



# **Paris Travelogue 2018**

Allison Sheridan

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## Introduction

Whenever Steve and I go on an extensive trip, I write a travelogue of our adventures for the entertainment of our family and friends.

Unlike most “My Summer Vacation” reports, I try to be a bit silly and include photos that other people would not consider informative or educational.

The travelogue you are about to read is exactly as written during our trip with one chapter per day. This means there are egregious errors in the writing, which were often (but not always) noted by alert readers. If I was alerted to the errors, you’ll see the mea culpa in the next day’s letter.

In 2003, Steve and I traveled to Sedona, Arizona to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary. At breakfast the day before our actual anniversary, we met Dean and Suzanne Elger and enjoyed their company so much that we invited them to dinner that night. They declined.

The next morning we breakfasted with them (again to great hilarity) but did not invite them to dinner as it was our anniversary. When we arrived at the romantic restaurant Steve had chosen for dinner, Dean and Suzanne were there.

I asked them if they were stalking us, and Suzanne proudly said, “Yes! We changed your reservation to a party of four!”

They had no idea it was our anniversary, so we didn’t tell them because we were having too much fun.





However, we did punish them by demanding that they go with us on a trip to celebrate every five years of our marriage.

Sedona again for our 25th anniversary:



And our 30th anniversary in Santa Barbara:



For our 35th anniversary we decided to make them go to Paris with us. This is the travelogue of that adventure. Most of the text is mine, but the photos were taken by Steve, Dean and me.

# Day 0 - On Our Way

I like to call the first day Day 0 just so my numbering starts out wrong to begin with. Our adventure begins with a flight from Los Angeles to Heathrow Airport in London, and then on to Paris.

Have you seen that episode of Modern Family where Jay gets the family into what he thinks is the exclusive Platinum-level floor of the hotel in Vegas, only to find out later that there's a double secret Executive Platinum level? We have Business-class tickets so we were excited to not be in the plebeian Admirals Club lounge, rather the Flagship Lounge. But then we got there and found out there's a Flagship First lounge.

We're trying to make do.





Dean and Suzanne shared similar difficulties.



For the better part of Wednesday and Thursday we managed to make it from Los Angeles to London to Paris by 7:30pm while Dean and Suzanne went from Ivins, Utah to Colorado to Frankfurt to Paris. Needless to say we went out for wine and bread (with dinner on the side) and now we're all going to sleep.

We hope to be more entertaining tomorrow but I'll leave you with proof that Steve found the Eiffel Tower.



Excited, Allison & Steve

## Day 2 - Napoleon & Eiffel Tower

Yes, day 2, not day 1. You see, it took us about 20 hours to get to Paris and then the time change and blah blah blah, so it's day 2. And Namdar pointed out that computer scientists always start at 0 not 1 (which Bart and Dorothy will appreciate) so I'm right on on target.

Normally when you travel like this to foreign lands, you have trouble sleeping. Not us. The four of us went to bed around 11:15pm on what might have been Thursday night. We discussed how Dean would probably be up around 6am, Steve at 6:30, Allison made a bid for 7am and Suzanne was unconscious and didn't weigh in.

Steve and I got up at 8:15am, Dean around 8:30 and Suzanne leaped out of bed at around 11am with a spring in her step. We then made an "early" morning trip to a boulangerie for "pain au chocolat" and coffees.

Wait, Dean told us this is a boulangerie?





We waddled out of the apartment at the crack of noon and walked down to the Hôtel National des Invalides. It's a war museum and Napoleon's tomb.



Immediately I spotted two Napoleons.



And then another one:



Suzanne and I dressed the part quite well. The attendant assured us we looked awesome.





Napoleon's tomb is pretty dramatic looking:



There's a crucifix facing the tomb, which was kind of odd because behind Jesus on the cross is a church, so he's facing away from the church and towards Napoleon.





From there we trotted off to see the Eiffel Tower. I'm sure you've never seen any photos of it before, so I'll show you what it looks like.



We decided to spring the 19 euros each for the privilege of climbing to the second level and then taking the elevator to the very top (281 meters). We totally WOULD have climbed that last bit but they wouldn't let us.

The view was spectacular from up there. If you're not bored with Napoleon's tomb, here's the view of the dome from above:





The Seine looked pretty nifty from above. Nolan and Lindsay - there was a soccer game going on, not too many fans in the rain though.



This is my favorite artsy fartsy photo from the Eiffel Tower:



I know Americans are larger than other people but I was surprised to see that even the little green walking men in France are thinner than ours.



We walked home along the Seine in the rain which was pretty swell. Time for a selfie for you!





We decided it was time for cocktails so we went to what we are calling Alex's. It isn't called that but our favorite waiter there (favorite of two visits) is named Alex. We sipped wine and had tiny toasted ham and salmon sandwiches under heat lamps till 10 at night.



Hope you are all well, until tomorrow,

Allison & Steve

## Day 3 - Musée des Arts et Métiers and Notre Dame

I have to tell you guys, I walk on the order of 18,000 steps a day, traveling around 9 miles a day. I always kid that on vacation I get fewer steps and fewer miles than when I'm at home. This is STILL true, even in Paris. However...I'm absolutely knackered (as my friends Don and Barbara would say). We walked 17,679 steps and 7.36 miles today, but I haven't even closed my calorie ring nor come close on my exercise ring on my Apple Watch. I think standing and looking at cool stuff and strolling is actually exhausting work.

But you probably have no sympathy for me at all on this issue, so we'll move along.

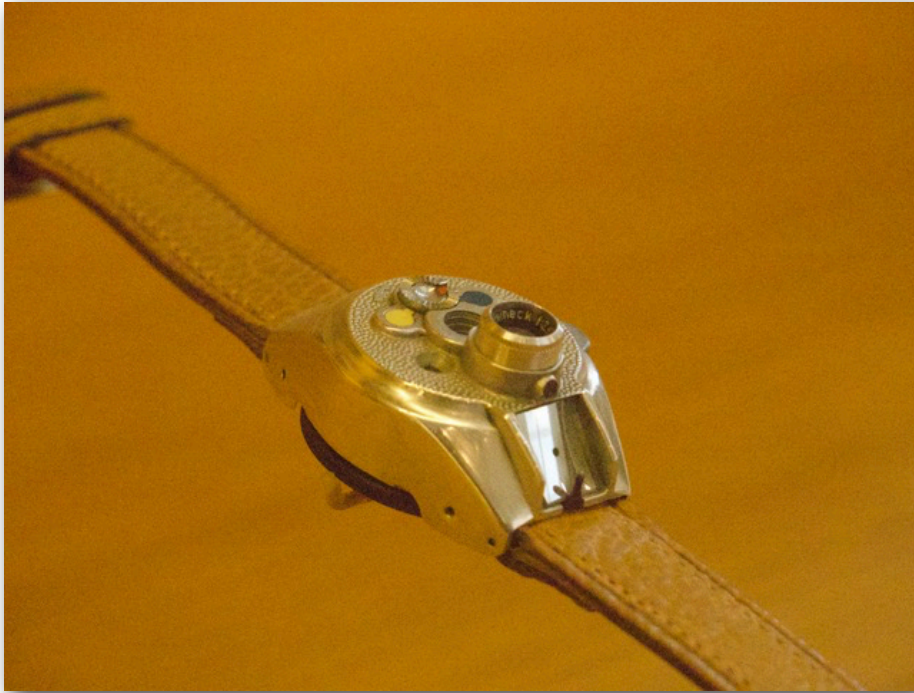
We were much more efficient on Day 3 as we rushed out of our apartment at 11am. We took the Metro (Suzanne taught us how to use public transportation!) over to the Musée des Arts et Métiers. Roughly translated it's the engineering geek museum. Dean and Suzanne seemed to enjoy it as much as we did (but they may have just been being polite.)

Out in front of the geek museum was a statue of liberty (it appears that they built it for us):





I liked this 1935 camera watch:



There was an odd little room with automated dolls playing instruments. The prettiest one was this harpsichordist:



The ornate etching on this jeweler's vice made me appreciate the joy of artisanship:



Attached to the museum is the L'église de Saint Martin des Champs, which is a church that has been turned into a car and plane museum. It was kind of an odd juxtaposition. You can see the Foucault pendulum in the foreground, but sadly it didn't have any pins to knock down.





However, it turns out that our little buddy Foucault was the first to measure the speed of light in 1862! This isn't much to look at but it's a set of mirrors including one that's rotating and driven by the bellows on the bottom left. It was pretty cool.



Steve and I got to go to Mars:



From there we realized that we were really close to Notre Dame, so why not stop by?

As we walked we came across a crazy structure called the Pompidou Center. The architects built it inside out. The colored pipes are air conditioning, electrical, water and even elevators.



As we passed the Pompidou, we came into a huge plaza called Place Igor Stravinsky. It has a pond filled with crazy art pieces, each of which represents a composition of his. It was most odd because the backdrop was the ancient St. Merri cathedral.





And a bizarre mural...



Right before we got to Notre Dame, we came across the Hotel Deville. We thought it looked pretty cool until Suzanne told us this plaza we're standing in was where they used to draw and quarter people.

Don't look it up if you don't want your day ruined! Think Cruella Deville...

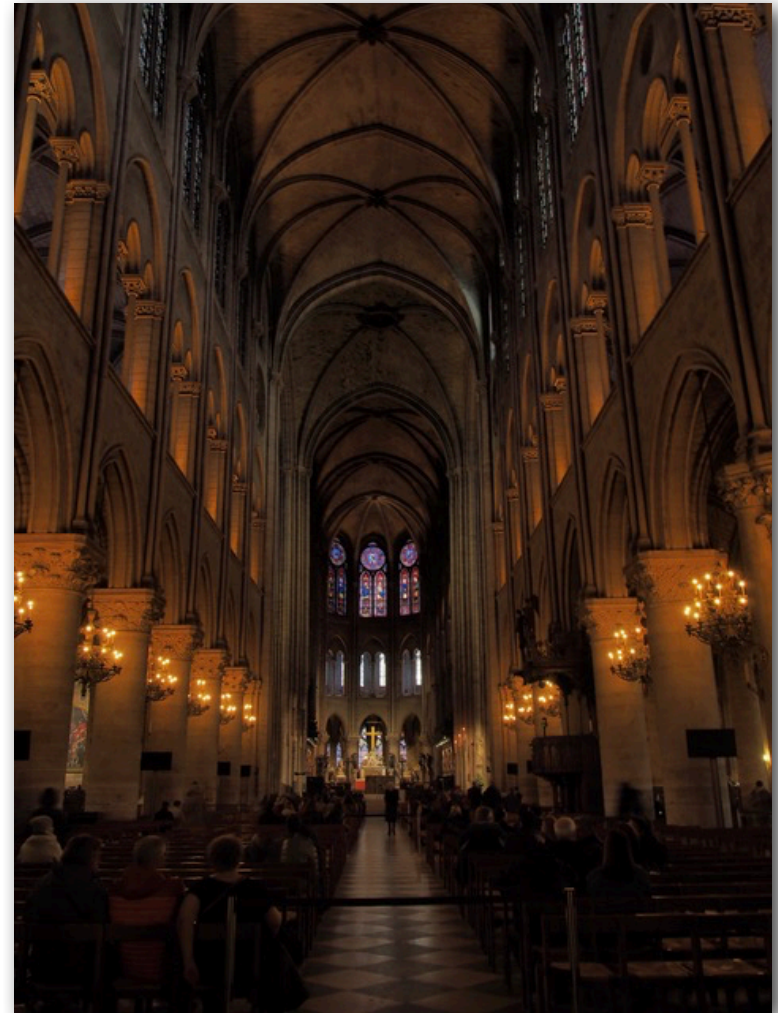




It's not going to be possible to express the grandeur of Notre Dame so I'll just drop in a two images. This photo is one of the many phenomenal stained-glass windows:



And one looking the length of the church. For you photography nerds, this photo was taken with my Olympus E-M5 Mark II, with the auto-HDR mode on. It took 3 images, blended them together. But get this - each capture was a 1 second exposure, hand held! I wasn't even leaning against a wall! I cannot believe how well this camera did.





Outside Notre Dame, Dean commandeered someone into taking a group shot of us:



But I liked this shot better. There must be a story behind it but I just don't know what it is.





The walk back along the Seine at evening time was delightful. I'll let the sailors amongst you ponder how this sailboat is able to navigate into the river which has bridges throughout that are clearly shorter than the masts.



We'll close with another shot of the ever-changing Eiffel Tower down the street from Alex's.



Happily yours, Allison and Steve



# Day 4 - Versailles, AKA Adventures in Public Transportation

I'm sure you're all worried about my exercise rings on my Apple Watch. Good news on that front. Our trip to the Palace at Versailles fixed that critical problem as I walked 23,000 steps and barely made my exercise goal. Somehow Dean got 26,000 steps. I say he takes little tiny baby steps, but he says he got those extra steps walking forward, and then walking backwards to where I stopped to take a photo and then walking forward again.

We checked the weather for the day and it showed no rain at all in the forecast. In a moment of hubris, Suzanne and I decided we'd carry no umbrellas. As soon as we got in line, it started to pour. Of course it did.

We took 2 trains to get to Versailles with our trusty guide Suzanne figuring out how that numbers means the RER trains and letters mean the Metro. That didn't keep us from having to ask for help in the middle of the trip. But arrive at Versailles we did.

You can see it promising to rain in this photo of us in front of King Louis the XIV:



Versailles is insane in its opulence. Here's the walls of the entrance courtyard clad in gold:



We wandered the royal chambers, this is some random woman's room, maybe Victoria somebody.





Here's a selfie - see us?



The Royal "chapel" inside Versailles wasn't too ostentatious what with the folding chairs and all. (Photo is another hand held auto-HDR by my Olympus camera.)



Steve loved the Hall of Mirrors. This is where the Treaty of Versailles was signed ending World War II. By the way, when you hear "some random woman's room, maybe Victoria somebody", you'll know it's me talking. When it says something like "where the Treaty of Versailles was signed", you'll know it's either Dean or Suzanne. Just sayin'.



While the inside of the Palace was wondrous to see, we couldn't help think of the people of France starving while the King surrounded himself by tacky gold.

Outdoors the grounds were spectacular.





Life imitates art:



Back to the gold leaf in the Frog Fountain (I know, these are iguana and turtles):



Fine, here's some of the frogs:



Tired of frogs, turtles and iguanas? How about horsies?





It was time to sustain ourselves with a non-alcoholic Kronenbourg and a light lunch. Here's our boys relaxing in the sun:

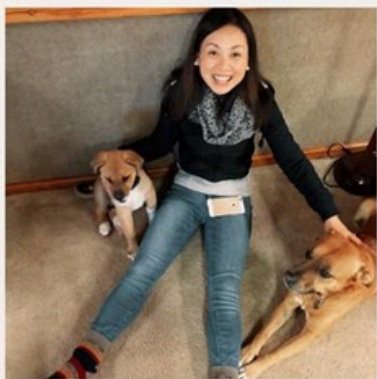


I'm always happiest when near water. This is the Grand Canal with the Palace in the very far distance. While walking along the edge of the water, I did a video FaceTime with Lindsay and Forbes and Tesla while walking along here. How cool is technology?

Tesla in particular was very excited to see the canal and the palace. Steve was more worried that I was going to fall in the water!



I know that David and Jennifer are confused why there are no pictures of Tesla in here. We'll take a short interlude just for them, with this photo from Alice and Nick Tondée with Tesla, Dodger and their new dog Denali having a play date at Nolan and Lindsay's in our absence.



I'm sure you wanted more bizarre gold things in fountain pictures, so I'll give you one more. Of a young girl, what might be wheat, and a creepy frog man.





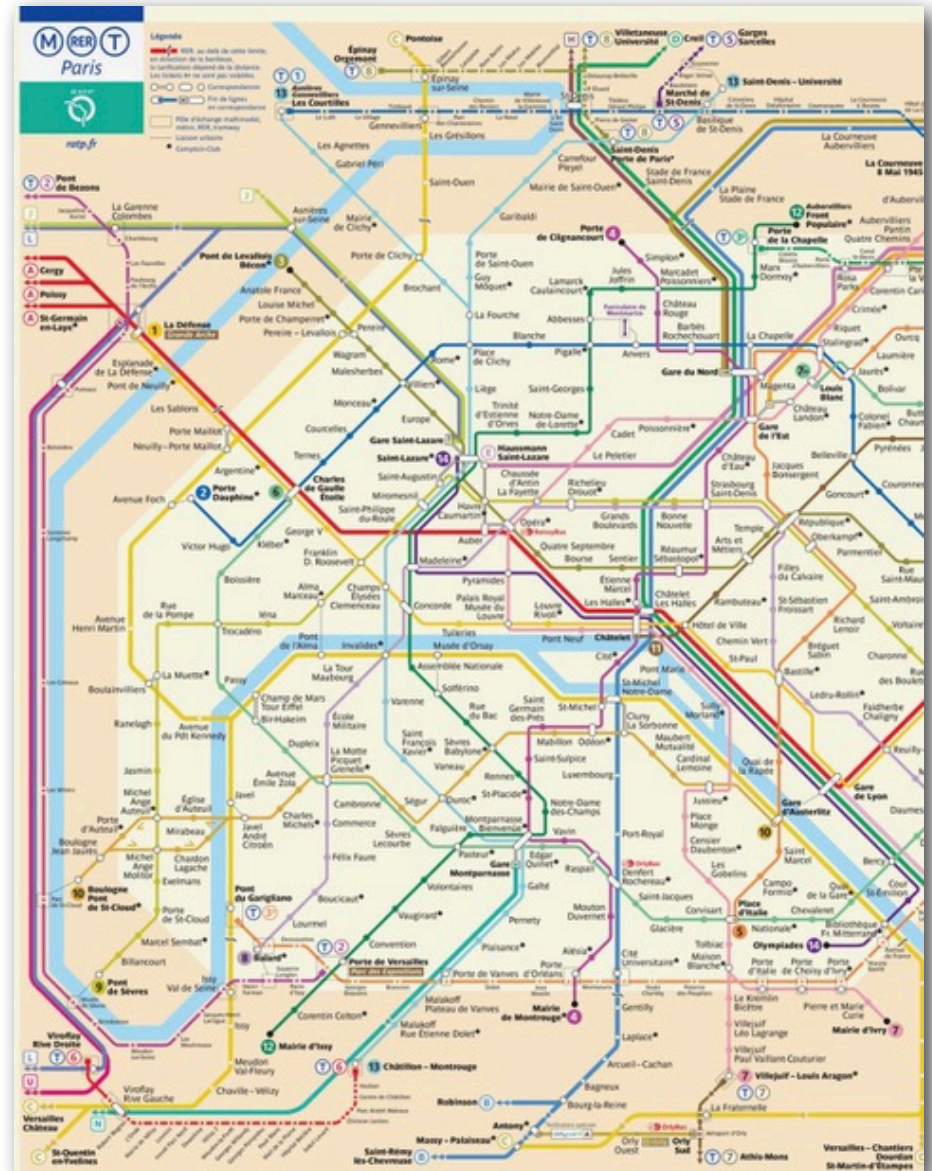
To hopefully erase that picture from your memory...



See? It's simple!

When we first got to Paris, I asked Suzanne about taking public transportation. She said, "It's EASY, you'll be FINE!"

On our way back we jumped on a train in the nick of time as it pulled out of the station, being surprised that it was 4 min early. Well, it appears that the way you tell if it's the RIGHT train is by what time it shows up. We ended up circumnavigating Paris, spiraling around the Eiffel Tower. Dean and Suzanne tried to pretend that this was all on purpose, as we got off at the Arc de Triomphe, which is on the exact opposite side of Paris.



Let's close with one more picture of the beautiful grounds of the Palace at Versailles:



Fondly,

Allison & Steve



## Day 5 - The Louvre

I must start this letter, not with an apology for misnumbering (yet), but for saying the Treaty of Versailles ended World War II. The astute amongst you were quick to point out it was World War I. Thank you Steven. And Steve.

In our quest to knock off every classic thing you do in Paris in the least amount of days, we rushed out at 10:45am to tackle the Louvre. Well actually, it was to get breakfast. We bought chocolate croissants (pain au chocolat) and Dean made us ham and eggs. So we waddled out around noon to tackle the Louvre. It's not that big, right? We should be able to knock it off in a half a day.

On our way we saw the Washington Monument:



Then we saw the London Eye:



At first we thought this horrible lion was attacking the poor little cherub baby...Till we noticed the nasty cherub had stolen her baby and had it coming:

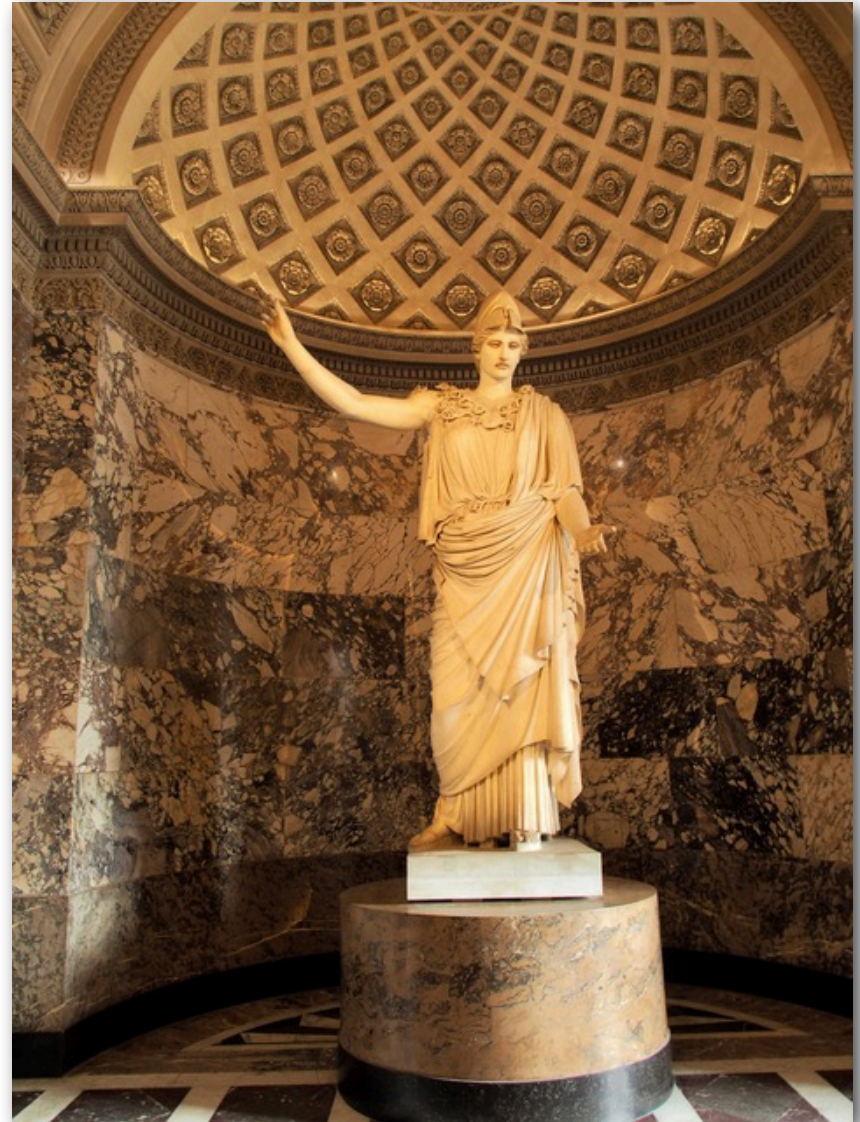


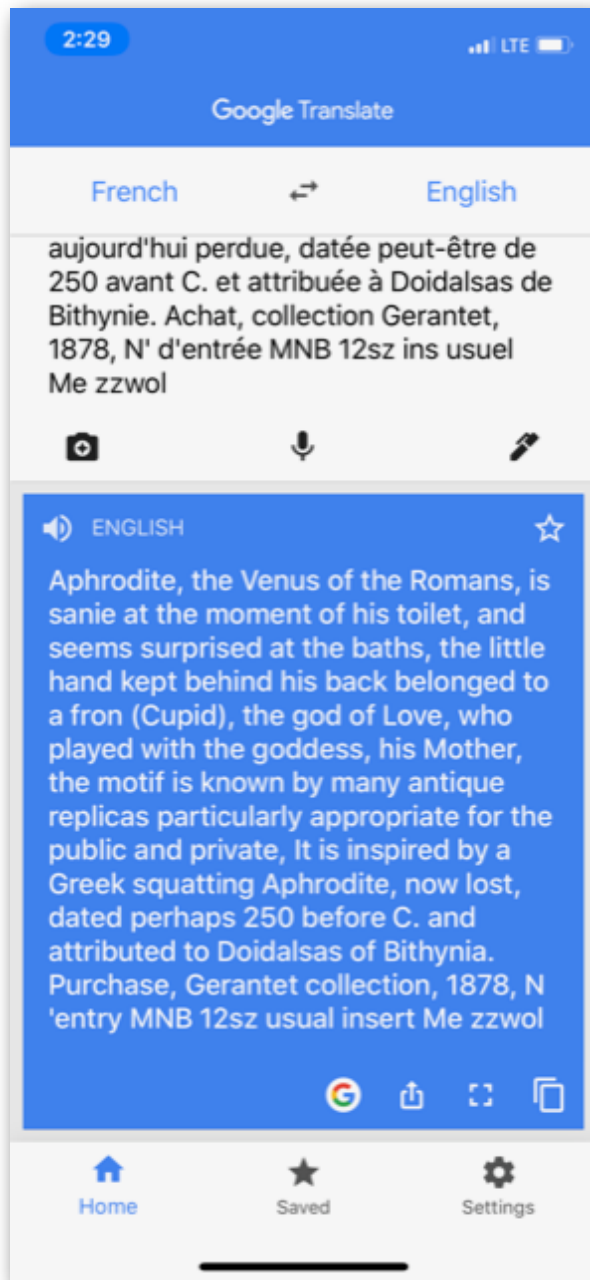


I would really like to know what the story was behind this creepy baby hand on this statue, but that would have required actually reading one of the signs:



Ok, there was some normal stuff in the Louvre too. Here's Athena to cleanse your palate.





Before we left for Paris I downloaded the Google Translate app, and the French dictionary for offline use. You point the camera at a sign, It scans the text, then you drag your finger across the part you want it to read to you. I thought it did rather a good job. Not that I read it of course, but the tech was cool.

But I liked things like this better. He is called "A Grotesque":





And then we saw the Mona Lisa:



This one made me smile:



Steve found Big Foot:



And then we went to the gift shop. I couldn't decide which of you deserved this postcard so I took a picture so you could all enjoy it. Hey, it's ART!





And another shot of the Mona Lisa:



Being nerds, we went downstairs in the Louvre where you can walk in the original moat and learned about how the castle that is now the Louvre was transformed over time. We loved it! But this scale model of the grounds was very upsetting. Do you see how the walls aren't parallel on the right hand side? Come on, trapezoidal buildings, and not even symmetrically trapezoidal, only on one side? You're killing me.



Did you know there's an Apple Store in the Louvre???



Most of you have had to endure our gushing on Facebook about how this was our actual 35th wedding anniversary. We went to Paris with Dean and Suzanne because when we first met them, they crashed our 20th wedding anniversary dinner. We'll have one last interlude of being precious about it. Here we are in front of the Louvre:





We walked home along the Seine. We've heard it suggested that the water level is quite high. I'll let you decide.



We went to Les Cocettes for a romantic dinner (with Dean and Suzanne). Chef Christian Constant made us amazing scallops, veal, lamb, prawns, and asparagus. Not too expensive either, so if you stop by Paris we can highly recommend it. An after-dinner drink at Alex's topped off the evening.

Steve says I have to behave and close out with one normal-looking photo so here we are inside one of the amazing rooms inside the Louvre:



Love to you all,  
Allison and Steve

## Day 6 - Petite Palais, Arc de Triomphe, American and Russian Cathedrals

I hope you all enjoyed the cultural detail I was able to provide you yesterday. We decided to walk to the Arc de Triomphe and stop at our whim along the way.

We tried to go into the Grand Palais, which has a huge glass structural roof. We didn't get to go inside because they were preparing for some sort of event in a few weeks. Well if the Grand Palais was too snooty for us, we'll go to the far inferior Petite Palais (that means little palace) across the street.



All we could find in the Petite Palais were original paintings by such hacks as Van Gogh, Cezanne, Picasso, and Monet. So that sucked.

In contrast to the swarms of people snapping cell phone photos of the Mona Lisa, the Holland Exhibition was filled with quiet, respectful people unable but also unconcerned about taking photos. Instead we read the signs and studied the paintings.

I'm not sure I was any more excited about Van Gogh and Monet than I was the Mona Lisa but there were styles and subjects to enthrall each of us.



Haven't seen many flowers but the gardens in the middle of the wee tiny palace were lovely:



We strolled along the Champs Élysées to get to that big arch. As Suzanne keeps saying, "We fancy!"



We thought of Robb Dunewood and Rod Simmons when we saw this:





The Arc looked really close when we first turned onto the Champs Elysées, but it seemed to take forever and we had to fortify ourselves with coffee and stroopwafels. Finally we arrived!



The friezes on the walls of the Arc are pretty crazy. From what we could discern from the kiddie video we enjoyed, the Arc was started by Napoleon I for his soldiers to return under in victory. He didn't get it done in time for his soldiers' return, but luckily other people got it done.





Remember how nimble we were on day one trotting up the Eiffel Tower? 20,000 steps a day is beginning to wear on us. Steve and Dean bought tickets to go to the top, and we ASSUMED there was an elevator. But no....it was 16 flights of stairs that we paid to climb.



After all (my) whining and complaining on the way up, we were delighted we'd made the effort. The view of the city was spectacular:





The Arc is located at what would be the axle of a giant wheel where each street goes out at spokes from that center. But when you take a panorama they all become parallel!



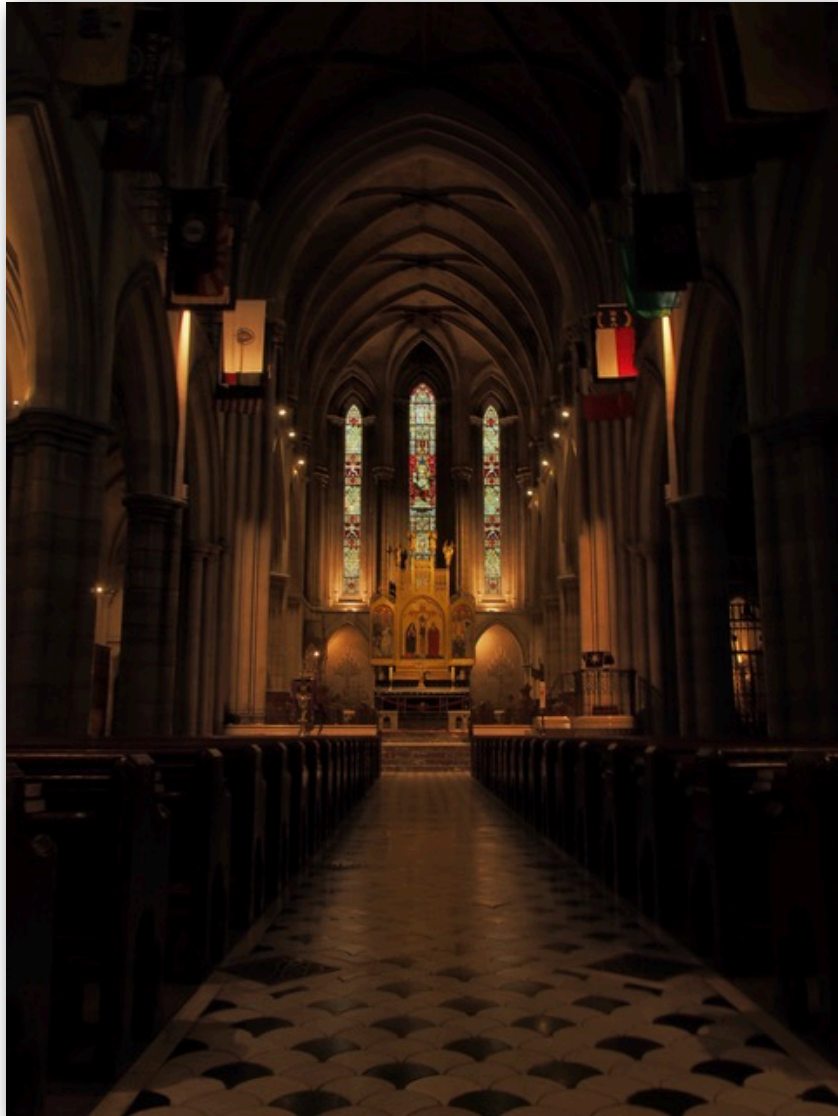
For those of you who like to play Where's Waldo, this is a picture of Montmartre, but if you look closely enough you can find Moulin Rouge and a windmill.



Got a spectacular shot of Dean and Suzanne from the top (for the photography nerds, I carried my 90mm equivalent portrait lens along for just this kind of photo):



On our way back to the apartment, we stopped into the American Cathedral of the Holy Trinity. There are flags up above for each of the states. (Again for photography nerds, 1 second, hand held, auto-HDR on the E-M5 Mark II.)



To be as cross-cultural as possible, we went into the Russian Orthodox Cathedral:





It was interesting inside, as we weren't actually allowed into the cathedral itself. Instead we were in front of a backdrop with beautiful music playing. It was really quite moving and yet oddly fake.



We stuffed ourselves to the gills at a place we call "The Camp-ground" and then waddled back home.



We went to be early so we'd be fresh for an early morning train to Lyon.

Not travel weary just yet,

Allison & Steve

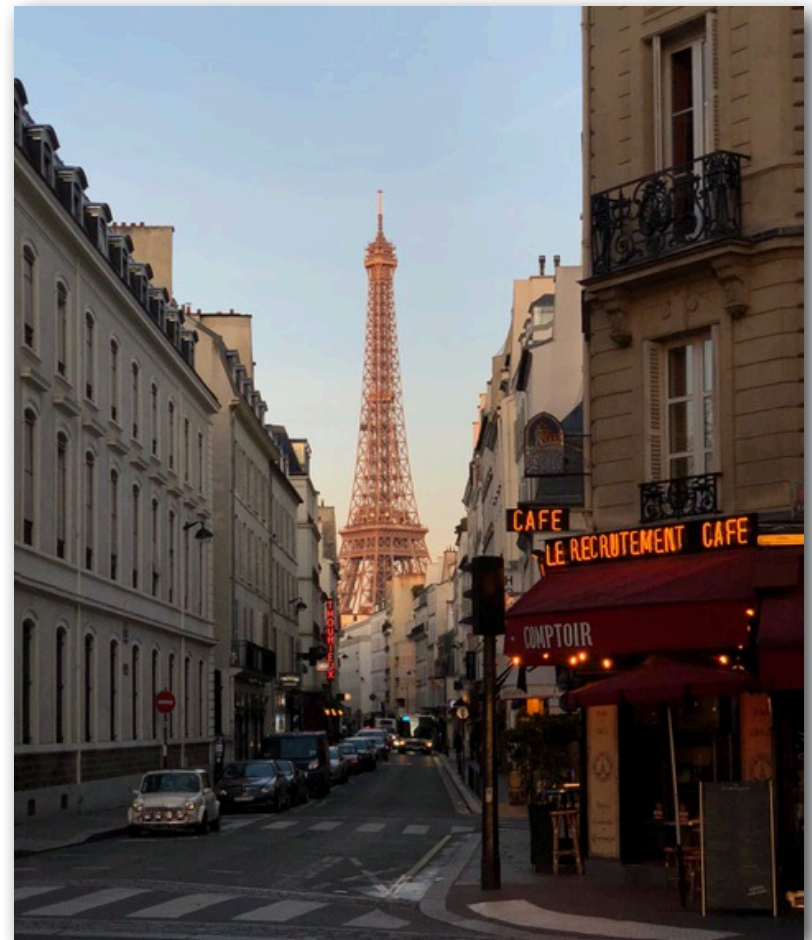
## Day 7 - Lyon Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière

We have become simply exhausted with the stress of touring Paris, so we filled up the dishwasher in our apartment on Rue Fabert, hit start, and took the bullet train to our country estate in Lyon.

Proof that we actually got up before the sun (once) on this trip.



You think  
we're kidding.





The bullet train was AMAZING. It was smooth, it was quiet, and it was fast! The screenshot below from "Le Wifi" shows we were going 287km per hour aka 178 miles per hour!



Our summer residence is owned by our dear friend Pat Dengler. It's a small house built by her great uncle in 1928 in the tiny town of Grézieu-la-Varenne just outside of Lyon. She has actually flown over here to help us tour Lyon along with her lovely cousins Yves and Christiane. When the cousins visited Los Angeles, we took them on a hike of the Hollywood Sign, so we're old friends.

They took us immediately on arrival to the Brasserie Georges, a fabulous brewery/restaurant built in 1836. Dean swooned when he saw piles of sauerkraut and sausages and potatoes.



Our Portuguese waiter had an amazing talent with carrying glasses:



Lyon has two major rivers, the Saône and the Rhône, which merge south of the city and become just the Rhône all the way to the Mediterranean. Here's the Pont Bonaparte (Pont = Bridge) over the Rhône:





In the top middle of the photo you can just see the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière, which is our destination. Steve's view of the bridge included me taking a photo:



And that began the death march uphill. I'm talking 137 beats per minute uphill.





On our way we passed through Roman ruins (as one does).  
The Theatre of Fourvière:



And a view of the French Alps:





And then the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière:



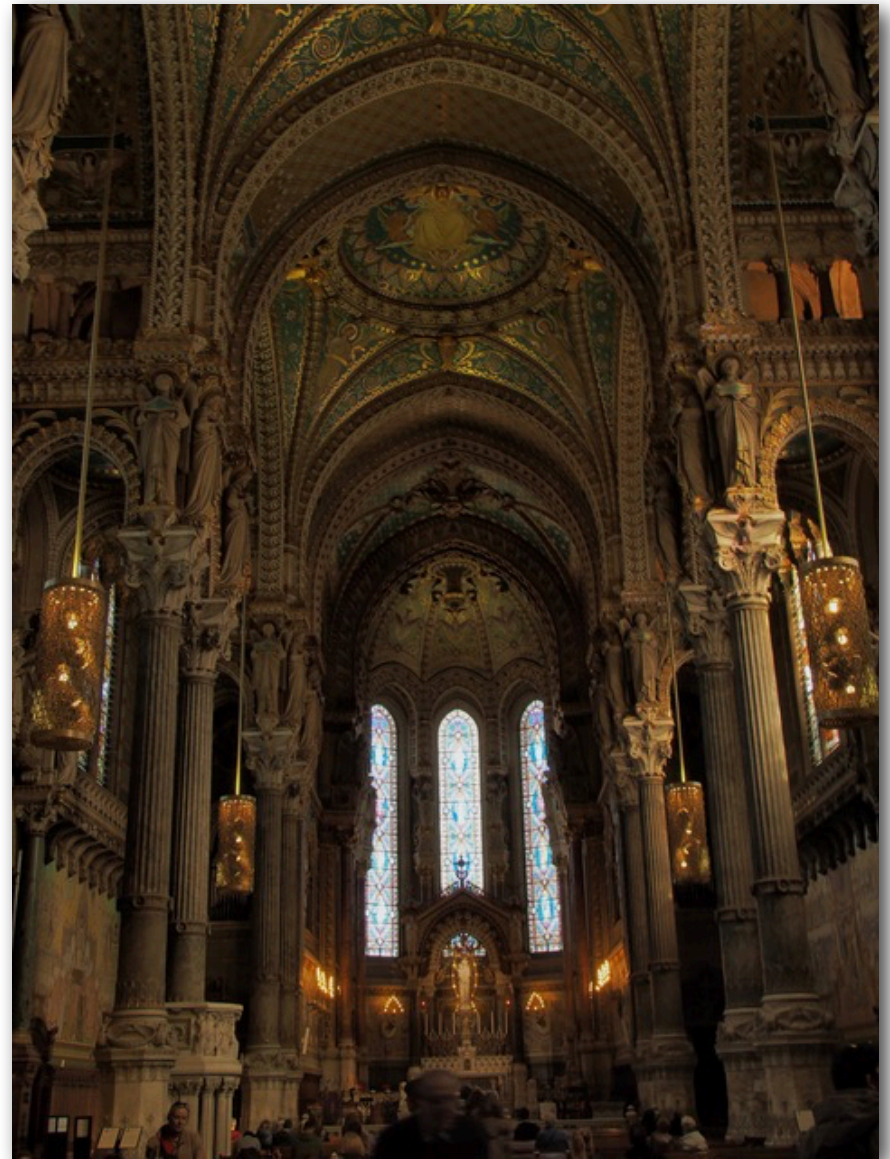
Too long since you've had a selfie you say? Pat is in the middle next to me, with Christiane in the red, and Yves behind me.



We were surprised to see the Eiffel Tower from here:



Inside the Basilica was breathtaking (I'm running out of adjectives about these churches!)





From up there we were treated to a clear view of Mont Blanc



(and learned why the pens are white on top).

One of my favorite things about the Basilica was the crosses on the four towers on the outside. Mostly because Pat explained that two of them are actually cell phone towers.





Steve captured this inspirational image of Pope John Paul II out front of the Basilica.



And then began our stumble down extremely steep stairs. Christiane explained that she didn't make us go UP these stairs as a gift to us. So we had taken the easy path. But then they told us people mountain bike down these steps and I didn't believe them. Till a young man came flying down them on a mountain bike right next to us (too quickly to capture a photo).





Proof that the water is really high in the rivers in France. This is the Saône walkway:



The French do nothing small, Lyon City Hall:



Our next trip into Lyon looks in a wee bit of danger of a smidgen of rain, wish us luck!



Until tomorrow,

Allison & Steve



## Day 8 - Lyon Tour & Confluence

I asked Dean to help me to get a funny start on this email and he said, "Use waffle or banana. Those are both funny words."

How's this: we had bananas at breakfast (along with ham and eggs a la Dean, and fresh bread from Pat) but we had no waffles today. Here's Dean making us said ham and eggs:



As we predicted from the weather report yesterday, a big storm passed through Lyon in the morning, with strong winds and pelting rain. But this didn't stop your intrepid travelers from braving the weather to go on a guided walking tour of the old city of Lyon.



Our guide Anne was soft spoken, which worried me at first, but then she passed out little radio receivers and headphones for us, and turned on her microphone on her transmitter and

we could easily hear her lilting French accent regaling us with tales of destroyed and rebuilt churches and more.

The area of old Lyon was built up (densified) by putting apartments in the gaps between buildings so that it was really hard to get around town. They left some passageways open, called Traboules.



There was a bunch of history stuff about tearing things down, building things up, blowing buildings up in wars and revolutions as well. Anne said that the holes in the stairs were to ventilate the area, but a small child once asked on a tour whether they were Traboules for the mice!





We met a lovely young man named Pierre from Marseilles who was on the tour with us, so we asked him to dine with us at the bouchon - a type of restaurant for "workers". Here's an artsy top view:



Instead of a group shot of the table (which never looks good of anyone, here's the whole crew in pairs.

Dean & Suzanne:



Pat & me:



Christiane and Pierre:





Steve and Yves:



Biere & Biere:



We found a statue dedicated to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry the author of the book *The Little Prince*. Here's the statue of him in his pilot's uniform, as he died in the service in World War II (and it was II, not I). You can see the Little Prince over his shoulder.



We passed a "Miniature Museum". Believe it or not, this photo is of a two foot cube. These are not life size! If you look closely you can see the reflection of my head in the glass.





After all this culture and history, it was obviously time to find the Lyon Apple Store. Bart will be angry to hear that there are TWO in Lyon (there are zero in the Republic of Ireland). We chose the one at the Confluence mall.



Confluence is the name for where the Saône and Rhône rivers turn into one, and the Rhône wins.



A swan put on a show for us:



The Musée de Confluence is spectacular - looks a lot like the Disney Hall in Los Angeles but it's a different architect.





And there was some bridge that looked cool with old barges in front of it. We shall call it Pont de Confluence.



Walking back we saw another upsetting building. Steve had a lot of trouble with the lack of pattern to the colors and window placement.



We went back to Pat's house for a fabulous dinner of fresh bread, brie, cheddar, thinly sliced salami, three kinds of chocolates and butter and jam and wine and beer.

And then we played cards till the wee hours. We taught Dean, Suzanne and Pat how to play Golf (thanks to the Tondees for teaching us the game, hope we got it right). And then I taught Suzanne how my dad played Gin Rummy. I made sure to teach her the appropriate phrases, such as, "I have a hand like a foot!"

Happily yours, Allison & Steve





# Day 9 - Grézieu la Varenne to Paris

Ok, I forgot the "Saint" part of the author of Le Petite Prince's name in the last letter. I might have had an extra "n" in his last name too. His name is actually Antoine de Saint-Exupery. I blame Suzanne, even though she DID tell me that. But still I blame her.

Remember I said we will call that bridge Pont Confluence? Well, I just made that up. That arced bridge near the confluence is actually Pont Pasteur. I heard he made some big news a while back about milk and such.

</end errata>

This day was much more laid back and relaxing than the whirlwind trip we've been on so far. Of course we started with the daily ritual of fresh bread and breakfast a la Dean (we're taking him home with us by the way).

At the brisk hour of 10:45am we set out on foot to walk the town of Grézieu la Varenne (the location of Pat's house). We started in her back yard (or garden as they say in these parts). She's got cherry blossoms blooming already (or at least that's what I'm calling them):



Pat's house from the garden:



We walked to the little church where Pat's parents were married - Église Saint-Roch. She explained that the parishes are so small that the priest has to travel between them, so Mass is only every month.





I liked the stone work out front...until I noticed the asymmetry.



By local standards, Église Saint-Roch is considered austere, and yet I still find it stunningly beautiful.



We couldn't get enough of the stained glass. Here's a closeup of one of them:



And Steve's favorite:





We walked the local cemetery looking for the oldest grave-stones. This one was dated 1820.



The bread had worn off by this time and we were feeling weak from our nearly 1 mile walk, so we went back to our favorite Grézieu la Varenne pizzeria, Robino.





It was time to say goodbye to Les Buissonnets (the name given to Pat's house, presumably by her great uncle when he built it in 1928).



Pat, Yves and Christiane were kind enough to take us all the way until we boarded the train. I'm not sure if they were worried that we couldn't navigate the station (true) or whether we'd change our minds and go back and never leave (also a distinct possibility!)

Bittersweet goodbye from the train:





And after a 290 mile high-speed train ride that took just 2 hours, we arrived back in Paris:



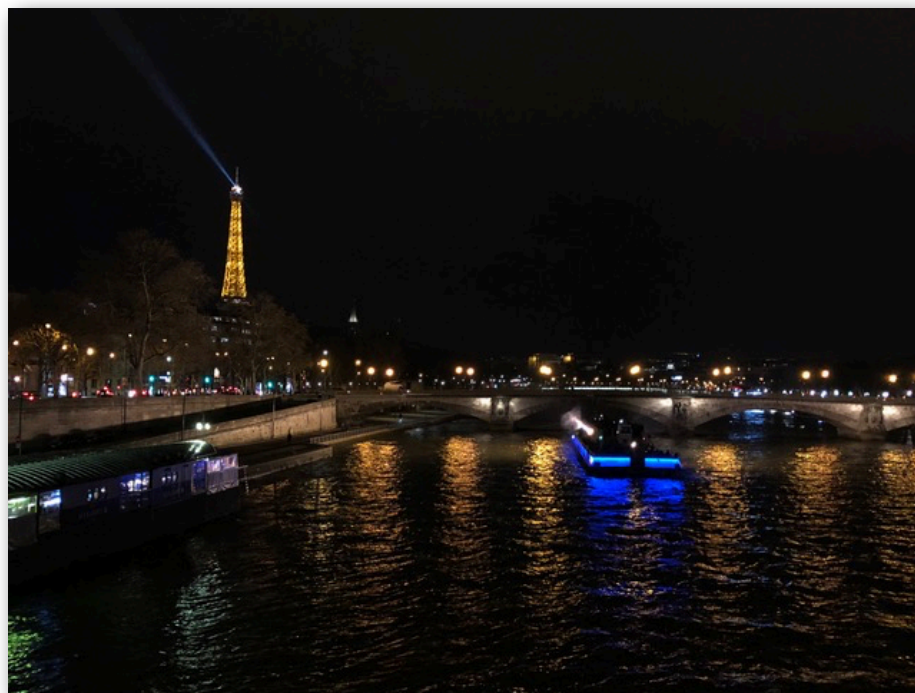
We had just the energy to go home, drop off our bags and go out for a very early dinner. Steve caught this awesome photo of the courtyard of our apartment as we arrived):



As promised, Alex had our table reserved for us:



We rounded out this relaxing day by walking down to the Seine in time to see the hourly sparkly lights of the Eiffel Tower reflected in the river.



Tomorrow Steve and I will part ways with Dean and Suzanne and take another high speed train. This time we're going to Brussels for a day trip to visit friends.

A bientôt,

Allison & Steve



# Day 10 - Brussels, Belgium

Can you believe we're on Day 10 and I haven't yet messed up the number? Ok, so I got the wars mixed up, got a totally wrong name for a bridge and forgot half the name of the author of Le Petite Prince, but at least the numbering is right!

## Errata #1

However, it has come to my attention by alert reader Namdar, that if the subject is masculine, you don't put an "e" at the end of the adjective. So the correct name of the book is Le Petit Prince. His 4 years of high school French stuck with him better than my 4 years of high school French.

## Errata #2

Pat says those weren't cherry blossoms, they were pomme japonais blossoms. She said they're a Japanese apple, or as Suzanne identified them, crab apples. How do you like them crab apples?

In a rare moment of independence, Steve and I left Dean and Suzanne and took a train ALL BY OURSELVES from Paris to Brussels!

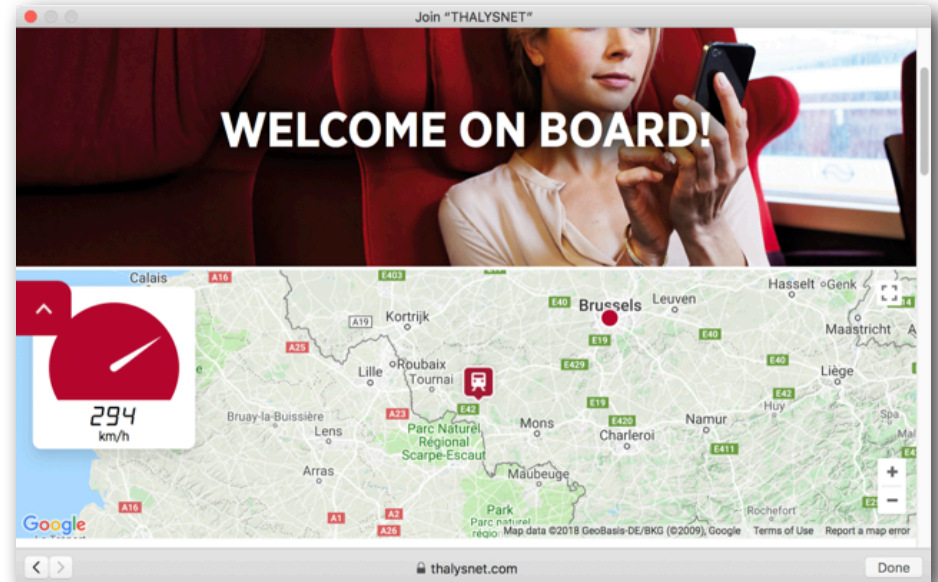
This all started when one of my Internet friends, Helma, pointed out that Paris was only a six hour drive from where she lives in Maastricht, Netherlands. We started discussing which one of us would be willing to drive that far, when she remembered that there's a high speed train from Paris to Brussels that only takes an hour and a half. Turns out Europe is much smaller than I realize and even smaller when you throw in the high speed trains. From the Netherlands to Brussels is only an hour and a half drive.

So then I remembered that Knightwise (our nutty Belgian friend) and his delightful wife Nyana live fairly close to Maastricht. I connected the three of them and they agreed to drive together to meet us. But if we're going to be in Belgium, we have to meet up with our friend Peter Boodts too. If these names are unfamiliar to you, you'll have to go back to the travelogue archives for England, Ireland and Belgium in 2010 when we met them all before!

Ok, too long without pictures! Suzanne and Dean were worried about our ability to navigate to Brussels on our own, so Suzanne planned the whole trip out for us telling us which train to get on where, and what time, so we rewarded them by sending them photos of every step of the way, like successful acquisition of an Uber, and when we arrived at Gare du Nord :



The high speed train was fabulous. I'm not sure I mentioned how fast these go. On the trains they have a thing where you can watch the speed. We never saw it top 300 km/hr so we think that might be the actual speed limit. Here it is showing 294, which is 183 miles/hour!





Knightwise decided to make our train trip a wee bit more interesting by suggesting they meet us at Brussels Centraal instead of Brussels Midi where our train stop was. When I said we did this all by ourselves, you knew I was lying right? Suzanne spent 45 minutes working on how we would make that change, and Helma also weighed in. Turns out there's a train leaving every 3 minutes from Brussels Midi to Centraal. The tricky bit is those trains all leave from different tracks! So the two women chose one for us and it actually worked flawlessly. We walked off of one train and onto another and in 3 more minutes we were greeted by our crazy friends.

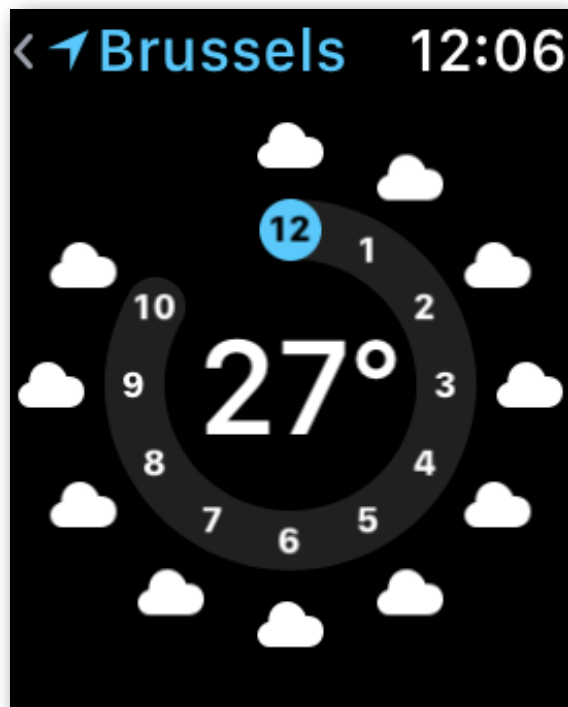


eter brought us chocolate bunnies and Helma brought us our favorites kinds of stroopwafels, AND she brought me a book on CSS! (It's a programming thing she and Bart are teaching me. I bet Dorothy steals the book from me though.)

They took us first to City Hall. This is NOT what City Hall looks like where we live.



It was FREEZING in Belgium. Now when a Californian tells you it's freezing, you need to take that with a grain of salt. We often say that when the temps dip into the low 60s. But in this case I can prove it - here's a screenshot from my Apple Watch! This is not Celsius!



We had brought coats and gloves and scarves and were wearing 3 layers of clothes, but it immediately became apparent that with snow on the ground we also need hats! Helma bought her and me warm and fuzzy hats - and Steve finally got himself the "newsboy's cap" he's been looking for. I think he looks pretty awesome in it.





During a podcast recording with Bart one time, he mentioned Tin Tin. I had no idea what he was talking about and Helma thought that was hilarious. She laughs at me a lot. She wanted me to include this photo for Bart of us posing in front of Tin Tin figures:



When first met Knightwise (through the Internet) we found his sense of humor...unique. He's often inappropriate but in a delightfully playful way. We discovered on this trip that Knightwise might not be as unique as we thought, we think it might be a characteristic of Belgians. Let me explain.

In the middle of a main square in Brussels, there is a statue of a little boy peeing in a fountain. Ok, a little weird, but it's one of main attractions of the city. On holidays, they dress him up. You can't actually see him very well because he's dressed in Saint Patrick's Day garb.





Don't worry though, everywhere you go you see figurines of this ridiculous statue.

Mannekin-Pis chocolate:



Mannekin-Pis advertising ice cream:





Mannekin-pis, well, peeing in a bucket outside a store for no reason.



Mannekin-Pis figurines. Knightwise bought me one of the little ones...so I could remember him.



That's probably enough Mannekin-Pis statues (but if you want more let me know, because I have more pictures.)



We stopped by the King of Belgium's house, but it's not where he actually lives.



Helma found a snowman!





It was obviously well past time to visit the Brussels Apple Store!



I discovered when I asked Knightwise to take this photo that you should NEVER ask Knightwise to take a picture.

Here's what else was on my camera role when I got it back:



There were SIX photos like that.

And the obvious photo...



Another cold pic! That tower you see is the City Hall building we showed you at the beginning of the letter. I know, we only walked around 7 miles and 15K steps so it wasn't as far as usual for me. Sorry about that.





When Steve and I got up at 6am, it was too early for the bread places to be open. We were worried about how we would eat. We should not have been concerned:

- We got croissants at the train station that were better than any we have ever had in the US.
- Then on the train...they fed us again, with pastries and yogurt and meats and fruit. I ate the pastries.
- When we arrived, Knightwise suggested that we have coffee...and pastries! Who were we to say no?
- We walked for a while and were super cold, so Knightwise ducked into another place and Steve said all he wanted was soup! Well, we had soup...and bacon bread...and more coffee.
- We got to the train station too early, so...there was a Godiva shop right there...so what else could we do but go in and have salty hot chocolate and pralines?
- Believe it or not, when we got on the train to go home, they offered us dinner! So we declined in a moment of madness. We did have wine though.
- Luckily when we got back to the apartment, Dean and Suzanne had laid out a fabulous spread of bread, brie, gouda, apples, and cherries. I hope my digestive system won't be confused by the fruit.

But I have actually skipped one meal. Somewhere towards the end of this food-fest of a day, Peter announced that you haven't really been to Belgium if you haven't eaten a waffle off of a waffle truck. So...when in Belgium:





And there, I have successfully worked the funny word waffle into one of my emails.

Fatly yours,

Allison and Steve

p.s. Dean and Suzanne went to Moulin Rouge in a snowy rain-storm:





# Day 11 - Catacombs AKA The Day Was Saved by Bourbon

Today was not exactly the best day we've had in Paris. We'd been told that The Catacombs were pretty interesting and worth a visit. This may be a true statement but it wasn't quite our experience.

We got up early (7:00!) and drank a quick cup of coffee while feasting on the gevulde koeken Helma brought us. I know Linda will want to know what they are and how to make them. They're a pastry made with almond paste in the middle and I THINK a smidge of sugar and butter is involved. Here's the recipe Helma sent me: <http://bit.ly/2GGB4s8>

We should have known it was going to be a tough day when we went outside to find snow:



Pat told us to get in line an hour before they opened at 10, but we didn't get there till 9:40am. We read online that they would let 200 people in at a time, and it looked touch and go on the size of the line whether we would be in the first group.

They lied about 200 people at a time. Near as we can figure, they took in 4 to 6 at a time. It was 30 degrees outside. It was snowing. And we stood in line for 2.5 hours! It didn't matter that we had 3 layers on, hats, gloves, boots and scarves...our feet were positively frozen. It was pretty miserable. Suzanne and I trying to look brave while freezing:





I'm sure I'll get a few facts wrong here, but the Catacombs are where the French decided to move all of the bones from the local cemeteries, starting in the 1700s or so. From what I remember, the cemeteries were a public health hazard because they had so many bodies over the centuries, they decided to move them all to the same place.

Luckily they had a giant quarry underneath the city where they'd gotten the limestone from the ancient Lutetian era to build such structures as Notre Dame.

They fetched these bones and stacked them and stacked them and stacked them.



Evidently the workers got bored, so they got more creative with how they stacked the bones over time.





It was obviously eery but in some ways beautiful.



We showed you us at the top of the Eiffel Tower, and the top of the Arc du Triomphe, how about at the bottom of the Catacombs?





As cold as we were, we pretty much strolled through as fast as we could because we REALLY needed some warmth.

Dean found us a great restaurant with warm comfort food, but we still had to leave there and again brave the cold. It was only around 1pm so we figured we could squeeze in the Musée d'Orsay. Our last day is Monday and it was Sunday so it was our last chance.

But when we got to the Musée d'Orsay, we saw a HUUUUUGE line of people freezing to death outside. There was no way we were going to be able to stand in that line. So we'll never see Whistler's Mother (Drew says it's on the third floor), but here's what it looks like on the outside.



Did you notice the title of the email? This is when things finally took a turn for the better. We walked (as fast as we could to heat ourselves up) towards the apartment, and we came across a spectacular square which contained the Assemblée Nationale - Palais Bourbon. Remember that name...



Steve captured a 360 photo of the square. These images look really cool on Facebook, because you can rotate your phone around and feel like you're there. But they look really weird in 2D, but you can see us having fun.



We raced as fast as we could to go get food (bread and brie and wine and chocolate éclairs, because I'm channeling my inner Heather). Our plan was to hunker down at 3pm in the apartment.

But I am VERY susceptible to suggestion. Remember the name of the square? I announced that I needed bourbon. I walked across the street and into Bar du Central and ordered a bourbon. The others had no choice but to follow along with my strategy.





Suzanne announced that "Bourbon saved the day." I think she's right!

I try not to do any video, but here I must violate my rule. Here's a 9 second video of the snow gently falling outside the window as we listen to Ed Sheeran and finally relax, nice and warm.

We're warm and happy and planning an evening of cards.

Bourbon saved the day,

Allison & Steve



I try not to do any video, but here I must violate my rule. Here's a 9 second video of the snow gently falling outside the window as we listen to Ed Sheeran and finally relax, nice and warm.

## Day 12 - Last Day in Paris

Yesterday wasn't our favorite day what with the freezing cold part trying to see the Catacombs, but we made the best of the evening by playing many rousing card games of Golf. We have been teaching Dean and Suzanne to play...evidently significantly incorrectly from a scoring perspective. Normally I would ask Lindsay and Nolan and Teri about the rules, but they've been irresponsibly asleep at 3 or 4 in the morning when I want to ask them about it. So we made the rules up on our own.

Dean and Steve made it out into the morning frigid air to bring us our coffee and croissants. They were rewarded for their chivalry with this spectacular view of the Hotel Invalides (where Napoleon is buried):

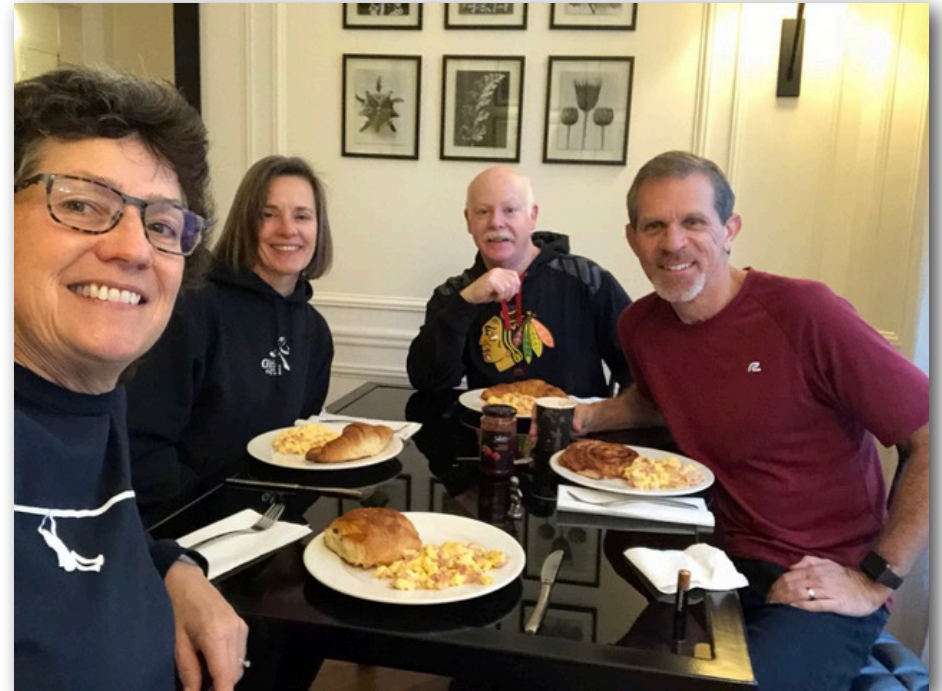




Even the bikes were covered in snow.



When they returned, we had "Breakfast a la Dean":



But we had nothing to DO today. We looked at the Musée d'Orsay but it's closed on Monday as are many of the rides in Paris. It's not the worst thing in the world to stay in your jammies all day playing Golf with your friends, but it seemed a bit of a waste.

Suzanne and I decided to go outside for a walk, just to see the snow and move around a little bit. When we stepped out of our front door, there was a HUGE equestrian military parade going right in front of the doorstep of our apartment!



Around this time it occurred to us that perhaps the boys might be interested in the spectacular event. I tried texting Steve on one service, then on another, and then finally I remembered that I have an international phone number and I knew the number of the apartment, so I called the boys. Dean answered, and I said, "GET OUTSIDE RIGHT AWAY - YOU'RE GOING TO WANT TO SEE THIS!!!"

The horses stopped in front of the Hotel Invalides (everyone sing now, that's where Napoleon is buried). This guy knew he was pretty and posed for me perfectly:





But to be honest, his horse was even prettier:



Suzanne had noticed a few days ago that there were barricades being put up along the roads near our apartment. She had also noticed that they had put up flags along the walkway up to the Hotel Invalides monument. She noted that every other flag was the French flag, but wondered what country was represented by the alternate flag.

I asked one of the gendarmes, "quesqui s'est pas?" One of the very few phrases that have come to me naturally since I've been here. It roughly means, "what's going on?" She explained that it was a military ceremony to escort the head of

Luxembourg into Paris! Steve looked it up online and learned that it was the Grand Duke Henri and Grand Duchess Maria Teresa of Luxembourg. It has been forty years since they did a state visit to France!

Now we know that the second flag was the flag for Luxembourg.

After a long time waiting and watching the horses stomp around being quite cold (I felt badly for them but worse for the guys holding giant freezing metal tubas!), the proceedings began. Across the center marched three white horses (the French ones were brown), and we're pretty sure these are the Luxembourg representatives:





I'm not sure who the guys were with black horses but they were pretty cool looking against the snow:



And then these guys started waving their swords around:





I promise, last horsey picture. I finally got a closeup of some of the horsemen only to discover that there are women in there too!



So remember how when I called Dean and Steve, I basically did my impression of the Precog Agatha in *Minority Report* when she yells to Tom Cruise, "RUUUUNNNNNN"? Well, Dean took me seriously. Turns out he ran out in his pajamas and slippers!



When I realized that, I thought it would be funny to make the boys (especially Dean) go out in the snow and stage a snowball fight so I could make a slo-mo video of their battle. Sadly they decided to throw them at ME. Steve said his only regret on the whole trip was that he didn't hit me with that snowball. Dean wants me to point out that he DID hit me, but you look at the snowball trajectories...



After all that excitement we were really happy that we hadn't planned anything for the day. Paris gave us a gift we'll never forget.

So now it was ok to turn up the heater and play Golf most of the afternoon!

After several hours of such relaxation Suzanne and I went into town and went shopping for sexy French lingerie, as one does! Later on Suzanne pointed out that technically we bought sexy Italian lingerie while in Paris, but I think it still counts.





We met up with Dean on our walk back and stumbled across the Eiffel Tower (it crops up all the time!



While Suzanne had been our spirit guide on all other adventures, I took it into my own hands to find a restaurant for our final dinner. I found Le Recamier listed on Conde Nast's list of 50 Best Restaurants in Paris, sorted by arrondissement (which means neighborhood, and they're helpfully numbered). Le Recamier is known for their soufflés. The boys asked me what a soufflé was and I told them they were like chicken pot pies (they bought it).

The temperatures continued to be below freezing - here's the boys all bundled up in matching coats, scarves, hats, and ear muffs:



I really truly dislike photos of food, but sometimes you have to make an exception (I'm sure you'll give me a hard time for this, Tom). The soufflés were unlike any chicken pot pie I've ever had. Absolutely the very best meal we had in the two week trip.



Happy last supper:





As we walked the mile and a half home to our apartment, we were treated to a lit up Hotel Invalides (who's buried there again?) and the Eiffel Tower yet again.



Sated and filled with joy,  
Allison & Steve

P.S. I saw this weird thing in a store window on our walk home.

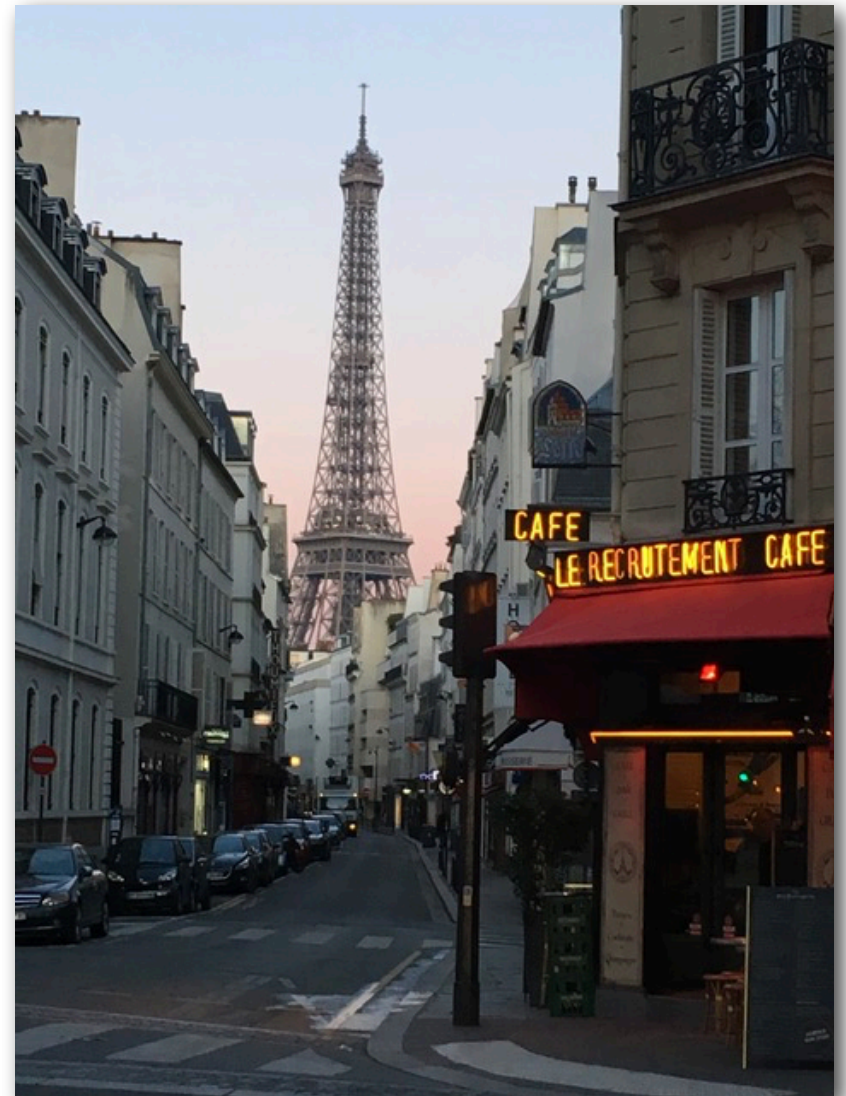


# Day 1 - Finis

Remember on the way out how we lost day 1 because of flying through the night and changing time zones? Alert reader Devon explained that on our way back, we would regain that day and so for completeness, this final installment is entitled Day 1.

We got up at 5:30 am so Dean could make us smoked salmon/cream cheese/capers sandwiches for breakfast.

Dean dashed down around the corner to get one last shot of the Eiffel Tower (with Alex's restaurant in the foreground. Did you notice they got a new awning yesterday?)





ou may have strong feelings (positive or negative) about the company Uber as a ride-sharing service, but we found it to be a great way to travel when time was of the essence in Paris. (They don't have Lyft yet in Paris or I'd have chosen that service). The apartment manager promised to arrange a taxi for our early morning departure but as of the day before we left he hadn't done it, and then it wasn't clear whether he had or not, so Uber it was.

For 80 euro we were able to order a giant Mercedes van to take all four of us and our 7 pieces of luggage (plus backpacks) to the airport. It was luxurious leather on the interior and even had seats facing each other so we had a little party on the way to the airport.

Dean has been working on his photography skills during the trip but he might have a wee bit more work to do. Just tell him it's a great picture to encourage his efforts, ok?



We said our tearful goodbyes as we undertook various international flights that will get us home late tonite, around 24 hours after we wake up. To say I feel like a vegetable as I write this is an exaggeration of my mental skill level!

I wanted to end this year's travelogue with some thoughts about what it's like being with Dean and Suzanne for two weeks.

- Suzanne does your laundry (seriously, she's the laundry fairy, did our laundry TWICE)
- Suzanne is a wizard at reading metro lines and planning the trips
- Suzanne can memorize all dates, times, street names and train stations the first time she hears/reads them.
- Suzanne does the dishes when you're not fast enough
- Suzanne cuts up fruit to stave off scurvy from us living on a diet of pastries
- Dean makes eggs and opens doors and fetches coffee

There aren't that many people with whom we'd love to travel for an extended time than Dean and Suzanne. And even fewer who'd put up with us. It might be that we let them win at Golf.

We'll close out with a final selfie of our flight home:



I hope you've enjoyed our travelogue and lived vicariously through our silliness,

Jet lagged but happy,

Allison & Steve



P.S. The only bad thing about Paris was that I didn't have popcorn. So that's the first thing I made when we got home.

