

My Thoughts on Traveling to France

Introduction

It is my goal in writing this essay for you to have a successful trip. On occasion, I have watched people spoil a gorgeous day as these two examples show: One Sunday at lunch in L'Isle sur la Sorgue, which has not only a fabulous market, but also amazing antiques, we were sitting over one of the canals enjoying an elegant meal at the vegetarian restaurant, le Basilic (the Basal), where the floor show was an American complaining that he wanted meat! The opposite experience happened in a tiny restaurant in Umbria, three hours north of Rome. Another American complained that he wanted pasta with ketchup – he could not believe that an Italian restaurant did not have pasta with ketchup!

Things are different in other countries and they are supposed to be. Some things are better while some things are worse. Watch and observe. For instance, Europeans do not expect to eat anything that they want any day of the year. They know what is in season and are excited to eat things when they are fresh and at their peak. As I write this, blueberries are fresh and steadily getting less expensive. In another month they will be out of season, but corn should be pretty good by then. There are reasons that you do not eat oysters in the summer or lobster in the winter.

Paris is my favorite large city and France is my favorite country to visit. When I was a junior in high school, 1967-68, I attended School Boys Abroad (now School Year Abroad) in Rennes, France (Rennes is the ancient capital of Brittany, the peninsula that points due west from Paris and sticks into the Atlantic Ocean). It was fabulous! Everyone was used to college students coming to Europe for their junior year at about age 20. We just forget to tell everyone that we were not juniors in college but were juniors in *high school* and were only 16. Everyone treated us like young adults and that was the way we behaved. Again, it was fabulous!

At this point I have a confession to make; I have never stayed in Paris more than 10 days. I go to France to rest where even if the phone rings there is not a whole lot that I can do about it. Obviously, it is easier to relax in the countryside than it is in a huge city so my visits to Paris tend to be relatively short, sometimes just one night on arrival or just before departure. This has had the delightful side effect of making each visit fresh and exciting. At some point I would like to have a prolonged stay. I look forward to writing about that time.

When my daughter was in high school a trip was organized to Madrid, Paris and London. I was asked to give an introductory talk about Paris. As I wrote out my thoughts it occurred to me that notes and comments would benefit the students the most when they were actually in Paris so I made copies for all. Those essays were the start of what you are now reading. Subsequently, when patients, family or friends were going to Paris or France, I would give them copies. Others asked for more detailed advice so I wrote additional essays. So, now, soon after our return from a French trip, I write out my observations and suggestions and have added them as well.

Paris

In General

Paris is my favorite large city. We will have a general discussion about jet lag, food, transportation, dress, people, sights, and safety as well as specific recommendations for walks and museum visits.

Before you leave, read as much as you can about each of your destinations. Knowledge makes your experience more interesting and fun. I encourage you to read a guidebook to Paris. Each member of your group should try to read a different guidebook. This should make your discussions more fun.

As part of your pre-travel explorations use the internet. Asterix is a comic book character that I enjoy tremendously. He has his own web page, www.asterix.fr, which is in both French and English. Just for fun try the French page first, you will probably do better than you think.

As soon as you arrive in Paris you should buy *un plan de Paris*, a small red book that has every road and subway stop marked. Do not buy the blue plan. It includes all of the suburbs, is too large and is an unnecessary extra expense. The red book easily fits in a pocket and is easy to refer to, even in a crowded subway. It is organized by arrondissements, which are the twenty administrative districts of Paris. By convention the abbreviation for arrondissements is "e" (e.g. 5e is the abbreviation for the cinquieme arrondissement). Hereafter, I will use the letter "e" after a number from 1-20. Pedestrian traffic tends to flow within an arrondissement. Do not buy a Michelin map of Paris, which divides the city into a grid. Sequential maps may be located many pages away and are difficult to find. With the *plan*, when you switch from the 1e to the 8e, it only takes a second. When I read a book that takes place in Paris, I will look up the location in the plan. I also find it a great souvenir.

Throughout Paris are kiosks where magazines and books such as *1e plan de Paris* are sold. While you are buying your plan, be sure to buy one of the weekly guides to activities that are available in English. I would also encourage you to read the *International Herald-Tribune*, an English language paper, which is packed with well written, insightful articles.

Gary Lee Kraut has written a guidebook called *Paris Revisited*. He also has an excellent web site: parisrevisited.com He offers a wide variety of interesting services.

Jet lag

Mathew Edlund MD, a psychiatrist and sleep expert has written an interesting book called *The Body Clock Advantage* that you can get from Amazon.com. If you have major problems this is a good resource. As you know, it is impossible to get a good night's sleep the night before your departure. I have found the following to be very helpful in fighting jet lag. Drink a lot of water. Carry a bottle with you onto the plane. It will be an hour or more before the stewardess comes by with the drinks. This is a critical time for hydration. Drink the whole bottle. Avoid both alcohol and anything with bubbles. The pasta dinner may help you to sleep and will be the easiest to digest. Just because the movies are free does not mean that you have to watch them. Make a big effort to sleep. The most important thing to do on the plane is to use artificial tears such as Refresh, Hypotears or Tears Natural every 30 minutes at least. This will greatly soothe your eyes and help with hydration. Once you arrive in Europe, do not take a nap! Get out and be active! Conversely, after your trip home, go to bed as soon as possible.

Food and Drinks

During your stay in Paris you must spend some time sitting in a café simply watching the world go by. Hopefully, the weather will be nice enough for you to sit outside. What should you order to drink? Whole books have been written about French wines and aperitifs. We will discuss coffee and sodas. First, we should devote some time to water.

Water

In the past, Americans have been mystified by the French fascination with bottled water. They believe in its curative power. I have seen people drive for miles just to get water from a particular well. When I was a resident at Penn I would drive down to the docks of Philadelphia to buy a bottle of Perrier. Now it is available in every convenience store. Bottled water can be separated into two groups: “avec gaz” or “sans gaz” (with or without gas). Although there are no hard and fast rules as to when it is appropriate to have or not have bubbles in water, Perrier is considered to be relatively “heavy” and most appropriate as an aperitif before dinner and would never ever be drunk with a meal. Hands down my favorite water is Badoit, which has less gas than Perrier and a lighter taste. I think that it is terrific whether with a meal or when I am just thirsty. You are familiar with Evian and Vitel. Vichy has quite a mineral taste to me.

Sodas tend to be quite expensive in France. Coke is much more readily available than Pepsi. The diet version is called “Coca Light.” I do not recommend ever drinking sodas, as they offer no thirst quenching value. I would encourage you to stick with local drinks. My favorite is Orangina, which has recently been part of a takeover battle by Coke. Interestingly, the owner, Pernod, wants to sell so that it can expand other parts of its business, but the French government has blocked the sale. Orangina usually comes in a small bottle with a round bottom that the waiter will shake just before he opens it and pours it into your glass. Another alternative that is usually inexpensive is “diabalo grenadine” which is a sweet soda with a splash of red grenadine. Finally, there is a brand called “Pschitt” that comes in both orange and lemon-line.

The French cannot understand why we would ever want more than one piece of ice in a drink. A café in Paris that does not cater to Provençals who drink pastis with a piece of ice might not have any ice at all. It must be due to their desire to avoid tap water at all costs.

Coffee

Coffee is integral to French life. For breakfast they will typically drink equal parts of coffee and warm milk from a bowl into which they will dunk bread. Many French people will stop off at a café on their way to work where they will have a café crème (coffee with cream) and a croissant while standing at the bar. The French do not put milk into coffee after 10:00 am. Parisians are now used to Americans ordering cappuccino, so they are prepared to serve you. The French will have a demitasse of espresso after lunch and dinner. They will often put a large piece of raw sugar into the cup, stir, and dunk a second for the coffee to cool. If you are very lucky in a restaurant the coffee will come with a small, individually wrapped piece of bittersweet chocolate, a treat not to be missed!

Alcohol

The French view beer and wine as a food that is usually only drunk with meals. I encourage you to also view it as food.

Smoking

Unfortunately, the French smoke in great numbers. The tobacco monopoly is owned by the French government. In January 2008, smoking was banned inside restaurants and cafes, putting the outside tables at a huge premium.

Places to eat

Food is important to the French. The entire country stops at mealtime. The French live to eat. Even the humblest establishment will work hard to provide a quality meal. Unlike the States, where a restaurant will expect to turn a table over several times during a meal, French establishments will often, if not usually, expect to serve only one group at each table during a meal.

The names of the various establishments that serve meals can be quite confusing. In a moment we will review the specialties of each. The differences often will blur. We will also discuss options for take out. First let's discuss "street food."

Street food

Unlike Americans, the French rarely eat between meals let alone while walking on the street. Thus, exceptions tend to be important. Occasionally, you may find a stand where gouffres, Belgian waffles, are sold. Other vendors will sell pommes frites, French fries. These are usually quite greasy.

If you come across a street vendor standing in back of something that looks like a choo choo train, you are in luck. They are selling grilled chestnuts. These are seasonal and are only available during cold weather. They are very warming, very filling and very dry. Share "un carnet ('car-nay')" with your friends.

Street markets

Street markets are common throughout Europe. Several blocks along a street will be closed to vehicles. Stores will open out onto the street. Other merchants will open temporary stalls right on the street. These will usually be open every morning and occasionally in the afternoon as well. In the past, the French would shop for lunch in the morning and for dinner in the afternoon. Everyday. They would have only a small refrigerator. They would never consider shopping only once a week. Some of this has changed with "progress."

If possible, walk down a market street and watch all of the activity. This is a great place to people-watch and to observe the French in the act of being French.

In the country these street markets will move, almost as a whole, from town to town. Market day is usually the best time to visit a town.

Carry out food

The French have a wide variety of options for carry out food. The French do not go out to a restaurant for a big meal everyday, let alone every meal. There are a large number of options available to you.

Charcuterie: This is probably your best bet for an easy take out meal. Theoretically, a charcuterie will sell pork based products such as ham and pate. They will also usually sell a wide variety of prepared salads. They are happy to sell these in small portions and will usually

have plastic forks to give you. My favorite is celery ('sell-ree'), which is based on the root, not the green stalk that we eat here.

Boulangerie: Baker. French bread is far superior to anything that we have here. Eat as much as you can. Pick up some for your picnic.

Traiteur: Originally, these shops would sell wild game. They have evolved into elegant charcuteries and caterers. They will have very nice selections.

Epicerie or Alimentation: These are small grocery stores where you can pick up water or other drinks.

Fromagerie: Cheese shop. You have never really tasted cheese before! They will ask you at what time you plan to eat your cheese and will pick a different cheese if it is for lunch or dinner.

Pâtisserie: Pastry shop. Need I say more?

Dining establishments

What is the difference between a restaurant, bistro, café, brasserie, auberge, wine bar and "salon de the," not to mention hostellerie? By and large these are all place where you can get a sit-down meal. All of these can range between extremely elegant and extremely simple.

Café: These usually specialize in coffee and other drinks. Many will offer you meals. Be prepared to pay more if you sit at a table and also be prepared to "renouveler" (renew) your drinks every hour. Remember, the cost of your drink is basically your rent. In the past, there were some cafes where you could bring your own meal and just buy a drink. I do not know if this is still widely available. The "French Affair" (in Sarasota) in Gulfgate is typical of a charcuterie, which has evolved into a café serving a limited selection of nice meals.

Bistro: Theoretically, a bistro sells food that has a wine, and more specifically, Beaujolais, basis.

Brasserie: These are theoretically from Alsace and sell food with a beer basis. Although J Ryan's (in Sarasota) says that it is a bistro, its food is typical of a brasserie.

Auberge: Auberge means "inn." These are usually named after their décor rather than the kind of food they sell.

Wine bar: Although their name is English, wine bars have an Italian origin. They were set up to offer a limited variety of food to eat while tasting wine, which was also offered for sale by the bottle.

Salon de the: These are the only easy option available for meals during the afternoon. They will offer light meals with a wide variety of teas. "C'est la vie" (in Sarasota) is a typical boulangerie (bakery) pâtisserie combination which has evolved into a salon de the which serves lunch but still has baked goods available for sale.

Hostellerie: Stagecoaches would get fresh horses in a hostellerie while the passengers would have a meal. Once again, these are usually named after their décor.

Fast food

Fast food in France is a very different experience from here in the U.S. “Un sandweetch” will be a baguette sliced lengthwise with a piece of meat, typically ham, between. Do not expect lettuce or tomato.

McDonalds “MeekDonulds” and Pizza Hut “Pisa Ut” are far superior to anything that you would encounter here, due to the French demand of high quality meat and produce control. I have had excellent salads in McDonalds where you can always find a clean bathroom in an emergency. The Pizza Hut in Neuilly, west of l’Arch de Triomphe is extremely satisfying. We sat with a beautiful garden view and ate a very acceptable three-course meal when our children were youngsters.

Jules Verne

A terrific culinary extravagance that I suggest would be a meal at Jules Verne, half way up the Eiffel Tower. Try and call from the States before you leave. The earlier the reservation, the better the table. Eating is part of the experience. View the high cost as rent for watching an unbelievable show, which I found to be dramatically better than merely standing on the viewing platform. Over the course of two or three hours while you eat, the weather will change. The hustle and bustle is fascinating. If you do not eat there, do go “up” the Eiffel Tower.

Choosing a restaurant

How to find a restaurant? The word “Bio” is used as short hand for “biologique” which is used to mean organic. Frankly, I am amazed that there seems to be little organic American wine, something that is easily found in France. Furthermore, unlike an organic restaurant in the States (except for Chez Panisse, in Berkeley), a bio restaurant in France will actually list the farms from which it buys food! Both parties want and expect third parties to check up on them. I have found the bio sign in the window to be a big help.

So, how are you going to find that great little restaurant? I am assuming that you have read your guidebook and asked others for suggestions. By the way, the word “restaurant” was invented as the name of establishments in Paris where a “healthful” soup was sold. Eating in France is very different from the US. The owners of every restaurant, no how small or how poor the neighborhood, are going to prepare each meal with great pride. Even the mass produced American chains in France will offer far superior food to the “plastic” commonly served at home. Every restaurant will proudly display what they will be offering. Several things will rapidly become apparent. You will be able to tell what is in season. For instance, in June in Italy, arugala is in season, and is proudly displayed on every menu. June is when Italians plan to eat arugala. Americans expect lettuce and tomato on their burgers everyday of the year. Well, there are frequently periods when neither have any taste, but are present anyway. For that matter, American strawberries are big, red and beautiful. It has been so long since they had any taste that Americans have largely forgotten what they taste like. In Europe, when in season, strawberries will be smaller but absolutely packed with taste. On the other hand, the French can overdo it as well. The Dordogne River valley is the home of fois gras, which will be available on essentially every menu in every restaurant. When I inquired about this monotony, I was told that the restaurateurs know their clientele: Parisians! Who want fois gras at every possible opportunity despite or because of its rich, high cholesterol taste. They fully expect to feast on only Vittel and bread when they return to Paris.

Next, what kind of food do you want? Have you had French food every meal? Vietnam was a colony of France, so you will find interesting Oriental cooking even in small towns. Pho is a Vietnamese type of soup that I absolutely love. If you happen upon a restaurant where they serve the Pho with basil, sprouts and other items on a separate plate, you have come upon a real find. Even though Pho is usually listed on the menu as being meat based, it has always been prepared for me with a chicken base, which I strongly suggest as it will be gentler on your already stressed stomach. Your stomach is just not used to food this good! North Africa was also a colony resulting in the curious passion of the French for couscous. Creperies, although originally from Brittany, are found everywhere. Start with a savory, salt based buckwheat crepe and then have a sugar-based crepe for dessert. This should tide over even the heartiest appetite. Particularly in small restaurants, the first diners will be seated in the window, so you will be able to check out the food visually yourself. There are often streets that only contain restaurants. By and large this is a good recommendation in and of itself, as with this much choice, customers are unlikely to return after a mediocre meal.

Restaurant Streets

I do not think that restaurant streets were deliberately set up as such. Let us talk about what a restaurant street is. Actually, I am not certain there is a name for these narrow streets, typically just a block or so long which are one restaurant after another. Occasionally, they will stretch a little onto the adjacent streets. There will often be a café to sit in while you wait for the restaurants to open. There might also be a small nightclub for after your meal. Pretty much all the other establishments will be restaurants. You can expect a wide choice with usually no repeats. There are several benefits I can think of. You can read all the menus before you make your choice, or you can head for one restaurant and happen upon the others. Most restaurants close at least one night each week, so there will be other choices. I think that this type of competition forces everyone to maintain a higher standard.

Two restaurant streets to look for are: rue Tours, goes just one block from rue Buci to Blvd St. Germain and has a great Vietnamese Pho Soup Restaurant. Rue Princesse, which is across Blvd St. Germain from les Deux Magots and east a bit, has a great selection of restaurants. We eat at le Bistro d'Henri (1 rue des Princesse 75006 Paris 01.46.33.51.12). He is famous for chicken cooked in cream sauce and I have since learned from a vegetarian, a seven-hour lamb! The tiny kitchen opens directly onto the dining room. The service is French service at its most French. If you have the chance, go.

Okay, now it is time for us to put it all together. You are going to read menus as you walk around. You will think about what type of food you want. You will look for the word bio and check for fresh ingredients. You will observe the people dining in the window. Quickly, it should become apparent to you where you want to eat. During one stay, I drove over an hour to check out a restaurant that I had read about. I returned to the restaurant on a future trip with my daughter. It was well worth the effort.

Transportation

At first glance, traveling through Paris can be quite intimidating; just getting into town from the airport can be quite an experience in itself. You will either land at Charles de Gaulle or Orly depending on which airline you arrive on. AirFrance provides buses from both airports that go into central stations. There are also taxis that have their own strange rules. In the past, one taxi could not possibly take four people with four suitcases so families would have to take at least two taxis. Now, there are minivans available for a family. There is a high- speed train

from de Gaulle into the Gare du Nord, one of the Paris train stations from which you can connect directly to the metro. When you leave, be sure to allow at least three hours before your flight leaves. The lines move at glacial speed. As you ride into town, look at the buildings and stores, this will help to orient you to Paris.

Driving in Paris is almost a contact sport. You have to know the rules. The only one that seems to count is “priority to the right.” That means you have to look to your right because you are on the driver’s left and he does not care what you are doing. If he runs you over it is your fault. That goes for pedestrians as well. At L’Etoile (the star), which we know as L’Arch de Triomphe, there are at least twelve roads merging without a traffic light into what seems to be total chaos.

“**Le Metro**” goes underground and can speed you on your way if you are going in the direction that the train is going. Theoretically, there is no location in Paris that is more than 500 meters from the nearest metro stop. Parisian addresses will almost always include the nearest metro stop. No matter how far you are going, you pay the same fee to ride on the metro. A discount is offered if you buy “un carnet de billet” (un car-nay de be-yeah). There is a map of the metro in your Plan de Paris. The different trains are marked based on their final destination. These are typically “porte de ...” (gate of ...), from the old days when there were gates in the walls that surrounded the city. This wall has now been replaced by a road called “le peripherique,” which is usually below ground level and often goes below city parks in an effort to keep the noise down. When you get to your final destination on the metro there will be “un plan du quartier,” a map of the neighborhood. Check to see which side of the street you want to get out on as it might be quite easy to cross underground, but extremely difficult to cross the streets above ground. Some of the larger stops have corridors that seem to go on forever.

During a brief stay in a city as loaded with options as Paris I would encourage you to limit time spent in transportation. Try to organize events in a small area. This way you can get the lue for your time. You are going to be walking much more than you do at home so be prepared. Below I have included a list of places that I have visited on longer stays, and enjoyed tremendously, but would discourage you from visiting just because of a shortage of time: Sacre Coeur is too far away. Enjoy it from the distance. Monmarte and Pigalle are strictly for tourists and are of limited interest. Les Invalides is only of interest to see Napoleon’s tomb. Pere LaChaise Cemetery is too difficult to reach. The masterpieces of the Jeu de Paume have been moved to the d’Orsay.

Finally, whenever you visit a new city you should plan on walking more than you ever do at home. Get in shape!

Clothing for travel

We had a great time visiting France in January 2005. It was cold. Indeed, it was very cold, as low as 10 degrees. We did fine because we had appropriate clothes. If you are in Sarasota, I strongly encourage you to buy quality clothes at a place like Environeers (in the Crossings Shopping Center on Fruitville Road just west of I-75). While you might pay a little more, you will stay warmer, be dryer and more comfortable. I have also found that their clothing is much more durable and needs to be cleaned less, so on the whole it is cheaper. I bought walking boots from them seven years ago, which I still wear.

Parisians

Americans often find the French to be difficult. The French are very specific about language; after all, l'Academie Francaise controls all words used in French. They are often hesitant to try to speak English. If you make an effort, they will probably try to meet you half way. Yes, Parisians are often accused of being difficult. So are New Yorkers and people from every other large city. There are always going to be *some* difficult people. We will discuss some of the reasons for Parisians' behavior and what we, as visitors, can do to make the encounters as pleasant as possible for everyone. First we will talk about the effect of geography and history on Paris before discussing other factors that complicate the Parisians' character.

Geography and History's effect on Parisians

When you leave Paris on the Euro Star to the Chunnel, looking out of the window you will see miles and miles of farmland. This is still probably the most productive farmland in Europe and the source of wealth that the kings in Paris used to build France. Unlike New York, which is merely a large city, Paris is the heart around which France grew. This history fans the Parisian's ego.

The Louvre was built inside the walls of Paris. Prevailing winds blow from the west to the east so wealthy people would live on the west side of a city in order to breathe cleaner air. To the west of the Louvre, and outside the walls of Paris, the Tuilleries was built as an extension of the castle. When this portion of the castle burned during a revolution it was converted into the gardens that you should be sure to enjoy today. So, why did Louis XIV build Versailles? To get away from the stench of Paris. People rarely bathed. There was no way to get rid of waste, particularly human waste. Coincidentally, this problem would recur in Versailles where the staircases were commonly used as toilets. At the start of the French Revolution, the people marched on Versailles to bring the King back to Paris.

Popular revolts by the Parisians were a recurring theme in French history. This led to one of the key architectural elements of Paris that we all enjoy today, the broad boulevards. Baron Haussmann, the prefect of Paris during the mid nineteenth century devised the idea of these grand roads. First, slums were ruthlessly destroyed, forcing the citizens elsewhere. Second, sewers were built, to get rid of the waste. Third, the broad roads also allowed for the rapid deployment of the military, particularly the cavalry and canons. Haussmann's detractors said that the beauty of these large roads was an unintended benefit of his plans.

To complicate matters, nobody admits to being from Paris. They may have been born in Paris for generations, but they are really from one of the provinces where they have a weekend home and their cousins still live. To compound this problem, there is no regional Parisian cuisine, so all of the restaurants specialize in food from somewhere else.

France is a republic. The United States is a federation. To Americans this seems to be a small difference, to the French it is enormous. All political decisions are made in Paris. Although city government is local, there is no equivalent to our states. The country is divided into departments that are administered by bureaucrats, called prefects, who are not only not from the region, they are rotated on a regular basis with the theory that they cannot develop a local power base to contest the central authority in Paris. Perhaps Baron Haussmann had shown too much authority in his native Paris.

Everything in France is determined by “concours” which is translated into English as “examination” but literally means “contest.” Often these will only be given in Paris. Even if the test is given in the provinces, the results may only be posted in Paris. My friend, Daniel, took an exam to become a university professor of English. He had to call one of his cousins in Paris and ask him to go down to the Sorbonne where the results were posted to find out if he had passed. Incidentally, if you place below fourth in your class in medical school you will not be able to get a residency in Ophthalmology, my specialty.

Paris is the most visited city in Europe. Most Parisians are aware that tourism generates much of their income and make every effort to cordial. Others feel that Paris is a working city and that tourists are in the way.

Security

Do not bring anything with you that you cannot live without. Leave your good jewelry at home. I encourage you to wear a money belt around your waist. I find this more secure and more comfortable than something around your neck. Only carry enough money for one day’s purchases. The rest should be in your money belt, not on the bus or in the hotel room unless it is in a safe. Periodically, the gypsies will invade Paris. This is usually announced everywhere (another good reason to read the *Herald-Tribune* or the weekly guide). You will usually be approached by children who will hold something in your face, while another child picks your pocket. Yell at them! Cover your pockets. If you are in an area of risk, wear your backpack on your chest. Do not carry a fanny pack. This is much too inviting a target.

Packing Tips:

I have found packing clothes in two-gallon baggies a big help. You can squeeze out the air and save space. It will also keep shirts neater. If you are just spending one night somewhere, you can pack everything together. It will keep things dry.

Souvenirs

Take pictures of your friends and interesting people and things. Do not take pictures of major sights. Buy a postcard, which will probably be cheaper and will be a better picture. I think that tea towels are great. They do not take up much space in your suitcase and when you dry dishes with them next year (don’t you all dry the dishes??), they will remind you of your trip. Buy a calendar for next year. I enjoy looking at the pictures. I also enjoy the little statues that are sold on the street. Get an Eiffel Tower. If you have the chance to get a group photo, go for it! The vendor taking the photo will give you a chance to see it before you have to pay for it. Many years ago, we went on one of the bateaux mouch, with Jennie and John, that goes up and down the Seine River. We got a great picture from it which I still have in my office. I would encourage you to go on one of the bateaux mouch. Sure, it is a tourist thing to do. But you get to sit down for a while on a fun boat. The view is great, particularly at night when everything is lit up.

Bring a notebook or journal that will easily fit into your backpack. Bring scotch tape and a pen. Save everything. Keep subway passes or museum passes. Tape in your favorite postcards. This will be fun to look at in the years to come. I still have mine from the year I lived in France over forty years ago. Write down your impressions. Approach with an open mind. If something is better at home, great! Do not tell the Europeans. If something is better in France, great! Write down why you like it in your journal. This may come in handy for the future.

Waiters

Americans seem to have the most problems with waiters in cafes in Paris. It has been said that French waiters are surly even to their own cats so it should be no surprise that they would be surly to you and me. Let's take a moment to examine why. First, their title is "garçon" which does not mean "waiter", it means "boy." They work long hours, often fourteen hours and six days a week. They are trusted by no one. The owner watches them from behind the bar and his wife watches them from the cash register. They get only small change as a tip and are responsible if someone leaves without paying. On the other hand, I can remember waiters going out of their way to make my experience special on many occasions.

Taxi drivers are another group that is famous for tormenting Americans. Most of them are not even French. They also work long hours driving in Paris where driving is a nightmare.

So what can we do to counter all these conflicting influences on the average Parisian? In France, politeness is much more important than in the states. When entering a store everyone is greeted with either "Bonjour" or "Monsieur-dames" pronounced as one word "sur-dam." The repeated use of "merci" is appreciated. Ask "Parlez-vous anglais?" In a tourist area they probably will speak English. When in doubt, smile.

Tips about French money

We have already discussed the value of a money belt in detail. Put everything of value in your money belt and wear it around your waist.

Changing money in general is not convenient. This can be done either at a bank or a shop, which specializes in changing money. These shops are located in tourist areas and have longer hours. It is difficult to tell where you will get the best rate. Sometimes there is a fee in addition to the exchange rate. The fee tends to be higher when you change less money. They will not change money without a passport. Traveler's checks offer some added security and tend to be exchanged at a slightly higher rate. Be sure to use American Express only! I have seen others rejected or paid at a lower rate.

Credit cards are widely accepted in Europe. The American Express card was the first one available and is still widely accepted. The VISA card replaced a French card called Carte Bleu and has near universal acceptance. Leave your MasterCard and Discover Card at home. They do not have a wide acceptance. It may pay to Discover, but the Europeans have not gotten the news.

When you use a credit card you do not need to change money. In the past, you received a better rate. This seems to be less of an advantage now as banks are always on the lookout for a new way to raise fees.

ATMs are another alternative. These are now widely available 24 hours per day, even in the smallest villages. The machines offer a choice of languages so you can conduct your business in English. Be sure to learn your pin in terms of numbers, as many of the machines do not have letters printed over the keys.

Weather

Paris is cool (cold for Sarasota) and rainy in the early spring. Watch the weather in the newspaper. Dress in layers. Shift unnecessary clothing into your backpack. Once when we

were in Paris it just did not stop raining. So, we bought a Hermes umbrella, which we then used here for years. Although I like blue jeans, I find khakis to be more practical. They also give the group a better appearance. Everywhere in general and Paris specifically, appearance counts. If you look nice, it is only natural that people will be nice to you.

Walks and museum visits

They have now set up multiple area where there are banks of machines that sell tickets, either with cash or credit card. Nevertheless, I still suggest that you buy a museum pass either in the states before you leave or in the metro. Your time in Europe is valuable, do not waste time waiting in unnecessary lines,. There is a direct entrance into the Louvre from the metro. If you take the train from the Etoile (Arc de Triumph) direction, get in the last car. At the Musee Louvre stop, get off and turn right. This is the back entrance. There are also interesting shops as well as a convenient downtown location for Hertz. Be sure to pick up a map of the Louvre. When you get to the main hall turn to the right towards the Seine and follow the signs with the picture of the Mona Lisa.

These are my favorites: First, on the entry level, are the excavated foundations of the original Louvre. Take a little time to see them. You must see the Winged Victory of Samathrace and the Mona Lisa. The Mona Lisa is surprisingly small. It is behind thick glass. A warning not to take photos will be made in every language. The lights will come on. Instantly some tourist will start taking pictures and the lights will go off. Do not be one of these cultural boors.

Each time I visit the Mona Lisa at the Louvre I am amazed by her. She deserves to be the most famous painting in the world! Each year I expect to hear that she has been put away in security for 50 or 100 years. By all means, take advantage of the opportunity to visit her! Arrive at the Louvre early. For the first hour the Louvre is open, there is no line to see her. It is a more pleasant experience with fewer people.

Now head back up the very long corridor. At the east end you will see the Cimabues and then head north to see the Venus de Milo who is in this general area. I usually continue east, then north and finally west. With luck, you will be able to visit Marie de Medici whose life was, how should I say it... captured by Rubens. Unfortunately, she is in seclusion on Mondays. Be sure to rest along the way. This is a long walk. The ancient near eastern and Egyptian art is also worth seeing, but now is somewhat out of the way. The shops on the entrance level have many interesting souvenirs.

Now I have put some things together that will make for a fun day after your early visit to the Louvre. Leave the Louvre towards the north, away from the Seine. Head west along the rue to Rivoli, an arcade street filled with tourist traps.

Have you ever seen "The Bourne Identity?" There are a lot of scenes shot in Paris. The hero goes into the Hotel Regence which is just north of the secret escalator that I told you about across the Rue de Rivoli. I have heard that it is a very nice hotel. The lobby is beautiful and the concierge very helpful. It is a perfect location but I cannot answer for cost.

Continue on the rue de Rivoli past all of the souvenir stores. After about ten minutes, you will come to **Angelina's**, home of, conservatively, the world's best hot chocolate. It is so dense that your spoon will almost stand up. Did I forget to mention that they have the world's best whipped cream (chantilly)? The traditional meal at Angelina's consists of hot chocolate and

Mont Blanc, which is an incredible pastry. Try to get one of the tables by the window and watch the world go by.

Once suitably restored, resume your walk west, away from the Louvre, until you reach the American Embassy on the Place de la Concorde and head north one long block until you reach the rue St Honore which becomes the rue du Fauborg St Honore once you reach the 8e. Along the way you will pass incredible stores. The Hermes store is as big as a department store. Double back to the rue Royale and head towards la Madeleine. Frankly, until recently, I did not think I had met anyone who has actually entered this church that most resembles a train station.

We heard a fantastic candlelit concert there! At the far end of the church there are two grocery stores staring at each other. Around to the right towards the east is Fauchon. Around the left towards the west is Hediard. Both of these grocery stores have branches not only around Paris, but around France as well. These are great places to get carry out. The Fauchon, for instance, at the head of the rue Cler is open late on Sunday, great for those returning from a weekend in the country. In both of these stores, and in the elegant traiteurs elsewhere, you order your food from a clerk who will weigh everything. You will be given a slip, which is totally incomprehensible but tells the cashier what and how much you bought. This dates back to the old days when the husband and his assistants served the customer, but the wife as cashier was totally in charge of the money. You pay the cashier who puts more incomprehensible marks on your slip. You then exchange your slip with the clerk for your goodies.

Now the answer to your problem: Hediard is undoubtedly a most beautiful grocery store. Upstairs there is a lovely restaurant perfect for serious lunch on a self-indulgent day. You need to call ahead to book a table. They have a special menu just for the different kinds of espresso! Once you have finished lunch, go downstairs for a consult with Maurice, a charming man from Cameroon who actually roasts the coffee in the store himself. Have you ever wondered why the coffee cups are so small in France? No, it is not because they are cheap. The French believe that water actually ruins coffee. I have found that using less water when I make espresso actually enhances the taste.

If you can tear yourself away from Hediard, head back east past Fauchon and on towards the Opera. Along the way is more great shopping. At this point you must be exhausted so head south, back towards the Seine and have a rest at the Tuilleries gardens. Once rested, head east, upstream along the right bank of the Seine. Alternatively, you can cross the Seine and explore the "bookinistes" who sell used books, magazines, postcards and posters. My favorite bridge is Pont des Arts, which is only a pedestrian bridge. I can guarantee you that something interesting is happening.

On the right bank, just parallel with the Pont Neuf at the west end of l'Isle de la Cite, is Samartine, a department store so huge, it has at least four different buildings! The one you want is closest to the bridge. Ride the escalators up as far as you can go. It is a beautiful old store reminiscent of Wanameker's in downtown Philadelphia (It is now Hecht's or something else). Continue up the stairs until you reach the roof. Here is one of the bargains of Paris. For the price of a drink, you can get a fabulous view of the entire city.

Finally, cross the Pont Neuf onto l'Isle de la Cite and turn immediately into the hidden square. Be careful crossing the street here. This is a surprising area of peace and calm, just steps

away from Notre Dame. There is another square to the east that is a flower market during the week and a bird market on Sunday.

Free time suggestions

Museums charge admission fees. You have to wait in line to buy your ticket. At the Louvre you actually have to wait in two lines! The first line is to get into the building and the second is to buy your ticket. The city of Paris sells one, three and five day passes that actually cost less than two admissions and most importantly, save all of that waiting. These passes are available in most metro stations.

There are several interesting walks for your “free day.” We will start with Notre Dame. You must visit Notre Dame. It will be crowded, noisy and smoky. If you are lucky, there will be a concert during your visit. Go when it is sunny so that you can enjoy the stained glass windows the most. They are particularly beautiful when clouds float by and the light changes. Spend time looking at the sculpture and the portals. After your visit, walk towards to the Seine and then around the building. Look at the flying buttresses and exterior sculpture. Walk through the little children’s park to l’Isle St. Louis, which is the small residential island upstream from l’Isle de la cite where Notre Dame is located. Just as you cross the small bridge on your right is a small tearoom, on your left is a window; both are called Berthillon. Go often. They sell the best sorbets on earth. Be adventuresome. Go for it. Down the central road of the island, on the right side, is the restaurant where they have the gaulois meal. I have eaten there and had a great time.

Also near Notre Dame is la Ste. Chapelle, a relatively small chapel which seems to be made entirely of beautiful stained glass. The Palais de Justice was built around this church. There may be long lines later in the day. Do not go if it is raining or overcast as much of the effect will be lost.

Versailles

The chateau has been renovated. The Hall of Mirrors is beautiful and historically important. It is where the treaty that ended World War I was signed. Versailles is close to Paris, about the same distance Ardmore is from Philadelphia. I think you have to take the RER, which is the long distance subway out there. I love the gardens there. It is certainly worth visiting. During the summer they run the fountains and lights on Sundays. There is an amphitheater made of waterfalls and hanging shells. There are pools where Louis XIV would keep full sized boats. Walking in and enjoying gardens are typical French activities that are very enjoyable.

Chartres

Chartres is about an hour from downtown Paris. Both Versailles and Chartres are in the same direction, west, so it is a very doable day if you rent a car from Hertz. This would be a very pleasant day. I do not like the people of Chartres. I find them cold. Malcolm Miller, however, is an English man who has devoted his life to being the guide to the Cathedral, which I still feel is the most beautiful building in the world. Malcolm gives tours at noon and 3pm, pretty much every day. He has stayed at our home for numerous enjoyable visits. Please give him my best regards. With advance planning he will give private tours, but I have found that he still always does something fun with big groups as well.

Strolling

The best show in France is the evening stroll. You look at the people and they look at you. It is free for everyone. Yes, they are talking about you, but that is only fair as you are talking about them. The most famous place for this activity is the Champs Elysees. Keep alert. I do think it is worth walking through one of the tunnels to the base of l'Arch de Triumphe. Within two blocks of the Champs Elysees are the most beautiful shops in the world. Most of these are on the roads toward the Seine.

Another place famous for evening strolls is the Left Bank. Everyone wants to go to the Latin Quarter, the area around the Boulevard St. Michel in the 5e. I find it now to be dirty and filled with tourists. The restaurants all seem to be Greek dives, best to be avoided. I visit the Latin Quarter primarily to visit the bookstores. You should spend a couple of minutes in Shakespeare & Company, an English Language bookstore on the quay directly across the Seine from Notre Dame. Along the walls of the quay are the "boquinistes," used booksellers. You probably can get a nice pastel of your favorite view, another great souvenir with a lot of memory value.

Right Bank to the Left Bank

A new walk from the right bank to the left bank. The walks that I describe usually go from the right bank to the left bank. The big museums are on the right bank (or on the Seine in the case of the d'Orsay). Much of the really big shopping is also on the right bank. All of this is best done in the morning before the hordes of tourists arrive. There are cafes everywhere, but I tend to head back to left bank in the afternoon to relax and watch the world go by in a left bank café which is usually followed by dinner on the left bank as well. Depending on our goals for the trip, we have tended to stay on the left bank in a small hotel on our way in and a larger one on the right bank or at the airport on our way out. Now we routinely rent an apartment.

Let us say that you have finished shopping on the rue Faubourg St. Honore or finished a light lunch at Angelina's on the Rue de Rivoli or at la Table D'Hediard on Place de la Madeleine and you want to head back to the left bank. Head south towards the Seine until you encounter either the Place de la Concorde (be very careful of the traffic) or the Tuilleries gardens. Head into the gardens and turn east towards the main part of the Louvre.

If you enter the gardens from the Place de la Concorde on either side of the park are two relatively small buildings. If you enter from the rue de Rivoli, they are on your right, but you turn left anyway. The building on the corner of the Place and the rue de Rivoli is the Jeu de Paume. Jeu means game. Jeu de Paume was a mix between what is today badminton and tennis. Until the opening of the d'Orsay, this was where all the fabulous Impressionist art was on display. The other small building was l'Orangerie, where orange trees were grown to provide the King with citrus in the winter. Clemenceau was the head of France during the 1920s. he was a great friend of Monet whom he convinced to create three giant paintings as a gift to France to be placed in l'Orangerie. The paintings were held up because Money became blind from cataracts and could not finish them. I am not sure if you can still see the water lilies. These are his famous Waterlily Paintings! He did indeed have his right cataract out.

Carry on into the Tuilleries heading towards the Louvre. One of the walls of Paris stood about where the Louvre ends now. While one of the famous tours of Paris is of the sewers, this was not always the case; pollution was a major problem. There were no facilities for disposing of waste so people would merely throw it out the window. You could smell a city long before you

could see it. One day, Marie de Medici looked out of a window, in the Louvre, and saw the tuilleries. These were tile works where the roofing tiles were made. She then confiscated the tile works and built an extension of the Louvre outside of the walls. After all, who would dare attack the French King? The Parisians! This part of the castle actually ended with the two buildings we just discussed, the Jeu de Paume and l'Orangerie. During one of the revolts by the Parisians, they burned down the Tuileries and we benefit from the lovely gardens.

Hausmann, a native of Paris, was also the Prefect of Paris. He was tired of the revolts, which typically involved a lot of barricades on the many small streets. He knocked down buildings and built the grand boulevards so that the cavalry could respond quickly and the artillery could be used if necessary to get rid of those barricades. He also designed the facades of the buildings with commerce under a broad arcade on the ground floor and residences on the upper floors. Unlike in the States where the ground level floor is called the first floor, the French call this level "rez de chausse" or level on the street and then the floor above is the first floor or "premiere etage" or sometimes just "a l'etage." This is particularly true in stores, which have a mezzanine. While everything was torn up, he added the sewer system. Place de la Concorde – I find the name dripping with irony – was a huge staging area to rally the troops who were garrisoned on the Left Bank around the Champ de Mars, which means not only the "Field of Mars" but also the "marching grounds."

The French are famous for disliking certain people for generations. Hausmann is still much disliked by many Parisians. They object to his style of urban renewal by tearing down. He did create beautiful vistas and facilitated traffic flow. There are several interesting myths about him. First, he hated to go outdoors, so he designed everything from his offices. Evidently, he hated the left bank so the only urban renewal there was the Blvd St. Germain, which we will visit shortly at the end of our walk. Baron, his title, is a rarely used and certainly a relatively new title. His detractors would suggest that this was a deliberate insult, but he was not even aware of it. Finally, Prefects are no longer allowed to work in the area where they are from. In addition, they are rotated fairly frequently so that they cannot develop local allies. I guess Hausmann did his job too well.

We now return to our walk through the Tuileries Gardens. I must say that I have enjoyed the gardens in the cold of winter as well as the heat of summer. Elsewhere, I have described al fresco dining in the Luxembourg Gardens with goodies that we picked up at a traiteurs or other store. For whatever reason, it does not seem that many people eat here, but, you could pick something up at Hediard or Fauchon and bring it with you. There is also a small café in the middle of the gardens. Even if they are not eating, I have seen more than one person napping! Pull up a chair and watch the children (and adults) sail the boats on the pond. This is a nice place to relax.

Once you have reached the end of the Louvre closest to the Seine turn right towards the river and cross the busy road, called Quai des Tuileries or Quai du Louvre depending on where you are. Once again, be careful, cross at and with the light. Here you have a choice. You can immediately cross the river on the Pont du Carrousel, cross the other Quai and go up rue des Saints-Pere and then the rue Jacob. I prefer to continue to the pedestrian bridge, Pont des Arts, which I have written about elsewhere. Once across, there may be some bookinistes along the river or cross the Quai, pass la Monnaie, the Mint, and turn right on rue Guenegard, a strange little street, until you reach rue Mazarine, where you turn left. On your left soon will be a little courtyard with an interesting Chinese Tea Room and also a children's book

publisher. Soon, you will come to a relatively large intersection called “Carrefour (which does mean intersection and is the name of the biggest French hyper-marche-read Wal-Mart superstore) Buci.” Carrefour Buci is the start of the rue Buci market-street. Most importantly, there is a café just across from you that is the home of the coolest dog that I have ever seen. This little “Toto dog” is the most photographed dog on earth! In every direction there are fascinating shops. Turn right on rue Buci and in a few steps you will come to a small road, rue Tours, which is a restaurant street that I discussed elsewhere. Wander around. This is the left bank at its best. Unfortunately, when we were there, we noticed that Hotel Artus, which I have raved about elsewhere is closed – I suspect permanently.

When you have wandered around enough head west, against the traffic, up Blvd St. Germain until you get to the café Deux Magots. The name is slang, which translated roughly as “two cigarette butts.” In nice weather we sit outside, otherwise we sit as close to the window as possible. Enjoy your drink. Have a serious rest. Look at your map and figure out where you are going to go. I find the church across the square primarily of interest because there are still buildings built right up against it. Remember, that until relatively recently, Notre Dame was surrounded by buildings!

Now, at the bottom of the small square are several fascinating little streets to explore with lovely shopping. My favorite clothing store – **Blank Bleu** – is two blocks down. One block down and one block over are le Petit Zinc, an old-line bistro, and l’Entrecote, which basically only sell steak with French fries. Down the street from here is a really chic, fascinating hotel called Hotel Bel Ami. www.hotel-bel-ami.com. If you turn around and head back north up Rue Jacob, you will see some incredible interior designer shops and more importantly, the cloth shops, etc. that supply them.

Pere Lachaise

Pere Lachaise is the most famous graveyard in Paris, if not the world. For the best atmosphere it is best visited on a lugubrious day. There is an eponymous metro stop. If the route is complicated (involving more than one subway change or you have to go west to go east) take a taxi! As you come out of the subway there is a café on your right and the entrance on your left. This is a typical working class neighborhood. You will start off at the bottom of the hill, but it also means that you will end up walking down hill.

By the entrance there is usually a young lady selling maps for 2 euros. Buy one. Take a moment and glance through the list of “permanent residents.” If you do not recognize any old friends, I am going to give you four. Actually three, as Eloise and Abelard, supposedly the two most famous lovers of history, are buried in the same crypt and they are probably your first stop. Start off to your right more or less parallel to the road. The paths twist and turn a lot. Unfortunately, they are not buried directly on the path, but are a few meters off to your right in a lovely little Gothic structure. The story goes that the owners of Pere Lachaise were having difficulty selling plots so they reburied these two here to give the place more class. Up the hill further and again off the path and to the right is Jim Morrison’s grave. You will recognize it by the strange mixture of flowers and full cigarette packs. Your third obligatory visit is to Oscar Wilde’s tomb, which is really something. He is quite some distance from Jim’s place, up the hill and to the left. You will need to back track quite a bit. Look around at the other permanent residents. We saw Colette and were reminded of her several times during our trip. You will surely recognize Oscar’s tomb, as there is a sort of Egyptian flying nude male carved out of pale stone. Look closely at the strange red marks on the tomb. They are lipstick kisses!

Now turn again towards your right. The large building at the top of the hill is the crematorium. Beyond it is an interesting view of Paris. When the leaves are on the trees you may miss it, another advantage of visiting in winter. Head back down the hill, keeping more or less to your right until you return to where you entered. Across the street is the subway entrance and the taxi stand.

Michaels' The Best of 19th Century Art in a day

My favorite art walk starts at the **Musee d'Orsay**, continues to the **Rodin** and finishes at the **Musee Marmottan**. The Musee d'Orsay is on the left bank across from the Louvre in the 7e. It is a train station that has been converted into an art museum that specializes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century art. You enter on the ground floor where the trains picked up passengers. Walk quickly to the back of the station, past the eighteenth century art of somewhat limited interest to non-French and take the escalators to the upper level (about the fifth floor). Walk back towards the front of the museum. Here you will see the gems of the Impressionist movement. Enjoy the masterpieces. Take the elevators back to the ground floor. There is a superb librairie (bookstore) with excellent postcards, etc.

To get to the **Rodin Museum** turn left onto rue de Bellechasse (road of the beautiful hunt) and continue until you get to rue de Varenne and turn right. The museum is at number 77 on the left side. Here, in both the garden and the beautiful house are pieces of sculpture by Rodin, who, in my opinion, is the greatest sculptor of the last two hundred years. Once again, this is best enjoyed in clear weather.

The third and optional stop is at the **Musee Marmottan** that unfortunately, can only be reached by cab from the Rodin and will therefore be impractical for a group. It is located in the old home of a former curator of the Louvre who started a museum upon his retirement with his own private collection that is of little interest. In the basement, however, is a true gem. In order to pay inheritance taxes, Monet's son donated a large portion of his father's private collection. This museum is rarely crowded and all of the paintings are well displayed.

After you have enjoyed Monet's paintings, leave the museum and walk through the pretty little park back towards downtown. Turn left on rue de la Pomp and continue until Avenue Victor Hugo. This walk will pass Parisian shopping at its best.

The **Centre Georges Pompidou** is the third mega museum. This is a modern art museum. In front of it is a huge area where all kinds of open-air theater go on. Magicians, musicians and fire swallowers all hold forth. The building itself is a piece of modern art with all of the utilities exteriorized and in plain view. The escalator is in a glass tube designed to mimic the entrance to a beehive. The museum is on the top floors. On the highest floors there is a café, called George's with a terrific view of the city of Paris. To the south of the museum is the fountain by Nikki de St Phale. In nice weather is surrounded by old people gossiping and young children playing.

A word about shopping. Get *Susie's Paris Guide to Shopping*. It will tell you where the latest and greatest places to shop are. I have already mentioned the Avenue Victor Hugo and the streets south of the Champs Elysees. In the 8e is rue du Fauborg St Honore, which is also lined with famous stores. Les Grands Magasins (department stores) also are interesting including Galleries Lafayette, Samartine and Au Printemps.

Other General Information

Taxi Stands

Throughout Paris there are taxi stands which are indicated by fairly large signs that say "Tete de Taxi" which means "head of taxi" or start of the taxi line. The Paris bureaucrats are sincerely making an effort to reduce traffic. Rather than cruising to find a fare, which is allowed and as simple as standing on the curb and raising your arm, the taxis will line up at one of these taxi stands. I mention this here because the Pere Lachaise taxi stand is the only one that I know of that the drivers will simply park and leave their car. Yes, during lunch, they may park as well, but more and more that is the exception. Remember that the 20e is a residential neighborhood. Frequently, the cabbies will have gotten a fare that will bring them up to this area near their home. They will not be too thrilled to go back into all of the downtown traffic. Many, if not all, of the bigger hotels will have a doorman who will call you a taxi. He will tell the driver your destination, which can be quite helpful if you don't speak French and the taxi driver doesn't speak English. I would tip the doorman 1 or 2 euros. He will usually have a pretty good idea of how much and how long your ride should take. Money well spent. Once, the airline stewardess gave us a bottle of wine because the light in her kitchen kept waking the children. I gave that bottle to the doorman who immediately became my best friend. He kept my car parked right in front of the hotel, which was nice of him. Convenient and safe because some of the parking garages are somewhat scary, and much cheaper as I was not charged by the hotel a car park fee! Finally, if you are in a smaller hotel or you otherwise have to order a taxi, there is a standard fee, which is currently 10 euros.

Private taxis are another alternative. They are both fully licensed and insured, which is very important. If the police stop your illegal cab, you, the passenger, can be fined as well. If they are uninsured, you know that you will be out of luck in the event of an accident. However, we were fortunate to find a private driver, whom we hire for our visits. **Jean-Pierre 06.76.83.01.30.**

Disaster Planning

On a particular trip with my daughter, my passport was pick-pocketed. Elsewhere, I have laid out precautions, but obviously, I became lax. There are now money belts that fit under your arm like a holster. I am going to try that next time. The money belt I was wearing was uncomfortable because of the heat and inconvenient. Record your passport number. Make multiple photocopies of your passport and keep them in different places. Have a reserve fund that you have no plans on spending. This should be in the form of travelers' checks, with the numbers kept separately in several locations. For whatever, you cannot bring a PDA into an American Embassy so keep the numbers on old fashion paper. Seal all of this in an envelope addressed to you in case it gets lost. You never know, it just might reach you in the mail.

Traveling

If your group is small, renting a car is probably the least expensive way to travel. By and large, this is probably the most convenient. Of course, someone has to be willing to take on this responsibility. Just as there is a minimum age for renting cars, there is also a maximum age. It is usually possible to rent a car with a driver as well. Once again, this might actually be less expensive than other modes of transportation. It can be more convenient as well. Remember, you will have to carry that present you buy the first day for the rest of your trip. Or you can simply put it in the trunk of your car until it is time to leave. If the weather is bad, you can move on. I recommend Hertz. They seem to be everywhere. If the car has a problem, Hertz has a problem, not you. Typically, Hertz has a sale in March, especially if you are willing to prepay. Unlike plane or train reservations, this is totally refundable and flexible.

Train travel can also be an excellent option. Distances in Europe are often less than Americans expect. On more than one occasion we have taken a day trip. You can rest on the train and enjoy the scenery. The high-speed trains in Europe cannot only be much faster than driving, they do not force you to deal with traffic, and they go downtown to downtown, where you want to be! Another option is to drive to the region you want to visit with possible stops along the way and then drop off the car at the station and take a high-speed train back to your departure city. I have found that Rail Europe ([www. Raileurope.com](http://www.Raileurope.com)) is reliable and helpful.

Plane travel is the next option. I have found that this works well if you arrive in one airport and then use an “open jaw” ticket and then leave from another airport.

Bicycle, barge, walking and canoeing trips are all available. These, of course, would require specialized arrangements. On our travels we have bumped into bike tours on many occasions. This is a great way to work up an appetite and a thirst. Spending the day in this manner really reminds you that you are on vacation. It also gives you an opportunity to travel with other people if you want, or to be alone if you prefer.

So, before we can even start, you have a lot to think about. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. Even a fairly rigid schedule still leaves time for improvisation. One of my friends visited Paris with “the travel nazi” (named after the soup nazi). She had their trip so tightly scheduled that she included bathroom breaks!

The last area, and possibly the most important one to consider, is the dynamics of your group. Travel planning is by and large my responsibility in our family. Everyone gets along well and knows what to expect. My family demands a certain amount of down time. That works out great for me, as I use that time for bike riding. The closeness of a car can become torture if you are not getting along well. Separate hotel rooms afford a certain level of privacy not available if you rent a house. Other people find that the intimacy of a house enhances the atmosphere. Whatever your relationship with your travel companions, think about what will work out the best for you all. You may want to have independent adventures already in the schedule.

Check the calendar carefully. Different countries celebrate different holidays. You would not want to visit the States over Thanksgiving unprepared! In France, All Saints Day, November 1, is a holiday, which is treated in a manner similar to Thanksgiving here. People go home and traditionally clean the graves. When I was a Resident, I would take that week to visit because I knew that my friends in France would have some time off and would be happy to visit with me, whereas If I showed up in the middle of a work week they might not be as happy to see me. As everyone in Florida knows, just because you are on vacation, I still have to go to work! Thanksgiving and Christmas are often the only two days a year that many things in the States are closed. It would be a shame to plan on visiting something that is closed that day only. There are similar holidays everywhere.

In addition, holiday time can be a very difficult time to travel. For instance, the French have an amazing arcane way to determine their amount of vacation. Bastille Day, 14 July, and I believe 5 August, which I think is the feast of St. Anne, but cannot recall (interestingly, I have just looked in several guide books and none of them mention holidays!) are incredible crunch times. One time, years ago before the EU, I was traveling from France to Spain during crunch time with a friend. He bought a carton of cigarettes in a small shop. It was probably the biggest

sale this man had ever made. The shopkeeper asked us if we were going to Spain. When he learned where we were going he gave us very detailed instructions, which included driving through somebody's yard – they waved! After circling around a seven mile back up we wound up literally at the border and were waved right through. On the other hand, there is nothing like being in a small town on a holiday. There are often bands marching through the streets with people dancing.

Another thing to watch out for, but often more difficult to predict in advance, are major sporting events such as the World Cup of Soccer or one of the major bike races such as the Tour De France. Once we were in Italy when they were in the World Cup. The television shop owners literally put two large TVs right in the middle of the street where the whole town turned out. Needless to say, there were a lot of good things to eat and drink. The party really began once Italy won. When there is a major bike race, the roads for miles can be closed. I hope you do not have some place important to go. Relax and watch the race. This is another excuse for a holiday and celebration.

Saving for your vacation

There are several easy and fun ways to save for your big vacation. The best place to start is the French Canadian idea of the fou fou account. Any random money that comes in goes into this "account." Many people have told me that they never get any money in the mail. But think about it, there are often refunds or deposits that are no longer needed, not to mention coupons that you filled in "six to eight" weeks ago when you bought something for a rebate. You have already paid for the item. Tell everyone that rather than giving you a present, to please donate to your trip instead and when you are away on your vacation you will use that money for a meal or tour or present. I will often sit down right then and send a postcard to the giver sharing the experience. That is fun for both of you. You will be pleasantly surprised how quickly this money adds up.

The smoking account is a second idea. If you smoke, quit now. Just think about how much money is going up in smoke! TO tell you the truth, I have no idea how much a pack of cigarettes costs, but let us use \$3. Smoker or not, you can surely save \$3 each day. At the end of a month you will have \$90. At the end of a year you will have almost \$1,100! We are talking some real cash here. So at the end of two years if you save \$3 each day plus the fou fou account, you have the money you will need. The earlier you start, the more that you will have.

A great way to really cut costs is to go out of season. Here in Sarasota everything is most expensive in season and because of the crowd of people, the service is inevitably the slowest. A family friend showed me her plans to take a cruise on the Rhone River in France. I asked her why she planned to go in August, the height of the season when the weather can be very hot. She really had not thought about it. By changing her trip to May when she could experience the beautiful spring weather and by starting in Nice rather than ending there so that she could benefit from the warmer temperatures at the start of her stay, she actually saved enough to add four-day optional tours at both the beginning and the end of her trip. Thus, she got to go for a week longer, and the boat was half empty instead of fully packed! If that is not enough already, she also saved a few hundred dollars! So, timing and flexibility are critical.

Money

Buying your Euros: The Euro has reached an all time high. I expect it to continue to climb. The dollar has lost a quarter of its value since Christmas. To those of you reading this in the future, you might want to buy your Euros in thirds to average out the exchange rate but minimize the exchange costs. I always like to have a lot of things prepaid, to minimize the impact of our return home. There are several ways to buy Euros. The really big hitters can set up a bank account in Europe. Normal people like us can buy Euros at the airport, although that is an expensive way to do it. Some banks, particularly in big cities, offer this service. It is quite expensive here in Sarasota. Another idea is to buy Euro denominated American Express Travelers' Checks. These are the most easily accepted. Smaller establishments might be happy with Amex but balk at other brands. Most people will accept Amex or VISA credit cards. MasterCard, Discover, etc. will probably be worthless. You can always buy Euros from American Express on the internet. It is key to have some Euros when you arrive!

Reservations

September is the shoulder season so things in general should be less expensive and easier to get. I used to worry a lot about hotels in Paris. But, there are so many good ones that you can just go by what a friend advises who has been there recently. Unfortunately, as with everything, with time the hotels can change. I tend to look on the internet and then send a fax for a reservation. By all means, stay in the core of Paris so that you do not have to spend a lot of time on the Metro. When you get to Paris you need to buy three things. I have described them fully elsewhere but for the record they are a museum pass, a metro pass and "un plan de Paris." It fits easily in a sports coat pocket and you will see everyone, including natives looking in it for directions. It is available at every Kiosk. The museum pass is available in 1, 3, and 5-day versions. If you go to two museums in one day you will save money, but more importantly, it will save you time, as you will not have to wait in line to purchase the tickets.

Timing

Because of the terrorist concerns you need to schedule your life differently from the past. You need to get up early and get to the museums near the opening time. In just a couple of hours there will be very long lines waiting to have bags checked. I guess this is a good reason to pay a premium for a central hotel where you can go and take a nap after lunch.

Seasons and weather

France has five seasons, the fifth being called "la rentree" or the return. Americans always think that this means the return from the traditional French August vacation in the countryside, but it actually refers to the return to school. The French are very much a Confucianist society where how well you do on tests in school plays a huge role on where you will be later in life. Anyway, they tend to wear light fall clothing. There tends to be a lot of rain. Bring both a raincoat and a small umbrella.

My favorite guides are still the Cadogan guide and Patricia Well's book about food in Paris (the Food Lovers Guide to Paris). Buy the most recent edition of her book, even if it is out of date and read it before you go. It will really get the juices flowing. That reminds, me, the best source that I know of for up to the minute information about hotels and restaurants is a newsletter called La Belle France. It costs about \$85 for a year and all subscriptions always start in January. (Sounds very French, doesn't it?). Their phone number is 800-225-7825. They are located in Charlottesville, VA. They will send you the year to date, if you want. I have found it

very helpful in the past, but it is expensive. Ask them to throw in the last December issue, which always lists the best and worst.

Travel transportation

There are two different forms of transportation that you will need during your adventures, long distance and local.

Remember to always have a separate emergency fund that you can access instantly that will cover the cost of a taxi and get you out of the situation that you are in.

Avoid arriving in a new location for the first time late at night. If you must, have a prepaid, guaranteed reservation. Reconfirm this information prior to your departure. It is inevitable that when I attend the American Academy of Ophthalmology that my hotel reservations will be lost. One of my coworkers routinely will call to reconfirm at least three times and will not only get the name of the night manager, but will speak to him/her directly.

As you check in, get a card with the name, address and telephone number of your hotel in both English and the local language. If worse comes to worse you can always show the cab driver the card.

If you are staying in a large city and plan on using public transportation, identify the stops before leaving the area of your lodging. For instance, there is no location in Paris that is more than one kilometer or 1000 meters from a Metro stop. Make sure that you know how to get back to where you are staying. There might be two different stops near you, which are on different lines so learn them both.

Friends asked a bus conductor where they should get off. They actually got off of the bus directly below their window, but did not recognize their location at street level and so turned in the wrong direction and managed to get seriously lost.

Before leaving your hotel walk around the neighborhood. Not only will you learn the lay of the land, you will probably learn some interesting information. Once I was joining up with my daughter in Tours. I had two days in Paris by myself. During my orientation walk, I found a branch of Fauchon. Not only did I have a great meal, I got to watch Greece and Portugal play in the World Cup (Greece won).

During that same trip to Paris, I was to pick up a car from Hertz in the Louvre. During the famous I.M.Pei renovation with the pyramids, a large and lovely shopping mall was added. At my leisure, I took the Metro to the Louvre and found where the Hertz agency was. Separately, I strolled around the Louvre and back to my hotel so that I knew where the roads ran one way. Yes, I did enjoy my walk tremendously. When it was time to pick up the car, I knew exactly where to go and found my hotel effortlessly.

Travel Emergencies and Safety Precautions

Emergencies are going to happen whether you travel or stay at home. If you have a plan, they can be interesting events, if you do not have a plan they can be a disaster.

For the record, let me state the obvious – if at all possible, avoid going into “hot spots” or other dangerous areas. If you must go, there are other resources beyond the scope of this section that can help you.

The lost passport: My daughter did a summer term in Tours through the University of Pennsylvania. Rather than travel with her girlfriends, she asked me to join her and then travel around for a few days. We had a great time. We spent the last evening in Paris shopping. Obviously, I did not take enough care protecting my passport. At 4am I bolted out of bed with the certain realization that my passport was gone. I still checked everything and called all of the places where we had stayed. But to no avail!

Before we talk about the solution, let me do an advertisement for Tours. Strangely, for a city of its size, Tours does not have a university. This is very surprising since there are so many American University programs there. Sometime in the ‘50s or ‘60s the city fathers of Tours decided to aggressively attract American students. Tours is close to Paris, close to the Chateaux of the Loire Valley with a relatively neutral accent and benign politics and thus is an ideal location. If you have the chance, take advantage of it.

Now back to the theft of my passport, for clearly that is what happened. We went on to the airport where I made a formal declaration to the Police. At the time I was not aware of it but this is the critical first step. You must present to the American Embassy a form supplied by the local police. The airline employees were helpful and nice; however, they knew that if they took me to the States, they would have to bring me back as I did not have a passport. I spoke to a representative of the American consulate. He was obviously looking at a copy of my passport on his computer. Since 911, you must have a physical passport in order to enter the States.

Now please let me do another advertisement her, this time for Delta. They very kindly rescheduled both my ticket and my daughter’s without any additional charge. One of the employees offered to accompany us to the police station in the airport as well.

Fortunately, we were able to return to our hotel and get a room. As large as Paris is, frequently during the year every hotel room will be taken. We were scheduled to leave on a Saturday; and, of course the American Embassy is closed on both Saturday and Sunday. Although the process was relatively quick, it still took several hours and we could not get to the airport in time for our flight and thus had to leave on Tuesday. Once again, fortunately, Paris is just about the best place that I can think of to be forced to spend three extra days.

So, the first thing you need is the declaration from the local Police. Next, you need two passport photos. Most of the world evidently uses smaller photos than we do. Be sure to tell the photographer that they are for the States and need to be bigger – I think “2x2”. In any event, there will be an enterprising photographer within a few blocks of the consulate who will know the correct size.

Third, you need some other forms of identification. Please let me emphasize how important it is to keep your passport separate from your other documents unless it is in your money belt.

A money belt is a great invention that you can get at your local AAA office for a few dollars. They also offer something that goes around your neck that some women seem to prefer. Both

of these devices are to be worn inside of your clothing! Pickpockets are universal. The ultimate irony of the theft of my passport is that I usually go to such extremes to protect it.

Bring at least three copies of your passport: One that you carry in your daypack, one that is in your suitcase, and the third should be carried by one of your travel companions. It is also a good idea to leave a fourth with a friend back home who can fax it wherever. Similarly, keep the numbers of your traveler's checks separately. Although I do not own stock in American Express, I have found their traveler's checks to be universally accepted in marked contrast to other brands. I view certain money as an emergency fund that I fully intend to return home with.

Two stories from my fellow passport seekers will be helpful here. One is sad and the other strange. In the sad story, a young woman had been assaulted and had everything stolen. Her mother had wired money through Western Union with the specific instructions to not require identification, but they had refused to give her the money without full identification. The Embassy would not give her a passport without the fee. Fortunately again, one of the employees kindly made a collect call on her behalf and accepted her mother's credit card.

The strange story involved a father with two young sons whose passports had expired. This had not been picked up when they left the States, but was discovered when they wanted to return. The mother and the older sister had taken their scheduled flight because the daughter had important plans. The Embassy employees were having a problem because the father did not have the mother's written permission to bring the boys back home to the States. (You know that I could not make this up!) Honestly, I do not know how this problem was resolved.

Once I was in possession of my passport, my daughter and I had a magical meal at the grocery store Hediard.

The Missed Flight

Once again picking on Paris, we once flew into de Gaulle airport with the intention of changing planes and flying onto Nice where we would rent a car and drive to St Remy. Just prior to our landing, there had been a torrential rainstorm, which messed up the outgoing flights. This was compounded by a critical mistake that I made. Although I had previously landed at de Gaulle airport, I was unaware of how far apart Aerogare 1 and 2 are. I was also unaware that Aerogare 2 actually consists of two sets of five buildings separated by a superhighway! At the time of ticketing, I had asked how far apart the airlines were. I was told that because they were allied that the distance was insignificant. Wrong!

This is a very long and involved story that I enjoy telling. However, for the sake of brevity, I would like to make the following points:

If given a choice, change planes in a local that you are familiar with. On one occasion, my daughter's flight was delayed so she missed her ongoing flight. Fortunately, she was in Philadelphia and was able to stay with friends. She actually showed up at a party that she had been invited to, much to everyone's amazement!

Immediately contact the airline by telephone. There are always English speakers who can answer your questions. They are usually better informed than the local staff as to what the options are.

If your options are not good, immediately secure alternative transportation. Going back to our Paris trip, there were no seats available by plane or train for five days! Charles de Gaulle Airport is also a train station. We found the last taxi and went into Paris to the Gare De Lyon where the trains south leave. As I recall, there are six train stations in Paris and you have to go to the correct one.

Other examples of implementing options rapidly: A consultant was flying to visit us during the 911 attacks. His plane was grounded. No one was certain as to what was happening. He decided not to wait, but rented a car and thus was not stranded. About six weeks later, I was in New Orleans at a meeting when another plane crashed in New York. Across the street from the convention center was a Hertz office. I left in the last car that they had. There was a line of people who were being processed – but there were no more cars.

For my last story on the importance of rapid action, I once flew into Heathrow with the intention of flying on. Our plane was diverted to Scotland! The airline was arranging for buses to transport everyone back to London. They estimated that we would only be twelve hours late. Rather than talk to the ground crew at this rarely used airport, I called the airline. Unfortunately, I was clueless as to where we were. There were two businessmen discussing options near me. We made a deal on the spot: They told me where we were, I made reservations for three and one of them grabbed a cab, the only cab. We split the fare, had a decent meal and were only a few hours late without having to spend the night on a crowded bus.

Bring a backpack. Be organized. If your camera is hidden from view in your backpack, it is less likely to be stolen. Bring water in the side pockets where it will be easily accessible. Dehydration is a major problem on flights. Even if everything is perfect, it will be at least an hour before the attendants come by with drinks. We have all heard about people loaded on a plane and then left for hours. I have a friend who always brings power bars, which taste okay and will not melt or get crushed in your backpack. Bring toiletries, glasses, medicine, etc. At least bring a change of underwear, and preferably another outfit. I always bring at least two books. Recently, I have begun to bring a CD player.

Medical Problems

Always bring twice as much medicine as you will need and keep it in separate stashes. Bring copies of your medicines. They tend to have the same name everywhere. I cannot tell you how many prescriptions we have phoned into exotic locations. Bring an extra pair of glasses. We have a friend who once broke his glasses in France. He took the lenses and was able to get a new pair. He liked the style so much that he routinely buys new glasses abroad.

It might actually be easier if you have an unusual chronic condition, because the name tends to be more or less the same in every language. For example, glaucoma is glaucoma in every Indo-European language that I am aware of.

If a visit to the emergency room becomes necessary, go armed with friends and patience. Remember how long it can take to be seen in an ER here.

In many European countries, the pharmacists can prescribe medicines for common ailments. They can also advise you where to go for more help.

Time for another commercial: I find European pharmacies fascinating, and pharmacists extremely well educated. They are usually immaculate and carry many products that are unavailable here. They will routinely carry high quality shampoos, soaps, toothpastes, etc., which will often be significantly less expensive than they are here.

Once, I was standing in a pharmacy when an Irish couple walked in. The wife was obviously ill and the husband was so distraught that he was having trouble functioning. Almost randomly, he picked out several items, which I guess he thought might help. This was clearly a large sale for they were given a beautiful carry bag. Soon, the pharmacist herself appeared and spoke with them in broken English. She evidently knew what was going on, because a young man soon appeared who led the family where they needed to go. Thus, in less than five minutes, they, at the least, had the start of a solution.

Cooking Class

As a birthday present, in January 2005, Kathy surprised me with a “truffle hunt” with Patricia Wells based at her house in Vaison-la-Romaine, which is in Provence. I absolutely cannot say enough wonderful things about this experience. If you ever have a chance to take a course with her, either in Provence or in Paris, by all means do. This can be an excellent focus for your trip as well as a way to encounter other fascinating people. Similarly, if you are interested in things other than cooking, go to your local bookstore and pick up a magazine about your hobby or activity. I will bet that in the back will be ads for a course some place fun to go visit.

We stayed at Hotel Jeu de Paume where we stayed the first time we visited Paris with the children. The hotel was actually built inside this structure built expressly for this strange game which was evidently sort of a mixture of tennis and badminton. It is on l’Isle Saint Louis, which is an island directly behind Notre Dame and very conveniently located to Berthillon, the home of the world’s best sorbet. Be sure to have five or ten scoops! The hotel is very quiet and has delightful staff. The small street has many interesting shops and art galleries not to mention a collection of great restaurants. And now a little secret: L’Isle Saint Louis appears to not have any police. This is highly unusual, and I find it pleasant.

Soldes

Let us begin with sales. The French still have a strong socialistic bent. For reasons that I absolutely do not understand they feel that the time when sales can be held must be regulated. There are some strictly regulated exceptions such as fire sales (you have to have a significant one) or going out of business sales (you really have to). Sales can only be held twice a year, first in January and then sometime in the summer. The word for sale in French is “soldes.” You do not pronounce the final “es” so it sounds exactly like the English word “Sold.” There is even more regulation as to how much the merchants can reduce the prices. There is a series of three “desmarches” or price reductions. The winter sales will typically start the second or third weekend in January depending upon the day on which Christmas falls. The government wants people to have time to return their presents and still pay full price. Prices are reduced about 25% during the first desmarches. There will typically be very long lines to take advantage of these sales. It would take a lot of work to go to two or three stores on the first Saturday of the sales. A week later is the “lexeme desmarches” (second price cut). Now prices are cut 33-50% with still a reasonable selection. Finally, the next week is the “toilsome (third) or dernier (last) desmarches.” Here the merchants are free to get whatever they can. Typically, there is an absolute minimum selection.

The toilsome desmarches is actually a fantastic opportunity for Americans. Clothing in general and shoes in specific tend to fit us differently from the Europeans so, often our sizes will still be available. In addition, the garments sold in Europe will often, if not usually, have a very different style from what is on offer here in the states. This can be a great opportunity if you are going in January or if you hit it lucky in summer.

The stores will also have the fashions available for the next season, which, of course, will be displayed in a nicer manner than the sale items. These will be labeled with “nouvaute” (new) or “prochaine saison” (next season) or “arrive” (arrival).

Airports

It is hard to say whether Orly or Charles de Gaulle is the worst airport in the world. They are both dreadful. I have not flown into Orly for 20 years and have no plans to change so the rest of this discussion is about Charles de Gaulle. Elsewhere, I have described the nightmare of going between Aerogare 1 and Aerogare 2. Aerogare 2 is actually two sets of four buildings separated by a super highway! With the advent of the new Airbus two story planes, the authorities are adding two additional buildings making a total of five on each side! When you come into de Gaulle, ask the stewardess at what building you are arriving. Reconfirm when you land. Unfortunately, you may not arrive and depart from the same building. Furthermore, there are no signs anywhere that will indicate where which airline leaves from. As huge as the airport is, you still will probably have to take a bus to and from the airplane. So, especially for arriving, you will be left off wherever it is convenient.

In a moment I will describe how difficult it is to leave from de Gaulle. Having said that, arriving is usually very easy. Once you have gotten off of the bus and wound your way through the various corridors, your luggage will typically be there almost as quickly as you are. On one trip we had to wait while the police blew up some suitcases that had been abandoned! Yes, you want to be there with your suitcase.

If you stay near the airport the night before your departure, which often makes sense because of the early starts, stay at the Sheraton. It is actually physically part of the airport and can be a real lifesaver. Somebody there can find out where your gate is. The drivers of the hotel shuttle buses will take you to a central point. From there you are totally on your own.

There are many ways to the airport including a train from Gare du Nord, a direct bus from Paris, etc. In addition, there actually is a TGV station in the airport. You can take an elevator directly from the TGV to the Sheraton. Yet another reason to stay there.

Charles de Gaulle is another of those men that the French intensely love or intensely hate. I was in school in France in 1967-8 when he was in charge and the massive strikes occurred. Many of his opponents will not say his name. De Gaulle airport is located in the town of Roissy. So many French will refer to the airport as Roissy rather than de Gaulle.

You must allow yourself at least three hours prior to departure. Once you have found your gate, the wait truly begins. There is a line to check that you are in the correct line; then there is a wait to ask who packed your bags; then there is a wait to determine if your bags have to be searched and then you have to wait to actually check in. If you are actively checking in and it is less than 45 minutes until departure, the computers will lock and you will be considered to have missed your flight. I cannot make this up. You then have to go through immigration,

which now only takes minutes as everybody else is waiting in other lines. Finally, you have to wait in a really long line in order to get on the bus to the plane! It will take the full three hours.

Itinerary

Write out your itinerary on your computer. With electronic tickets this is particularly important. Typically, I center the destination at the top of the page and then on the next line the dates. Thereafter, I return to the left column with the day and then the date. Here is a fictitious example:

Paris
Friday 1-Sunday 10 January 2000
Cell phone number (if you have one)

Friday 1: Delta 432 Sarasota-Atlanta 11:15am-12:35pm Seats 4ABCD
Delta 21 Atlanta-CDG 4:35pm-6:30am Saturday Seats 19AB, 20AB

Saturday 2: Taxi Jacques telephone #
Hotel Jeu de Paume telephone #, web URL, confirmation #, address

I want to have as much information as possible all laid out. By having everything on just one or two pages, it is very easy to find. Furthermore, I will have in one place the number for all of our hotels. When my passport was stolen, I was able to phone all of my contacts, in just a few minutes.

On this trip I had arranged for a driver in advance, which can be a huge help after a long flight with minimal sleep, and had his number handy. If I had rented a car from Hertz, I would have the confirmation number here.

In addition, I include restaurant reservations with the name, phone number and address. This will help either with directions or with a taxi driver. Special events or tours should also be listed here. You would not want to show up a day late for the opera or a concert!

Give everyone a copy – this will cut down on “when do we get there?” questions. I also leave a copy with relatives friends and work in the event that we are needed.

Although I have multiple copies of passports and travelers’ checks numbers elsewhere, I do not list them here as too many people will see this.

In a brightly colored folder with the name of the trip prominently displayed I keep all of the details land working papers. For instance, when I rent a house in the country or an apartment in Paris, I might look at 100 or more web sites. I keep all of my notes in one place. Just in case, I keep everything. The weekend before departure I go through the folder; I reconfirm flights and reservations; only then do I discard unnecessary papers. I do bring the folder along with pertinent magazines or articles in my backpack on the plane. Even if my luggage disappears (!) my trip will not be ruined! I also have the first map that I will need handy in my backpack. The airport is not the place to search through your luggage for a map, which inevitably, is on the very bottom!

Vacation from Vacation or Long Day Trips

When we were on our honeymoon in Ireland, one of the other guests in a B&B gave me some great advice: It is always good to have a “day in hand.” What he meant was that having an extra day can let you take advantage of unexpected opportunities. It might be as simple as taking a “vacation from vacation.” When we are doing a touring vacation, will leave a day just to hang out. Typically, I will find a bicycle and go for a ride while my wife and children will read and relax by the pool or in a garden. If, on the other hand, we are on an unstructured vacation, say a week spent in Paris when we just plan to “flaner” or, poorly translated, “prowl around,” we might plan a full day trip. This will have the added benefit or “changer de l’aire” or “change the air.” Here are some ideas:

There are many long day trips that, with careful planning, will be a lot of fun. If you were to do these as part of a tour, and if you are traveling by yourself, that might actually be the best way to do them, the tour would last twelve hours or more. Alternatives would include hiring a driver/guide, taking a train, driving yourself or some combination. Here are two examples when we were staying in the country and went to visit the big city.

When my son was about twelve, we rented a house in the Luberon Valley. I asked him if there was anything special he wanted to do. He wanted to have dinner on top of the Eiffel Tower; we agreed on lunch. We got the TGV “tres grande vitesse” or very high speed train. We had a delightful lunch and then walked through the Tuilleries Gardens before catching a return train.

When we stayed in Umbria, we really wanted to visit Florence. We took a train and were met by our guide. Amazingly, she was able to show us the highlights of Florence in about six hours. The Uffizi was open late so we were able to see the great Botticelli and Cimabue paintings basically by ourselves.

There are other times when you literally just want to cover more ground or you want to visit several places that are reasonably close to each other. In these cases, it might make the most sense if you spent one night on the road. If you have rented an apartment, you might have to pay for the night in two different places. But how great would it be to leave those heavy suitcases and all of those souvenirs behind? If you are staying in a hotel, there will be a variety of options: you could check out, check your bags, and then recheck in. You probably will be given another room. I have a friend who likes to stay in different parts of Paris so he will check out of the first hotel, take his bags to the second hotel and check them with the bellman before heading to the train station. When he gets back, he has a whole new part of Paris to explore.

Where to go? When we had lunch on the Eiffel Tower, we pretty much traveled the length of the country. The beauty of the trains is that they travel from downtown to downtown, so you do not waste all of that time driving out to the airport. So, you can pretty much go anywhere that you want. The time through the Chunnel to London continues to fall; or you could visit Switzerland and Belgium, etc.

Time for some imagination and some negotiations: An eight year-old girl might want to visit a castle in the Loire Valley; a boy might want to visit the Normandy Beaches; the parents might want to taste Champagne or other wine. How about walking through Money’s Garden in Normandy? It would probably make the most sense, be the most fun and hopefully, the most relaxing if you met the needs of several members of your group. Okay, I will visit Monet’s Garden if you will go to the WWII beaches.

How about visiting some castles, possibly staying in a castle, and tasting some wine?

The Loire Valley

The Loire Valley is the Valley of the Kings. Elsewhere I have described the trials and tribulations of living in Paris before indoor plumbing. The kings of France used to “progress” through the countryside during the summer. This would allow them to escape the heat of Paris and to impress the locals. It would also force someone else to feed and lodge the royal entourage. If a noble were viewed as being a threat, a prolonged visit would allow the King to further evaluate the situation while the courtiers depleted the host’s resources.

There are three ways to visit the Loire Valley. First, you can join a group. These tours typically last 12 hours. If this is your choice, I would book through your hotel. The second is to hire a private guide such as Gary Lee Kraut through his web site: parisrevisited.com. This is a great idea if there are three or more people and might actually be more economical. Furthermore, you can visit the castles you want to see at your own pace as compared to the organized group. The third way, is to rent a car and drive down yourself.

Where should you stay? I am quite fond of Amboise. This is an old town built around a castle. Tours is a modern town where my daughter spent a summer attending a program run by her University. I enjoyed the town much more than I had anticipated. I also found the shopping better than I had expected.

What about hotels? Novotels are moderately priced functional hotels similar to Holiday Inns, usually located on the outskirts of town. Although I have never stayed in one, Grandesetapes.fr has several well-located castles to stay in that seem very interesting. Finally, Relais & Chateaux - www.relaischateaux.com (1.800.735.2478) has several high-end hotels in the area. This option gives you the option not only to visit the local castles but to actually stay in one yourself!

There are a multitude of castles to visit, not to mention some interesting wineries in the Loire Valley. Take out your guidebook and pick the ones you want to visit and then decide where to stay.

Both my wife’s favorite, Villandry with its fabulous gardens, and my favorite, Chenonceau, built on a bridge across the River Cher, are near tours, so that makes sense for us.

Why are there so many castles that are now hotels?

Originally, castles were built for protection on some high or otherwise protected location with thick walls and possibly a moat. Interestingly, the moats were usually dry – they did not enjoy a wet basement or mildew back then anymore than we do today. Rather, the moats were to slow down the charging soldiers. Typically, everyone would at least sleep inside the walls. At night there were packs of dogs that would eat anything or anyone that they could find. This is where the expression “throw them out to the wolves” comes from; if someone would not toe the line, they were thrown out at night to fend for themselves.

During the Renaissance, the castles changed from defensive residences to big homes. Most of the structures that we Americans call castles were really just manor homes, which would be

surrounded by several farms, all owned or managed by the same family. Back then the French had primogeniture where the eldest son would pretty much inherit everything. In fact, each son had his own title: "l'aine" was the eldest and would inherit; the second son was "le cadet" (same word in English) and would go into the military service; I have forgotten the name of the third son who would usually join the Catholic Church; successive sons were untitled but would typically leave the country for Louisiana or other colonies; until the last son who was "le Benjamin." Being the baby, and usually younger than l'aine's own children, he would typically hang around and somehow fit in. Needless to say, there have been many stories, not to mention movies, about le Benjamin.

Nowadays, everybody inherits. Furthermore, you can just imagine what the upkeep on a 12,000 sq ft home would be, so relatively few families can afford to keep a castle. Can you imagine the heating bills? Many of the castles have been purchased by rich foreigners, while others have been made into hotels.

Things to do with children (and adults, too!)

My daughter was four and my son was two the first time that we went to France. They learned quickly that if they behaved while in the car and the airplane, positive things would happen when we arrived. They had a blast. We had a small suitcase filled with diapers that magically were converted into presents as they were used up. They had Gameboys, books and guidebooks that kept them entertained, but for the most part they simply enjoyed the scenery as we did. Fortunately, they found the local music interesting and would pick out a CD to listen to at home.

Both of my children are adventuresome eaters. Cancale is an amazing town just across the bay from Mt. St. Michel. It is famous for its oyster park. My daughter and I ate oysters as a lady pulled the next one out of a concrete tank that flooded at high tide and shucked it. These oysters were out of the water 60 seconds or less before my daughter ate them! Later that evening, we ate dinner on the terrace of a small nearby restaurant. Fortunately, the French love children. That evenings entertainment was watching our children eat all of that fresh seafood!

Once on each trip, Kathy and I would find a babysitter and enjoy eating a quiet meal together. Having said that, we did eat at le View Logis in Tremolat, with Jennie and John, on our anniversary when the children were 5 and 7. Although we ate for three hours, neither became restless. Afterwards, they played in the garden while their parents recuperated!

A Few More Tidbits About Paris

On the right bank, just across the Seine from the western end of l'Isle de la Cite-Notre Dame's Island, is the department store St. Maritime. This is a cool old style department store actually located in several buildings with a café on the very top. You can take an elevator to the top of l'Arch de Triomphe. The Champs-Elysees and other monumental views surround you. My daughter likes the view from the steps of Sacre Coeur, the beautiful 19th century Church on the north side of Paris. There are always lots of vendors and artists around the steps.

Heading west from the Pompidou, just a few blocks through streets filled with art galleries you come to le Forum des Halles, which is a shopping center built where Les Halles, or the original central market of Paris, once stood. Because the wholesale grocers worked all night so that

the neighborhood grocers and restaurants would be stocked, there were many restaurants in the area that were open all night. Their most famous dish was French onion soup or la gratinee, which means “the cheesed one” because of the thick delicious covering of hot cheese over bread covering the crock of onion soup. This is great at anytime, especially if it is cold outside. There are still several restaurants that serve it in the area (the wholesale grocers have moved outside of Paris to the town of Rungis).

Street markets are fascinating for everyone. I have already described them. You can always get souvenirs like chocolate or olive oil to take home with you while you are there.

The bateaux mouches (which means “ant boats” really) leave from the west end of l’Isle de la Cite. These are the boats that you see cruising up and down the Seine in every movie about Paris. I would go at night. No, this is not paid advertising, but I would at least look at the photo that the photographer will take while you are on board.

Walking along the Seine is always an entertaining experience.

The Rodin museum has statues, including the “The Thinker,” located throughout its beautiful gardens. Come to think of it, I always spend some time in both the Tuilleries and the Luxembourg gardens. Go ahead and rent a little sailboat for an hour.

The tours through the sewers are given at rather odd times. I also believe that there is a minimum age, so be sure to find out before somebody’s hopes are dashed.

Everyone seems to find the Pere Lachaise Cemetery fascinating. It is too hilly and steep to push a stroller.

Part of the magic of Paris is simply watching the world go by either while walking or sitting in a sidewalk café. Yes, you are talking about the people that you see; but, after all, that is only fair as they are talking about you.

And don’t forget that there are a multitude of churches, museums and monuments waiting to be seen. Your children are going to have a great time!

Notre Dame has a nice playground on the left bank side. Often, there are “son et lumiere” (sound and light) shows in the evening that are totally different from seeing the church and the stained glass during the day.

If you have ancestors from Europe, I suggest that you visit where your ancestors came from. Once, when we were driving from Paris to Denmark, we stopped in a small town in Schleswig-Holstein where my great grandmother was born. We started talking to the owner of the small restaurant where we had lunch. He gave us a picture book of the area and sent us on a very pretty ride that was actually a short cut off of the heavily trafficked main road. What a great memory!

If you do not have European ancestors there are other areas to visit; people often have hobbies or sports that they enjoy. There is a doctor here who has traveled all over the world for paragliding. I have a patient who went to Germany to do quilting. A friend of mine who cuts hair won a contest and attended a convention in Italy. That experience was so valuable that he

returns to these meetings every two years. He now has friends all over Europe that he visits and in turn visit him here. I have another friend who “collects” countries. There is an organization for people who have visited over 100 countries and she is a member. Several of my patients belong to a group that rents a castle in the south of France every year as a location for painting. During the day, each participant goes off and paints. In the evening they have dinner and share ideas. Another patient travels the world doing underwater photography. So, ancestors, clubs, hobbies, work, and sports can all lead to ideas for successful trips. Get a magazine about one of these topics. In the back there will usually be ads with information about trips and tours.

Sometimes you just have to desire to visit a place. I have always wanted to visit New Zealand and Tasmania. I have absolutely no idea why, I just do. Some people love certain kinds of food and want to take cooking lessons in the region. Other people want to taste wine where it is produced. Someone that I know went to Scotland to visit distilleries. What is most interesting is that he is not a Scotch drinker, but a Bourbon drinker. Thus, desire, food and drink can often lead to other ideas.

Provence

Provence! Kathy, our children and I have gone on eight extended trips to Provence. We look forward to keep returning to one of our favorite places on earth.

Aix on Provence and Avignon are the two largest cities in Provence. Both merit an extensive visit. Go to Aix. Have lunch at “Le Deux Garcons,” the most famous café on le Course Mirabeau beneath the beautiful plane trees. Walk up into the town. The shopping is excellent. In Avignon, the Pope’s Palace is worth a visit.

Arles is the third largest city. Eat at le Hotel Pinus Nord, opposite to the Café Van Gogh. Eat outside if the weather is nice. There are many restaurants with tables in the square. There are actually Roman ruins built into the wall of the hotel. After lunch, walk up towards the arena to the main square. At the bottom of the main square is a long road off to the right. About two blocks down is a museum founded by Frederic Mistral. It is the original cultural museum. It is well worth a visit. If you have a chance, go to a bullfight (the bull lives) in the arena. These are on Sundays. The other Roman ruins are also worth a visit.

St. Remy is one of my favorite towns. Market day is Wednesday. There are many excellent restaurants. On the main circular road, just opposite to the road coming in from the east is “le Bistrot de Provence,” Great food. Once again, great shopping.

Just to the south is the road to Les Baux. This town was destroyed after one of the many wars. The ruins of the old town are an absolute must. Just below them, in an abandoned bauxite (from the name of the town) mine is le Cathedral de Son. They have taken advantage of the wonderful acoustics of the old mine. Slides are projected onto the walls. This is well worth an hour. Bring a sweater as it is quite cool in the mine.

In Egalyiere we ate in le Bistro d’Egalyiere. We sat at the only table outside!

In Paradou is le Bistro de Paradou. This restaurant was a proponent of organic food long before anyone else. Usually, you have no choice as to what you eat, just the special of the

day. This town is also famous for olive oil. Paradou is on the road between Les Baux and Arles.

There are so many great day trips in Provence!

You must go to le Pont du Gard. This day trip is into Languedoc. I prefer the north approach to le Pont du Gard. The restaurant in the hotel just opposite the bridge has a lovely terrace with nice food and what a view!

Take the road on toward Uzes, another town worth the visit. As is common in Provence, there is a ring road that was built when the walls were torn down. Near the top of the hill is a road that descends through the old town. On the right hand side is a cheese shop that specializes in non pasteurized cheese. The owner also has some bread from Paris, although I prefer the bakery on the ring road, so pick up some wine and have a picnic. There is also a great old-fashioned bookstore. The owner does not speak English, but he told me that he tries to carry books that tourists would want to read. After visiting Uzes, go to the small town of St Quentin le Poterie. As its name suggests, this town is loaded with potters.

For another day trip head south to Cassis, for great white wine. The beach is nice, the food good. Take a boat trip to the calanques. These are ancient rivers that have flooded. The water is the shade of lapis lazuli and the stone is bone white. It is hard to believe that you are only a few miles from Marseilles, but probably an hour by car. Drive east to Bandol, another nice beach town and then up to regain the main road. There are also several interesting vineyards in this valley.

Isle sur la Sorgue merits at least two visits; one on Sunday morning when there is both the food market and the antique market, and again on a quiet day. The antique market is the most famous in the South of France. In addition to the junk sold on the street, there are many famous shops well worth the visit. There is a "condominium" of antique shops opposite to the train station. Once again, there are many restaurants. You may have gotten bored with French food. There is a great Chinese restaurant called le Saigon on the road south. There is a vegetarian restaurant called le Basalic (basal) right over the stream opposite to the main drag. Another restaurant on the stream is called lou nigou chin which means "the little boat" in Provençal.

There are so many wonderful towns in Provence! Gordes is fantastic up on its cliff face. Be sure to approach from the south for the best view. Visit the boiries, old stone huts that were homes less than 100 years ago. Up over the hill to the north is the abbey of Senaque, well worth the visit. Gordes is on the north face of the Luberon valley, and is therefore somewhat protected from the Mistral (a fierce wind, which is cold and uncomfortable) and would seem logically to have the most desirable location. On the south face are Menerbes, famous for Peter Mayle, Lacoste, the home of the Marquis de Sade, and Bonnieux, famous for its bread museum. Each of these towns is picturesque. There are many nice restaurants in this area, but they seem to change rather quickly, so I hesitate to recommend. There is a very good creperie on the back end of Apt. If you take the high road through those three towns, it lets you off onto a road in Apt not far from the creperie on the left. Another choice would be to head south to Lourmarin where there is a two star restaurant that I have heard good things about.

Chateauneuf du Pape is nearby. The town is nice to walk through. The most famous wineries require advance registrations – deservedly so. Get Patricia Wells' (the cook book author) latest book about the region. Her summer home is nearby.

Orange has many interesting Roman ruins. I keep talking about them, but it seems as though Provence has as many as Italy and they are often better preserved. We enjoyed a marvelous opera on a freezing evening in Orange in 2000. Carpentras is also nearby and worth the visit.

Events in the country

For a whole variety of reasons, different towns will throw a party. If you are anywhere in the region, by all means go. This is a chance to see the locals "with their hair down." Granted, a similar event at home may be considered boring, but here it is a new experience. Europeans in general and the French in particular, know that a huge portion of their income is derived from tourists so they have learned to how to throw a fun party. Marching bands (and non-marching bands), bal dansant (dances) or the opening of anything can all be fun. Ker Messe in Breton means big party. This term is now used throughout France. We went to a circus that had six human and four animal participants. There were 25 people in the audience. What a hoot! If you are an where near a bullfight, by all means go. In France, the bulls are the mainliners and live! I can still see my children's faces at their 1st bull fight in Arles!

Closing Remarks

In terms of travel guides to Provence, I have found the Cadogan Guide, South of France to be the most helpful. My wife, Kathy, has particularly enjoyed the history lessons.

Although I have never been inside the Marseille airport, I have driven past it on the Auto Route. It is conveniently located. Rent a car from Hertz. If all goes well, you might have saved a little money with another company. If there is a problem, you can save yourself some grief by renting from Hertz. Be sure to rent a car by telephone before you leave home. The most likely time that a problem will occur is before you even rent your car. Hertz also has a convenient drop off and pick locations that will help you. Rent a big car. There is much theft in the South of France. If everything is locked inside the trunk, the thief will not know about your belongings.

Once you have rented your car you have several choices. I would discourage you from visiting Marseille. As with other large cities, it can only be visited well in a brief time with a guide. Unless you are madly in love with the Count of Monte Cristo, I would go elsewhere.

Personally, I would go straight to Aix from the airport. It is a great city, with the best shopping that you will see. After an overnight flight, I am not real keen on a wine tasting following a long car ride. The towns that you are going to visit all once had walls, which became ring roads when they were torn down. What is of most interested to you is inside those ring roads. The one time that we actually stayed in Aix we spent the night in a gorgeous, small hotel called the Villa Gallici, located just north of the ring road. At the time, it was new and unknown, and therefore, just expensive. Since then it has been featured in a number of magazines, so I suspect that the price has traveled north. It is represented by Relais & Chateaux (relaischateaux.com). Kathy loved everything about this hotel.

That's it for now. Kathy and I are traveling to Paris for Christmas 2008 with Jennie and John. We look forward to sharing that trip with you!