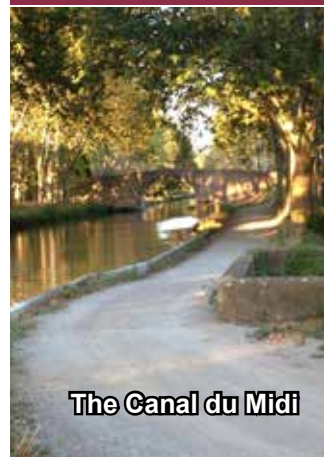




**Discover Europe Ltd.**

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In This Issue . . .



The Canal du Midi

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



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# Into the HEART of EUROPE

THE NEWSLETTER OF DISCOVER EUROPE LTD.

## POSTCARD FROM THE CANAL DU MIDI

In September 1976 my friend (and now fellow director of Discover Europe), Phil Little and I went grape picking in the south of France. We were based in a small village north of the town of Beziers, in the foothills of the southern escarpment of the Massif Central. This September I went back there - the problem was that, 37 years later, neither Phil nor I could remember the name of the village!

My family and I had been planning a trip to southwest France for quite some time, ever since the Icelandic ash cloud prevented us from going there as intended a few years ago, and last summer we made it. We spent 12 days exploring the region around the Canal du Midi, down the Mediterranean coast, almost to the border with Spain, and back through the lower reaches of the French Pyrenees.



The Canal du Midi

The Canal du Midi runs from Toulouse to Sète and was constructed between 1667 and 1681, mainly due to the efforts of one man, Pierre-Paul Riquet. Its original purpose was to provide an efficient way of transporting the agricultural produce of the region, mainly wheat, to the major seaports on both the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. For millennia, this has been one of the major land traffic corridors of Europe, flanked as it is on the north by the escarpment slope of the Massif Central and, on the south, by the Pyrenees. By connecting the Garonne River, which flows through Bordeaux into the Bay of Biscay, with the canal, a water route was created that connected the Atlantic with the Mediterranean and avoided the necessity of circumnavigating the whole Iberian Peninsula - a journey of a month, and one plagued by the pirates of the Barbary Coast.

These days the commercial traffic along the canal has been totally replaced by holiday makers, but the lock keepers are busier than ever. The canal is littered with places to eat right along the banks. Every couple of miles there are lock gates (écluses in French) which provide natural stopping points for the traffic along the canal. Each one has a lock keeper's house and many of these have restaurants or small snack bars, farm stands or gift shops - ways for the lock keeper to supplement their income (and they say the French don't have a word for entrepreneur!).

We spent several days biking along the canal, visiting local markets, eating the fabulous local food, sampling the local wine, eating, and visiting incredible places like Carcassonne. Did I mention the eating? Then one day I decided to drag my family down memory lane and try to find the village where we went grape picking 37 years ago. I didn't have much to go on. I knew the general area and the only other thing I remembered clearly was that, as the house we were staying in had no bathroom, we used to wash in the local river and use the public WC in the town square - a traditional old French hole-in-the-ground affair.



Chateau de Camon

## Still Available for Spring:

**Catalonia & Cathar Country, May 1 - 10**  
A trip for Vassar College to Barcelona and across the Pyrenees into southwest France with a stay in the fabulous Chateau de Camon.

**Wales & the Welsh Borders, May 1 - 10**  
A circular tour of Wales - celebrating the centenary of Dylan Thomas' birth.

**Let's Unpack in the Peaks, May 5 - 13**  
An extended stay at a country house hotel with day trips out to explore the Peak District.

**Stately Homes of England, May 9 - 17**  
A chance to join our tribute to *Downton Abbey* in partnership with The English Manner.

**Tastes of Southern Italy, May 10 - 18**  
From stays at the Villa Cheta and in Sorrento, we sample the food and flavors of the region.

**Paris, Normandy & the Loire, May 22 - 31**  
A circuit in northwest France: Giverny, Mt. St. Michel, Chateaux and Paris too.

**Island of Saints & Scholars, May 29 - Jun 7**  
Dublin to the west coast in the footsteps of the Irish literary giants.

**Tales of Wales, June 4 - 14**  
An in-depth tour of Wales with Harvard Alumni Travel and Professor of Celtic Languages and Literature, Catherine McKenna.

## Group Travel for Individuals

At **Discover Europe** we strive to create rich travel experiences with a difference. Each unique tour is limited to 5 - 15 people and guided by an expert with a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm. But don't just take our word for it; here's a sample of what some recent travelers had to say about their tours and/or tour guides:

*Fiona went out of her way to be helpful to me while in Italy and answered all my questions and concerns accurately and promptly. My best European trip ever!*  
Ann Carey, **Venezia, Friuli, Giulia**

*Are all your guides as nice as Ian? He was really special.*  
Morris & Judy Sherman, **The West Country**

*Best tour guide I've had on any trip ever - and I have traveled with Smithsonian, American Horticultural Society, and Regent Cruises. David is extremely knowledgeable, articulate, enthusiastic and personable. And very caring about his tourists. They don't get any better.*

Sheryl Heckler, **The Stately Homes of England**

**Discover Europe** offers a wide selection of well-crafted itineraries, but we will also customize a trip to your specifications. Whether it's a family reunion, a business trip, a school vacation, or simply a celebration, we can help you plan the ultimate escape to Europe.

For more information, contact **Discover Europe** toll-free at 866-563-7077; contact us via e-mail at [discovereurope@earthlink.net](mailto:discovereurope@earthlink.net); or visit our web site at [www.discovereuropeltd.com](http://www.discovereuropeltd.com).



Chateau de Foix

So, if, like me, you're suffering from the winter blues, or even seasonal affective disorder, why not cheer yourself up with the thought of taking a tour to Europe?

Michael Induni, President

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To cut a long story short, we found it and largely due to the fact that the public toilets were still there. The doors had had a recent coat of paint, but apart from that they were still exactly as I remembered. They pretty much smelled the same as well. We found the house that we stayed in, although it had been totally refurbished since then, and the town square had been turned into a parking lot, but the village of Murviel-les-Beziers was definitely recognizable and still just as quiet and sleepy as I remembered – not a tourist in sight!

A couple of other high points of this trip are definitely worth mentioning. One was our short stay in Collioure (see the front cover picture). In sharp contrast to Murviel-les-Beziers, this town is a magnet for tourists – but it's easy to see why. The region is known as the Cote Vermeille, the Vermillion Coast, and for the last hundred years it has been a refuge for artists seeking the magical light of the Mediterranean and a cheap place to live. Then light is still magical, but cheap is not the word you would use to describe it now!

The other highlight that I just have to rave about was our visit to Peter and Katie Lawton and our stay in their Abbaye Chateau de Camon. I have worked with Peter and Katie for a few years now, sending them the occasional small group, but this was my first time staying at the chateau. It won't be the last. The combination they have managed to create of the authentic history pouring from the stones of the building, with modern plumbing and conveniences (I'm still not sure how they manage to get the wifi through 3 foot thick stone walls), and the superb food that chef Tom creates every night, is truly outstanding. That is why we have four tours all staying there this year and why I'm already thinking about my next visit.

Michael

**A New Puzzle:** Which I like to call . . . Capital Punishment.  
1. Take the first capital letter of each of the six countries that originally came together to form the EEC (European Economic Community), the precursor of the EU (European Union) in 1957.  
2. Discard the three largest countries.  
3. Add the first capital letters of the next three countries to join the EEC in 1973.  
4. Take these six letters and arrange them to form the capital city of one of these countries. What is that city?

The first solution, drawn at random from all the correct entries submitted, will receive a \$200 discount off any trip listed in red in the next newsletter.

## News & Notes

**About Time.** A national disgrace has at last been remedied! No, I'm not referring to the official pardon posthumously bestowed upon Alan Turing - that's another story. I am, in fact, referring to the visitor facilities at Stonehenge. For years, what is possibly the single most iconic and culturally important ancient site in the whole of Britain has been presented to the millions of visitors that it receives every year in a somewhat less than flattering manner. There was even a major road cutting through part of the site.

No longer. At a cost of some 27 million pounds, English Heritage, the organisation that manages and cares for the monument, has completely reorganised the approach and built a brand new visitor center. I was fortunate to be invited by English Heritage to bring a few of my tour guides to an introduction to the new arrangements, and this January I combined a visit to see mum with a tour of the new facilities. All of which has some very important practical implications for prospective visitors.

The most important change, and one which has caused some frustration amongst visitors already, is the introduction of timed tickets. You can no longer just turn up at the monument and be sure of getting in - you have to book in advance. Although this system is absolutely



The Queen's Swan Marker at Work

**And a Solution:** According to the medieval chronicler Henry of Huntingdon, King Henry I died of a "surfeit of lampreys." Lampreys are still considered a delicacy in parts of Europe (around the Baltic and also in parts of France) and are quite possibly one of the most disgusting creatures on the face of the earth. They are a parasitic, eel-like fish that has a circular, jaw-less mouth, which attaches to a host fish, burrows into the flesh and then sucks its blood.

The first correct answer to be drawn at random was from Peter Mantzaris of Butler, PA and he gets to deduct \$200 from the cost of any tour listed in red in this newsletter.

essential in order to prevent overwhelming numbers of visitors arriving at the same time, it has had some teething troubles in its initial implementation. Mainly because of a lack of publicity about the new requirements.

Another major change is that Stonehenge will no longer be a quick stop. Personally I see this as a good thing. Too often in the past, was such an important site glossed over superficially by tour companies trying to cram too many activities into too short a space of time.

The removal of the road that used to run right across the Causeway means the the new visitor center is set some distance away from the stones and a shuttle ferries passengers back and forth between them. Combine this with the excellent new museum and exhibition spaces and the new gift shop and cafeteria and you will need at least 2 hours to visit properly.

**Swan Upping** is one of those delightfully British institutions that we maintain so well. It is the annual census of the swan population on stretches of the River Thames and dates from the twelfth century, when the Crown claimed ownership of all mute swans. At that time roast swan was a favorite dish at royal banquets and feasts.

Today, the Crown retains the right to ownership of all unmarked mute swans in open water, but The Queen only exercises it on certain stretches of the Thames and its surrounding tributaries. This ownership is shared with the Worshipful Company of Vintners and the Worshipful Company of Dyers, who were granted these rights by the Crown in the fifteenth century. Nowadays, of course, the swans are no longer eaten.

In the Swan Upping ceremony, The Queen's Swan Marker, the Royal Swan Uppers and the Swan Uppers of the Vintners' and Dyers' livery companies use six traditional Thames rowing skiffs in their five-day journey up-river.

The Queen's Swan Uppers wear traditional scarlet uniforms and each boat flies appropriate flags and pennants.



David Phillips & Anna Spencer

When a brood of cygnets is sighted, a cry of "All up!" is given to signal that the boats should get into position. On passing Windsor Castle, the rowers stand to attention in their boat with oars raised and salute "Her Majesty The Queen, Seigneur of the Swans."

Swan Upping takes place each year in the third week of July.

**New Offerings.** We'd like to take this opportunity for a shameless plug for some of our new trips listed in this newsletter - several of them based on ideas freely given by some of our frequent travellers.

In May, we are exploring a wonderful part of England that doesn't see too many US visitors - the Peak District. We have included a breathtaking array of different visits all from a base of one hotel. And a lovely hotel it is too!

Later on in the year we are taking the advice of another frequent traveler and setting off for the Scottish Lowlands. This is the land of Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott and the border between God's own country and the sassenachs to the south (you can tell my mother's family were all Scots?).

And we've also redesigned our Stately Homes tour and our Mystery tour for the fall. Why not join us this year?

### OUR FAVORITE HOTELS

#### Relais des 3 Mas Collioure, France

The main photograph on the cover of this newsletter was taken from my room at the Relais des 3 Mas at sunrise. Built into the side of the cliff surrounding the bay, the hotel boasts a Michelin star restaurant. All the rooms are unique and each one is themed around a different painter associated with the region.



Relais des 3 Mas

## Itineraries for 2014

Please note that there are two types of tour shown here. If the tour name is in **Red**, then it is a regular Discover Europe tour with between 5 and 15 participants.

If the tour name is in **Blue**, then it means that the tour is being sponsored by an organization. These tours may well also be available, but as the circumstances vary from trip to trip, please call us first.

**Along the Pyrenees, June 6 – 14**  
Exploring Cathar country and the Basque region from Carcassonne to Bilbao.

**The Pilgrim's Way, June 12 – 21**  
Following on from the Pyrenees tour, we trace the Way of St. James to Santiago.

**The Gardens of Ireland, June 12 – 21**  
Gardens, private and public from the west coast to Dublin plus a N. Ireland option.

**A Cotswold Spring, June 12 – 21**  
An extended stay in lovely Stow-on-the-Wold. Quintessential English countryside.

**Ancient Islands, June 16 – 30**  
Smith College professor Scott Bradbury leads this trip to Malta, Cyprus & Crete.



Kourion, Cyprus

**Rome, Florence & Venice, June 19 – 28**  
A perfect introduction to Italy's big three.

**Jewels of Eastern Europe, Jun 26 – Jul 5**  
Exploring this historic region from stays in Budapest, Vienna & Prague.

**Adriatic Crossroads, June 25 – July 14**  
A two part trip for Crow Canyon Archaeological Center from Ravenna to Croatia.

**Britain in Bloom, July 7 – 16**  
The Hampton Court Flower Show and breathtaking private garden visits.

**Discovering East Anglia, July 11 – 19**  
Experience life in a country house hotel with Gavin Miller in his home region.

**Magic of Medieval England, Jul 25 – Aug 2**  
From Robin Hood's Nottingham to the walled city of York. This is one the children (or grandchildren) will love.

**The Gardens of Scotland, Aug 21 – 30**  
Edinburgh and then gardens up the east coast to Aberdeen and Inverness.

**Treasures of SW France, Sept 4 – 17**  
Toulouse, the Dordogne and Bordeaux, with an optional extension to Paris.



Jersey's Gorey Castle

**The Channel Islands, Sept 4 – 13**  
A trip for Vassar inspired by the *Guernsey Literary & Potato Peel Pie Society*.

**A Scandinavian ArtVenture, Sept 13 – 27**  
Oslo, Copenhagen and Stockholm in the company of the Princeton class of '58.

**French Catalonia, Sept 13 – 25**  
Stays at the Chateau de Camon and the Relais des 3 Mas in Collioure highlight this trip. An optional extension to Paris.

**Treasure Houses of N England, Sept 18 – 27**  
Visiting stately homes from Yorkshire to the Lake District.

**The Scottish Lowlands, Sept 26 – Oct 5**  
Glasgow to Robbie Burns' country, through the borders and up to Edinburgh.

**Stately Homes, Part II, Sept 30 – Oct 8**  
We still visit Highclere Castle, but we focus on houses in the south of England.

**England's West Country, Oct 2 – 11**  
London to Land's End by train and then winding our way back by road.

**Linger in the Languedoc, Oct 3 – 11**  
An extended stay at the Abbaye Chateau de Camon with day trips exploring the region from Carcassonne to the Pyrenees.

**Kent: Garden of England, Oct 9 – 18**  
Canterbury, Dover, Gardens, Dickens, Kings and Castles, History and Hops.

**Autumn in Tuscany, Oct 17 – 25**  
From our base in Montecatini Terme, we take trips into the Tuscan countryside.

**The Glory of Greece, Oct 23 – Nov 4**  
Athens, Corinth, Mycenae and Delphi - the highlights of mainland Greece.

**A Mystery Tour?, November 8 – 16**  
A celebration of the great English Mystery writers & a day trip on the Orient Express.

**Thanksgiving in Mallorca, Nov 21 – 29**  
A week in paradise - with no cooking and cleaning. Find out why Gavin lives here.

**Christmas in Scotland, Dec 21 – 29, 2014**  
Stays in Glasgow and Edinburgh, then Christmas in a Scottish castle.

For detailed itineraries, contact **Discover Europe** toll-free at 866-563-7077; e-mail at [discovereurope@earthlink.net](mailto:discovereurope@earthlink.net); or our web site at [www.discovereuropeltd.com](http://www.discovereuropeltd.com).