What did you get up to over the Easter weekend?

“I was overwhelmed by the generosity and hospitality of the French hosts. I needn’t have been concerned about my lack of French as language is no barrier to having fun and acting/sign language goes long way.”

“Another benefit was catching up and spending time with Tatsfielders and Westerhamites!”

“A fun filled weekend of great food, good company and bon homie. An uplifting experience not to be missed.”

“Everyone was very kind and the French seemed to know your name which gave a personal and important feeling.”

“Settled in and felt comfortable from the minute we arrived…all the activities were great fun – everyone joining in and mingling whether English or French.”

“I can’t wait for next year when they come and visit.”

“A well balanced and not overly busy programme.”

“The Sunday games were hilarious – the French have such a sense of fun.”

“Our hosts were tres gentile (very kind) and looked after us very well, catering for our every need. They are lovely people and we feel privileged to know them.”

These are just a few of the comments we captured on the coach journey back from Vern d’Anjou.

Billy our coach driver from Skinners drove us smoothly and safely to Vern arriving to a warm reception at about 4pm on Good Friday. We were greeted by John White who preferred to travel on two wheels instead of four, cycling all the way from Tatsfield to Vern d’Anjou. The French are wondering whether he’ll take part in the Tour de France next! After a warm welcome from our hosts, the evening was spent in true French style enjoying a leisurely meal amongst groups of friends before tired heads hit the pillow (we’d left Tatsfield at 5am).

We spent Saturday in the city of Nantes, travelling by boat to the small fishing village of Trentemoult with its narrow streets and brightly painted houses. We were fortunate to have reasonably warm weather for our picnic lunch before visiting a museum of machines in the afternoon. A team of mad builders had let their imaginations go and created monumental mechanical animals including an enormous elephant the size of a house upon which you could ride as it roamed around. After some free time to explore the cafes, shops, cathedral and castle we headed to an old converted biscuit factory for an evening meal.

On Easter Sunday there were the usual formalities of speeches at the official reception before the afternoon fun and games started. We were split into teams for a treasure hunt, which took us around the village. Following the Easter egg trail we came across a quiz about Easter, before having another superb picnic with some memorable home-made pates and cold meats. Then it was the egg throwing game, thankfully bin bags and hats providing some protection and then on to a *four*-legged race…quite interesting for the middle person! Final stop was in the grounds of the retirement home where we dressed up as rabbits for a relay race to collect carrots. This involved going around the oak tree planted for the twinning some years ago which was a nice touch. Over tea and cake we marveled at an enormous 87 metre scarf which the residents had knitted.

In the evening we arrived to a beautifully decorated hall with cheerful citrus colours and were treated to a fantastic meal of Tartiflette and an array of desserts. Then there was folk dancing to follow causing much hilarity. We were also presented with a puzzle of images of Tatsfield and Vern d’Anjou and each family had had to put their piece together prior to the evening. There were two copies, one for the French and one for the English and each were signed by the Presidents of the Twinning Association and dated as a souvenir of our visit.

On Monday we travelled to Lion d’Angers to tour the National Stud and after another gastronomical picnic, we walked to the racecourse to see a couple of races. The final evening was at the local restaurant Le Pigeon Blanc where friendships were further cemented over a gourmet meal followed by dancing.

Our French hosts had clearly put a lot of thought into the fantastic programme of activities. The extent of their hospitality and friendship is very heart-warming and many happy memories have been created from a special weekend as the photos have captured. If the Vern d’Anjou experience hasn’t yet appealed to you, think again. This is an experience not to be missed and a decision you won’t regret making. We will be looking for hosts for next Easter so why not give it some thought and join in the fun.