues and plenty of local color. Imagine arriving in Paris fully rested, without jetlag!

Paris would be YOUR time. There will be five days of complete freedom to explore the city at your own pace. You can spend the whole time in the Louvre, stroll the Champs Elysees, or find a neighborhood you’ve never been to. We will have one day where you can opt to join your fellow food enthusiasts at the world famous Le Cordon Bleu and participate in a cooking demonstration and class. And one evening where we’ll all have dinner at a local ‘tres Parisian” bistro and give ourselves one last toast to our good fortune and a fond farewell. Other than that, Paris is yours!

Please give yourself this extraordinary opportunity. You’ll come back home with rich memories and stories to share...for the rest of your life. We will be twelve people only. No big crowds, but also not a lot of rooms, so please get your deposit in. I hope to see you in Paris! www.spiritandspice.com/chefscruise2

Warmest regards,

Chef Tom