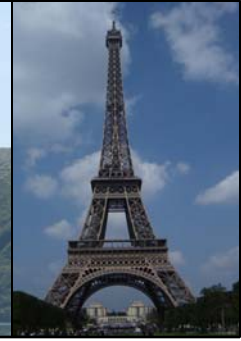




BURT WOLF

TRAVELS & TRADITIONS

CRUISING FRANCE



In 1991, a French archaeological team working on the banks of the Seine River in the middle of Paris discovered three dugout canoes that proved to be 6,500 years old. The canoes belonged to a Neolithic tribe of hunter-gathers. So it seems that people have been hanging out in this neighborhood for at least 7,000 years.

About a mile up stream from the spot where the canoes were found is an island in the middle of the river. Around 300 BC, a Celtic tribe known as the *Parisii* set up a trading post on this island. It was the perfect spot for a settlement. The river was used for east-west trade, and a north-south land route passed over the island. Once again, the spot where a land route crossed a river became the point of origin for a great European city. The ancient Romans saw the value of the location and developed the island into a typical Roman outpost. Today, it's called the Ile De La Cite and it's one of the best neighborhoods in Paris. It is also



the starting point for my tour and river cruise from Paris to Lyon in the middle of France. The eastern half of the Ile De La Cite is home to the cathedral of Notre Dame. Construction on the cathedral started in 1163 and went on for almost 200 years. At the time, most people could not read, so the builders used the front of the cathedral as a giant billboard to illustrate stories from the bible. In the middle is the Last Judgment and the Resurrection.

In the year 250, St. Denis, a Christian missionary and the first bishop of Paris, was beheaded on this hilltop. Legend has it that he picked up his head, and took 6,000 steps to the spot where he wanted to be buried. The hill became known as Mons Martyrum, which means the martyr's mound. These days the area is known as Montmartre and it's the highest point in

Paris. During the last decades of the 1800s and early 1900s, Montmartre was the favorite district for artists and the place where Impressionism and Cubism were born. This was the neighborhood of Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Picasso. It was, and still is the home of the Moulin Rouge and its traditional Parisian cancan show.

In 1896, the Moulin hosted the annual Paris Arts Student's Ball, during which the first all-nude striptease was presented. The model who unveiled this new art form was arrested and taken to jail at which point the citizens of Montmartre rioted. It appears that the right to undress completely in an appropriate public space is a basic French liberty and not to be interfered with. And so she was released.

Another revolutionary triumph for French freedom that made my list of top ten tourist sites in Paris is The Arc De Triomphe. It was commissioned in 1809 by Napoleon in order to illustrate his most important military triumphs and its size was meant to match the dimensions of his ego. It lists 128 major battles which are richly illustrated, and the names of his 660 favorite generals who took part in those battles.



I hear that his personal recipe for the cream filling that goes into a Napoleon pastry is inscribed on the monument, but up to now, no one has been able to find it. Actually, it's not so easy to find a Napoleon pastry in Paris. However, right down the block from Napoleon's Tomb is Le Boulanger, a pastry shop that opened in 1901



and has been making great cakes, pastries and breads ever since.

Now most pastry shops offer a dessert called a *millefeuille*, it's French for a thousand leaves. Same pastry cream as a

Napoleon. Same pastry dough as a Napoleon. But on a *millefeuille* the top is powdered sugar.



The top of a Napoleon however has icing with a brown "N" on a white background. The "N" stands for Napoleon.

But when Napoleon lost at Waterloo, the pastry chefs of Paris decided to keep the pastry but drop his initial from the top. You know this is a tough town and your pastry is only as good as your last battle.

The Eiffel Tower was built as the entrance way to the international exposition of 1889, which celebrated the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution. And its design was quite revolutionary.

The French government held a competition and over 100 plans were submitted to the committee. The government was looking for a monument that expressed their sense of achievement.



The winning design was presented by Gustave Eiffel, who until that time was considered to be a talented bridge engineer. His idea was to construct a 1,000 foot tower made of open-lattice wrought iron. The plan was to keep it up for only a few years. But with the high cost of taking it down, and the fun that everyone was having going up, it's still

here.

Until 1930 when it was surpassed by the Chrysler Building in New York City it was the tallest structure on earth. These days, it's the best place to get the ultimate view of Paris.

Next stop, the Musee D'Orsay. The Gare D'Orsay was a train station built for the 1900 World's Fair. By the early 1950s, however, its platforms were too short for modern trains and the building was scheduled for demolition. But the President of France, Giscard d'Estaing, understood the value of the structure and turned it into a national museum. A museum filled with works of the great French Impressionists.

French Impressionism got started in the late 1800s and early 1900s when a group of painters in Paris got fed up with the traditional subjects of French painting. They'd had enough of religion and mythology and history, they wanted something new.

During the late 1860s, Claude Monet began

concentrating on the effects of light and color. The subject matter of the painting, the depth and the perspective became less important. Surface pattern became more important. The Impressionists did all of their painting outside while looking at their subject as opposed to the conventional practice of painting in a studio.



Today the Musee D'Orsay presents the works of the Impressionists and the Post-Impressionists including Monet, Manet, Pissarro, Degas, Cezanne, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec and Van Gogh---artists who freed Western painting from thousands of years of tradition.

And let's not forget the Louvre---the largest museum in the world and probably the most famous. You could easily spend five years working your way through the main collections.

BEAUNE

The next day we headed south past the forests of Fontainebleau, which were the favorite hunting grounds of the French kings, and into the Burgundian city of Beaune.

People have been living in Beaune since prehistoric times. For centuries it belonged to the ancient Romans and was a center for cattle raising and the production of wine. For many years it was the home of the Dukes of Burgundy who were more powerful than the



King of France, until 1478 when the King invaded and made it part of France. Today, Beaune is the wine capital of Burgundy and much of its economy is based on the production and sale of wine --- so you owe yourself a drink.

The most famous landmark in town is the Hotel-Dieu. During the 1400s, Nicolas Rolin was the Chancellor to the Dukes of Burgundy and one of the most powerful men in Europe.

Things were good for Nicolas, but not for everybody. The Hundred Year's War had just ended, and there were bands of soldiers wandering around the countryside destroying everything and everybody they could get their hands on. A plague had just begun and ninety percent of the people in Beaune were destitute. But Nicholas saw an opportunity in

all of this, he thought he might be able to do well by doing good. He was a bit concerned about the things that he had done to become the great Lord of Burgundy and how they might look on his application to get into heaven.



So Nicholas built a great hospital. A magnificent palace. A place that has become famous throughout the world. And that fame was central to his plan. Rolin figured

that if someone "upstairs" noticed what he had done it might reduce the impact of his sins and improve his overall standing with the Almighty. This was not an uncommon practice at the time. Celestial favors were a big business and this arrangement in no way diminished the magnificence of his charity.

Much of the art created for the Hospices was commissioned by Rolin in order to distract the minds of the patients from their own condition and redirect their thoughts to prayer and requests for God's forgiveness. Well, let me tell you... lying in bed in a hospital and looking at the detail of the Last Judgment could certainly do that.

When the well-to-do were well enough to leave, they would make a generous gift. Sometimes it was money. Money was good. Sometimes it was land. And in 1471, for the first time, it was a vineyard.



Wine was thought of as a health-giving liquid. Water was often dangerously polluted and considered something that could kill you. So donating a vineyard was a great step in the right direction. The Hospices could use the grapes to make wine... give some of it to the patients... and sell the rest for money. And they could do that year after year after year. The gift of a vineyard was a gift that kept on giving.

Over the centuries many more vineyards were donated. Today the Hospices has holdings on over 50 estates, and they are on some of Burgundy's best land. Each year grapes are gathered from the hillside and employees of the Hospices make the official Hospices wine.

On the third Sunday in November, the result of these

winemaking activities are sold at the world's largest charity wine auction. Buyers come from all over the world to bid and many millions of dollars are raised to cover the upkeep of the Hospices.

TOURNUS & MACON

The next morning we visited the Chateau De Cormatin. It was built in the early 1600s as the private residence of the Marquis d'Huxells, who had the brilliant insight to marry the daughter of the Count de Monee who was the Finance Minister of King Louis the XIII.



Most of the Chateaux that were put up during this period were vacation homes for the Parisian nobility--- nice "little" places so you could get away from it all. They had "rustic" fireplaces. "Old fashioned" wooden ceilings. Lots of paintings --- probably done by the kids in school. A country

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kitchen. A place for the little things you collected as you traveled around. A few extra bedrooms in case you wanted to invite two or three hundred of your closest friends for the weekend. And pleasant little gardens where you could grow a few herbs or vegetables or flowers. Or plant your own forest. The simple life.

That afternoon we arrived in Macon and took a walk around the town. We also visited St. Vincent's Cathedral which was built during the 6th century. But about 1100 years later, during the French Revolution, local citizens decided that they had a better use for the stones than a church, so these days there isn't much left of the old cathedral.

That's the oldest house in the city. It was built in the 1400s. And because there's a row of figures on it that appear to be half man, half animal, it was thought to be owned by the devil and when you walked by it you weren't supposed to look at it. But recent research indicates that those are just naked guys hanging out in a bar. So if you want to look at it you can.



Macon is the southernmost wine town in Burgundy. The wines that come from this area are usually light, uncomplicated, easy to drink and a good value for their price. Pouilly-Fuisse is the most famous and most expensive wine of Macon.

But I'd just as soon drink the Macon-Village --- considerably less expensive. Great taste and because the wines of Macon are not aged in oak they are ready to drink when they are released. And I'm ready.

LYON

The next morning we sailed to the city of Lyon which was founded by the ancient Romans in 43 BC. They developed their settlement on a peninsula formed by the meeting point of two great rivers --- the Rhône and the Saône.

The hill above the city is called the Fourviere --- probably a contraction of "Forum Vetus" which is Latin for Old Forum. On the top is the church of Notre Dame. It was built in the 1870s. It's a little flashy for some of the local residents who refer to it as the upturned elephant because of the four short towers that stick up from the corners.

Even though the subject matter is the Virgin Mary, the mosaic-covered walls and floors give the inside of the

building a Moorish quality. It has become a major pilgrimage site with over a million visitors each year.

Right down the street is the excavation of two ancient Roman theatres. They were discovered during the 1930s by a group of nuns digging a garden.

The larger theater was constructed in 15BC and had over 10,000 seats. If you got to perform here, it was considered an important booking for your act and a tribute to your agent's power and influence. It was like playing the big room in Vegas.



Even today, the theatres are used to present special events. These giant Roman amphitheatres are the earliest Roman structures outside of Rome.

At the base of the amphitheater's hill is Lyon's Old Town. During the 1400s, King Louis XI of France granted Lyon the right to hold commercial fairs that brought in buyers and sellers from all over Europe. Many of the merchants who took up residence in Lyon were from Italy and the buildings have a similar look to the buildings that were constructed during the same time in Florence. In fact, Lyon's Old Town has one of the largest collections of Renaissance buildings and has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



The word Renaissance literally mean rebirth and in the arts it's reference to a period in European culture that followed the

Middle Ages. It was characterized by an interest in the classical knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome. In architecture the objective was to re-create the ancient classical structures of Rome. Harmony, balance and proportion were the essential elements.

At the beginning of the 1800s, Lyon was considered to be the silk capital of Europe. Over half the population of the city was involved in the weaving and dying of silk. The weavers were



Cruising France

known as *canuts* and today La Maison des Canuts is a museum dedicated to the history of Lyon's silk industry.

A guided tour covers the history of the textile industry in Lyon, the invention of the jacquard loom which revolutionized textile weaving and how the industry is evolving in the 21st century. In addition, the museum has a gift shop with great silk scarves and fabulous ties.



Lyon also has a unique architectural feature --- known as *traboules*, they are narrow covered alleys that were designed as private connections between the great family mansions. They were originally used to transport the delicate fabrics between the different producers and the dyers, and to allow private visits between the families. During the Second World War they were conduits for the French Resistance. The residents of Lyon knew the network --- the Nazi's didn't.

Today the *traboules* are still private but agreements between the owners and the Lyon Tourist Association make them available to visitors.

Many people say this is the town that invented modern French cuisine. Chef Paul Bocuse reinvented it in the 1970s. We sampled some of the signature dishes at Brassiere Le Nord.

For starters, a chicken liver and foie gras mousse, roasted beet salad and a puree of cod and potatoes. The main courses were pan roasted chicken, steak in a pepper sauce and whatever the daily special is. Today it's saddle of lamb. For dessert, a fresh fig and raspberry tart and a pineapple upside down cake with coconut ice cream.



That evening we returned to our boat for a private performance by The Gypsy Kings. The Gypsy Kings are a musical group who perform Rumba Gitano music which is a blend of rumba, rhythms and flamenco. Their first album was released in 1987 and since then they have sold over 18 million albums. They're the world's best selling musical group from France.

It was a great concert and a perfect way to end our cruise.

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