



That holiday had definitely many "Wow!" moments. It was perfect to let my old job behind me and to rejuvenate. At the beginning of June, I had gone down with Covid and was still feeling a bit weak. I was struggling with a frequent cough I could not get rid of easily. But hardly had we arrived at our destination I was beginning to feel a boost of fresh energy.

We stayed in Sault, which is an old village in the region of Provence, perched along the top of a ridge overlooking a wide valley. The scarcely populated area is a safe haven for wildlife. There are many lavender fields spread out across the valleys, giving the region a magical touch. Across there is Mt. Ventoux, which is 1912 meters high and has a conical peak. There are small shops

with regional products and there is a weekly market too. And no need to say that the restaurants around our cosy hotel offered delicious food, giving us enough stamina for our various photographic excursions.

We were three people: Walter, who was our tour guide and photography teacher and there was Ueli and me as participants. The three of us went on like a house on fire and were enjoying each other's companionship. We all shared the same passion for photography and last but not least for the French cuisine.

First, we went to see Nicolas Ughetto, who lived a short walk from our hotel. Nicolas is a professional wildlife photographer and goes out to his favourite spots almost every early morning. He knows the region inside out and loves nature in all its forms. When we found his shop, I was taken aback: Through the open door, at the end of a large room, I made out a very big screen, displaying wild animals walking across lavender fields. The movie was enhanced by poignant classical music. For a moment I just stood there, feeling mesmerized, taking in the magical scenery.

His shop (La Galerie du Ventoux) is full of stunning wildlife pictures. I was struck by a big close-up picture of a wolf. The animal had compelling eyes which seemed captivating and sinister at the same time. We saw dozens of posters where Nicolas had managed to catch the essence and beauty of the moment. In front of me there was a tremendously gifted, hardworking professional photographer. He was

going to take us out on two days and we were about to have a very inspiring time.



As we had arrived just before harvest time, the lavender fields were in full bloom giving off a sweet aroma. We would install ourselves in good spots just before sunrise, take pictures and then have a late breakfast. Afterwards, we would either go out again in search of new spots for the evening or spend time sorting out and editing our photographs. Sometimes we also needed a nap in order to catch up on some sleep. It was still supposed to be a holiday and not a bootcamp after all!

I had never seen lavender fields in full bloom and was intrigued by the lovely fragrance, the strong colour and the millions of bees humming. On the dot, with the first rays of dawn, they started to hum.



We noticed that some lavender fields looked perfect whereas others were heavily

infested with weeds. The worst sight was when we came across a field where there had been a wildfire. Only charred stems were left and there were some lonely beehives surrounded by a few scorched trees. What a dystopian sight!

We learnt that conditions for successful lavender farming had become more difficult due to climate change. Over the past decade there had been exceptional droughts, wildfires, extraordinary spreads of pathogens and severe winters with hardly any snow to protect the plants from the cold. Some farmers have given up. We were glad that we still found some fields that were in good shape and Nicolas proved to be an excellent guide for this.



One early morning, Nicolas took us to a field where we saw a mighty stag on a small hill looking straight at us. Nicolas told us that in the colder time of the year, when all the leaves had gone, it would be easier to discover and photograph wildlife. It is a very tempting idea to go back there and be taken out to great spots by Nicolas. We spent two days with him and he did show us many impressive places off the beaten track.



Once, on a late morning, we were entering a small village where we noticed a lovely cafe with a bakery nearby. Having been out since 5:30 am, this was just too good to be true! A friendly man told us that we could fetch some pastry at the bakery nearby. Soon we were sitting outdoors, enjoying invigorating coffee and were cheerfully munching away. There was a post office opposite the road and we

noticed a woman who was just about to go in there. That was the moment when a group of men near us started to shout, that the post office was temporarily closed. Why? The post office clerk was one of the men enjoying his coffee break! The woman approached the men and they soon had a happy chat. To us, that was a scene fallen out of time.



For a change we visited a medieval village called "Vaison la Romain": A picturesque little town built into the mountain with narrow cobbled streets and an impressive old bridge across the river. And not to forget the lovely ice cream which

was a real treat on that hot day. Later we drove to the top of Mt. Ventoux which is the highest mountain in Provence. There are spectacular views from the top of Provence and the Rhône valley, the southern Alps and - when the view is good - you can even see the Pyrenees. The area on the top is barren. It consists just of limestone and is free of vegetation. Surprisingly, there are quite a lot of mad-cap cyclists, going for the very challenging climb up to 1912 meters.

Once a week there is a big market in Sault. It is a wonderful event for arts and crafts lovers as well as for the ones looking for local treats and fine food. I bought different spices. Later, when my wife and I started using them, I regretted that I had not bought more. They were of extraordinary taste and can probably only be found in Provence. Another reason to go back there!



Once again Walter had taken me to a fascinating place and we had enjoyed every day. I got to see places and aspects of nature I had not known before. We all went home with great pictures and very happy memories.



If you have enjoyed reading this report then you might want to find out more about Nicolas Ughetto and his pictures here:

[www.nicolas-ughetto.com](http://www.nicolas-ughetto.com)

