



FRANCE · JEREMY & KATE · 2026

FRANCE

· 2026 ·

Jeremy
& Kate

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OVERNIGHT FLIGHT: MAY 5TH - MAY 6TH
Direct flight from Chicago to Paris



We drove down to Oak Brook and stored our car at my Mom's neighbor's house.



Jeremy forgot his airplane pillow device and improvised this.



Jeremy had packed his carry-on with brown sugar and brownie mix for Aunt Bev, so of course he got an extra thorough TSA inspection. 🙄



We flew with Jeremy's sister, Carrie, Scott, Ira (2 years), and baby Audra (5 months).



The kids were so quiet on the flight! Although Audra didn't like the bassinet very much because with its lid, it was more like a small drawer.



We had the bulkhead row so we had plenty of leg room. I took some benadryl and slept fitfully.



You have to get fingerprinted on the way into Europe now. We got to go in the with-kids line, and the wait wasn't very long at all!



After retrieving our luggage, we parted ways with Carrie & Scott, who got a taxi to a Paris hotel to rest.

You can buy a special train ticket to get from the airport to downtown Paris for €14 on your phone or from on-site machines. It includes an RER ride and a metro ride.



From Gare Montparnasse in Paris, it's a €42 train to Angers.



Finding the correct train is a little tricky (there are hall #s, platform #s, and train #s), so it's good to leave some buffer time. Our plane landed at 9:20am, and we had pre-purchased tickets for the TGV train for 1:24pm, which worked well.



It's a 1hr 45min train ride from Paris to Angers. We got tickets on the second level in first class and it was very comfortable and civilized. The train goes 200 mph! You just carry your luggage on board yourself, and our seats were near a luggage rack.



And then we picked up our rental car in Angers! It was a Renault Espace from Avis, which we booked though Auto Europe. Everything went great with the rental car except we had a hard time finding the return location in Bordeaux, see p83.



Source: Gnous Sette

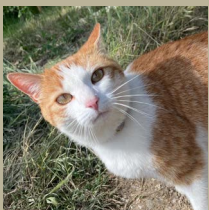
MONTILLIERS, 45 MIN DRIVE SOUTH OF ANGERS

La Gaucherie aux Dames

Jeremy's **Aunt Bev** and **Uncle Olivier** bought this farm in 2000 and remodeled it into a guest house (a gîte). Some buildings were originally built in the 1200s, and include some good-luck human bones. There is a moat, and fields with sheep, cows, and horses.

Anna & Nicolas's Wedding

Jeremy's cousin was having her wedding on her family farm, and many of Anna's American relatives traveled for the joyous occasion!



Above:
Sue and Jim:
Jeremy's parents



At around 5pm, we arrived at La Gaucherie aux Dames. Jeremy's parents had already arrived ahead of us, as well as a good number of other relatives of both the bride and groom.



Left to Right:

Nicolas: the groom.

Stéphane: Jeremy's cousin and brother of the bride.

Julie: Stéphane & Anna's cousin on their Dad's side and also the official French/English language interpreter for the ceremony.



We arrived just in time for a special live music party to welcome all the travelers!



Over the last year, **Uncle Olivier** remodeled this once-horse-barn into a beautiful party venue! He built a new roof, and restored the stone walls.

Sue gave Anna a family double wedding ring heirloom quilt.

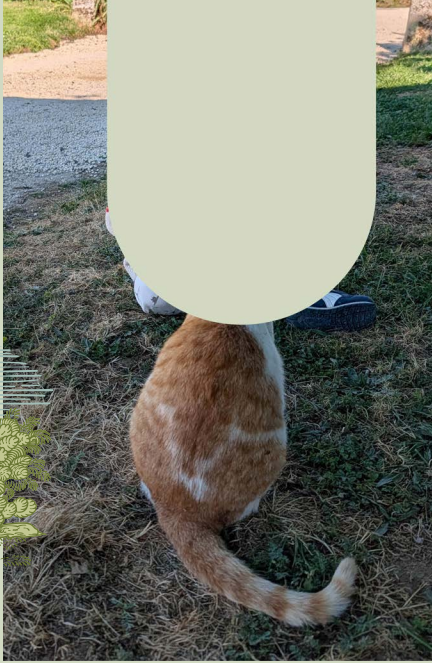


Meeting family and heartfelt folk music in a middle ages-barn made this was one of my favorite nights of the trip!



Family Time on the Farm









Local CSA Pick Up

Aunt Bev specially ordered large quantities of goat cheese and butter for the wedding. This site is primarily a weekly CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) pick up for regular families.



Stream on the Farm

One of the most beautiful parts of the farm is a winding stream. There are also the remains of what might have been an old mill.

We saw hundreds of mother wolf spiders running through the sheep field with their precious eggs tucked safely under their abdomen.



We don't have butter or milk CSAs in Wisconsin, and Jeremy thinks it's because of the prohibitions on raw milk in the US. Another difference was that these dairy items were barely labeled at all. It was very home spun. Even at a farmers market here, everything has commercial-style labels.

Jeremy and I were able to buy some delicious cheese and crackers that the farmers had as extra. 😊



Team Work for the Wedding!

As Jeremy and I well know, a DIY wedding is a lot of work! All the relatives helped out.

When we arrived on Wednesday, the new bathrooms for the barn were just white rooms with no fixtures or lights. By Saturday, they had working sinks, toilets and lights. The group also spread tons of fresh gravel on the roads, weeded, landscaped, decorated, and baked!







Gîte in Vihiers

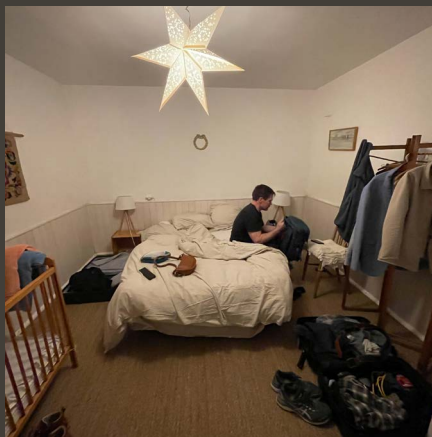
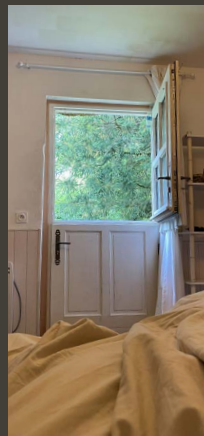
After 2 nights at the La Gaucherie aux Dames, we moved to a guest house 7 minutes away that Aunt Bev had reserved for family overflow.

This large property is owned by a noble family who might be considered distressed gentry. The family lives in the middle of the building, but the two ends were rented out by our group for the weekend. One end had a bunk house attic room with toilets and showers in unexpected places. Below, there was a large garage room that is sometimes used for events.

We stayed on the other end, where we had our own room down a short ladder, and shared a toilet room and separate shower room with Jeremy's cousin Toby and his wife Diana. I hadn't met them before, but they were great, and I'm glad I had a chance to get to know them!



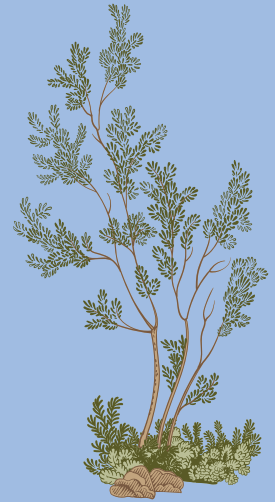
Source: Toby Ott



I don't normally believe in ghosts, but this place had a real haunted mansion atmosphere.

Our room was quite musty, but this Dutch door to the backyard helped air it out. I really liked the grounds, they had a secret garden feel.





Scott, Ira, Carrie, & Audra

ANNA & NICOLAS
The Wedding





Jeremy, Kate, Sue, & Jim



Some hilarious last minute repairs to the brand new bathrooms! Everything was finished *mere minutes* before the wedding because of **Olivier's** (Bride's father) hard work.



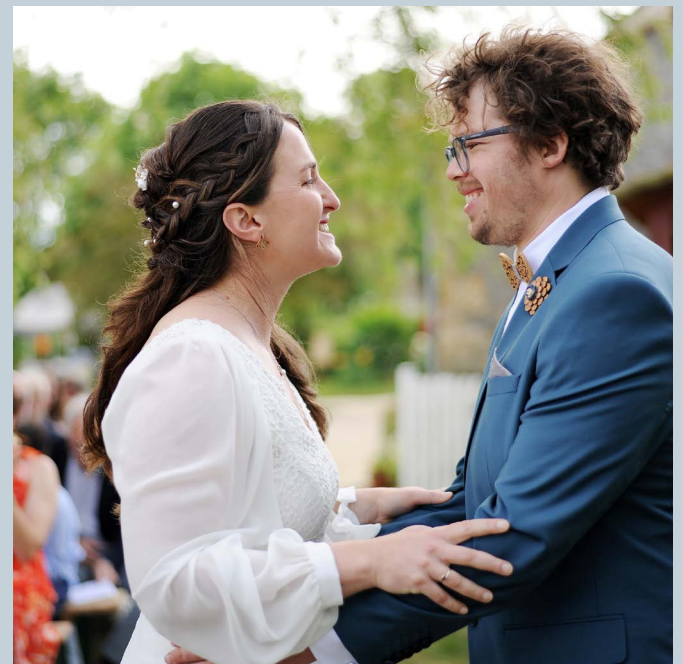
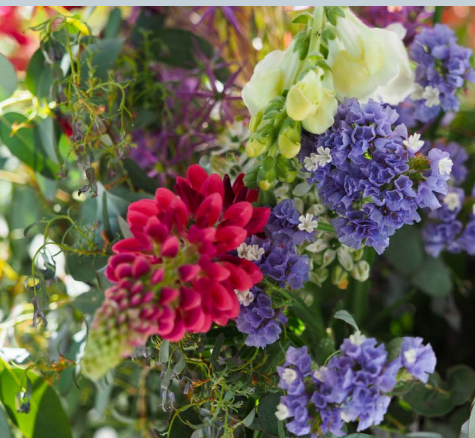
Source: Laureen Keravec

Stéphane, Bev, and Olivier worked so hard for months to prepare the farm for Anna's big day. Definitely a feat of love!





Sue (Jeremy's Mom) performed the ceremony with translation from **Julie** (Bride's cousin on her dad's side).

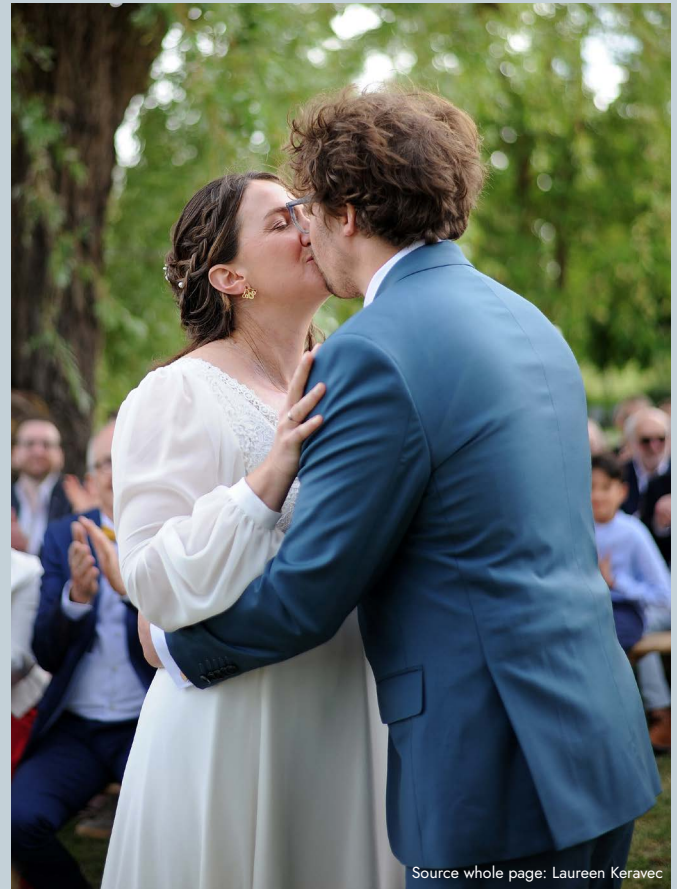




Kate live-streamed the ceremony to loved ones who couldn't make it to France.

Jim (Jeremy's Dad) sang, and a friend of the couple played guitar.

Jeremy, and other cousins, did readings in both English and French.



Source whole page: Laureen Keravec

**Anna and
Stéphane,** her
little brother.



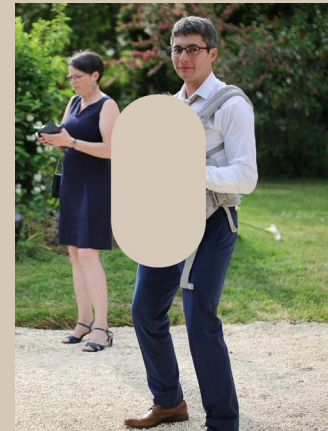
**Jeremy's Uncle
Melvin.**





Source whole page: Lauren Keravec

There were >6 group games/structured events at the wedding, like taking an assigned theme photo at your table, finding another random person at the wedding based on little pieces of paper, photo booth in a box, sing-alongs, choreographed dance-alongs, matching temporary tattoos, group-watched scavenger hunts, etc. Apparently these sorts of games are very common at French weddings.





Source whole page: Laureen Keravec



Source: Laureen Keravec



Back row: **Jim, Sue, Jeremy, Kate, Scott & Audra, Carrie, Ira**; Front row: **Anna & Nicolas**

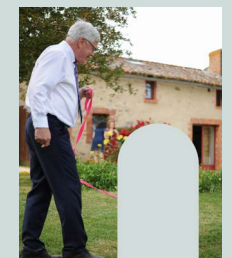


Source: jbrhl

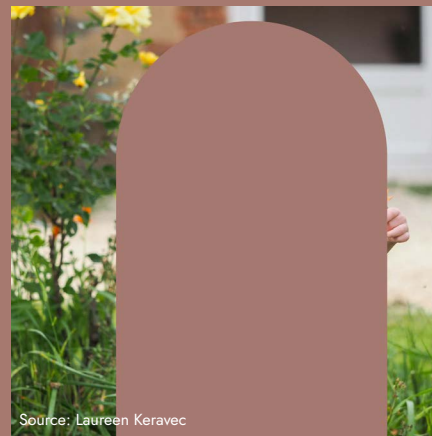


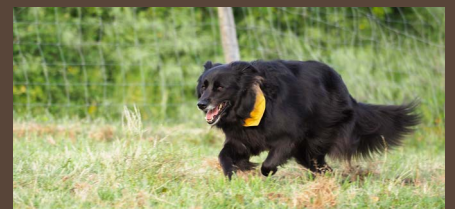
One of the games was a version of a bouquet toss where unmarried people grabbed a ribbon and marched in a circle as the bride cut away the ribbons one by one. The last one to be holding a ribbon gets the bouquet and is supposed to be the next one wed.

Source: whole page: Laureen Keravec



Back row: **Scott & Audra, Carrie, Jim, Sue, Bev, Mel, Dawn, Olivier, Sarah, Diana, Martha** (Sarah's Friend), **Bryan, Bea, Jeremy, Kate,**
 Front row: **Anna, Nicolas, Toby, Stéphane, Melanie**







Source: Laureen Keravec

Jim, Anna, Nicolas, & Sue



I sat next to Nicolas's cousin, **Max** who is a stage lighting designer always on tour with famous musicians! He was our delightful French cultural interpreter for the night.



Max's sister (**Melanie**, same name as Jeremy's cousin) sat across from us, and she did a semester at UW Whitewater. It was so fun to hear her impression of Wisconsin! She said everyone was really friendly but also wore basically pajamas to class. 🤔



Bea & Mel (Melanie is Jeremy's cousin)

Jeremy & Kate

Max



Stéphane (Jeremy's cousin and brother of the bride) made a surprise spectacular cake. Friends and Ott Cousins made one million pies.

French weddings also go very late. The tables were cleared to **begin** dancing **after midnight**.



Aunt Bev and **Uncle Olivier** gave a loving speech about Anna's birth.





Drive to Dordogne

Sunday morning we had our biggest driving day: **5 hours**. The route was narrow, rural roads. We must have gone through 50 roundabouts.

As is required by law, our rental car beeped if you go 1 km over the speed limit. They also have a lot of automated-speed checkers that result in a ticket being mailed to you, but we didn't get any tickets.



No passing.



No entry.



No parking or waiting.



Priority road, you have the right of way.



Priority given to the right at the next intersection.



Narrow passage ahead, you have priority over oncoming traffic.



End of a shared street where pedestrians, cyclists, and cars all mix at very low speed

Jeremy did a great job driving around rural France. The roads were dramatically narrower than we are used to. There are some default right-of-way differences, and we had to look up a lot of signs!

SAINT-VINCENT-DE-COSSE, BEYNAC-ET-CAZENAC
\$165 PER NIGHT | 3 NIGHTS

Les Hauts de Saint Vincent

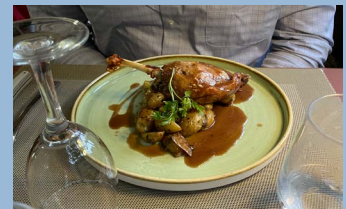
An upscale B&B run by a couple named Stéphanie and Fabrice. The building is a former manor house dating back to the 17th-18th century. This was a great place to stay, very professional, highly recommend.





We had a light breakfast here each morning (toast, yogurt & granola, hard boiled eggs), and one night we had dinner made by Stéphanie. Over these meals, we had some nice conversations with a couple from Tennessee and Poland.

This B&B had a homey feel, but still felt professional, like there was some distance between you and the hosts.



BEYNAC-ET-CAZENAC
\$125 FOR TWO

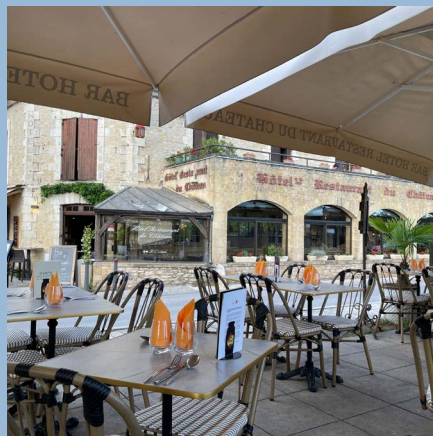
La Petite Tonnelle

This restaurant was recommended by Stéphanie, and it did not disappoint! Highly recommend.





Source: AdobeStock



BEYNAC-ET-CAZENAC | \$89 TOTAL

Hotel Du Château Restaurant

We sat at a river-side table (see arrow above) and watched the swans. The views and service were excellent, but the food could not compare to La Petite Tonnelle.

LES EYZIES | \$30 FOR TWO TICKETS

Grotte de Font-de-Gaume

One of the last caves in France where you can still see original prehistoric polychrome paintings painted ~17,000 years ago. Tickets are notoriously hard to come by, since only a small number of visitors are allowed in each day to protect the fragile pigments. Tickets are released randomly about 2 weeks ahead of time. We took whatever slot we could get, which turned out to be a French-language tour rather than an English one. There was another American couple who had done the same, and the very knowledgeable tour guide took pity on us and gave us the cliff notes in English periodically.



Source: Prehistoric Sites in the Vézère Valley

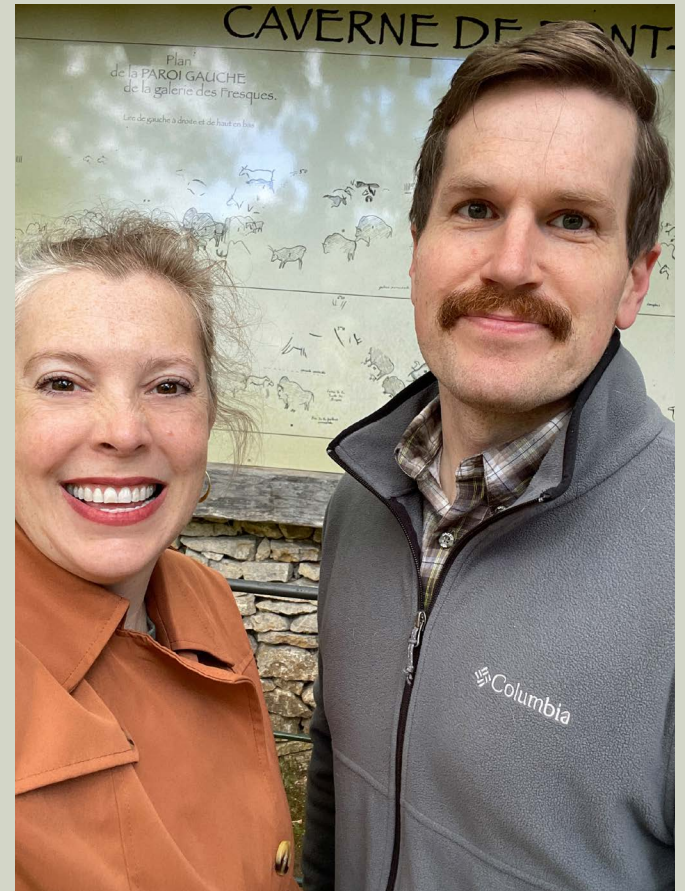


Source: wideangleadventure

Visitors take a ~10min hike from the parking lot to the cave entrance. The entrance to the cave has a natural porch that seems very appealing, and indeed it was used as a sheep pen until 1901 when the paintings' significance was recognized.



The real paintings are not high-contrast as these postcards, but we could totally see the animals.



It was pretty cool to see these genuine and charming paintings. What these paintings meant to the artists 17,000 years ago remains largely a mystery, so it's fun to speculate.

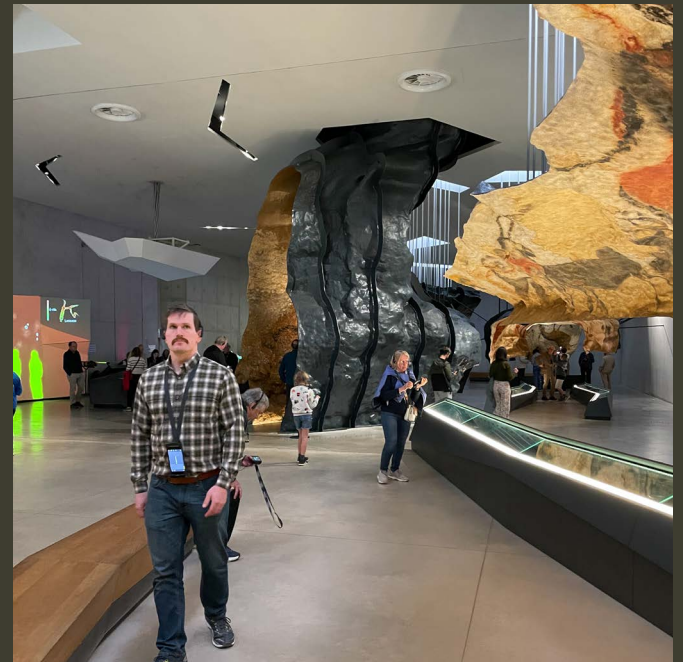
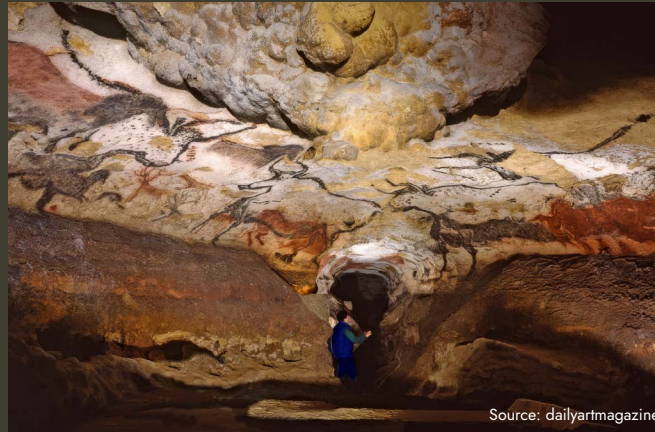
Our tour guide was great, but it would have been even better if we could have made it on to the English tour so that we could understand it all.



MONTIGNAC | \$59 FOR TWO TICKETS

Lascaux IV

This is an immersive, full-scale facsimile of the original Lascaux cave, which was painted around 17,000 years ago. Walking beneath the painted bison overhead is something you genuinely feel, even knowing it's a replica. Beyond the recreated cave environment, the exhibit also displays hanging segments of the key painted panels on their own. Our English-speaking guide was a letdown, unfortunately, as he knew less than was listed on the signs in the exhibit itself. And the exhibit could have done more to explain how the facsimile itself was built. But it was still something to see.



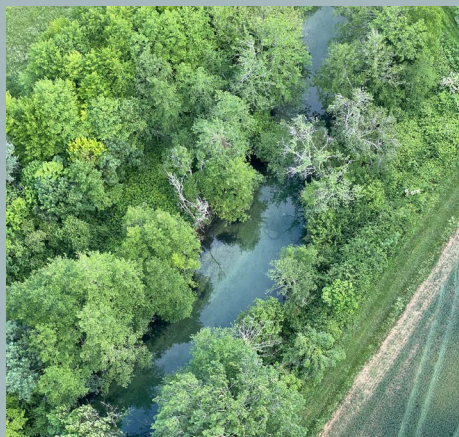
BEYNAC-ET-CAZENAC
\$577 FOR TWO | VOL EN BALLON

Hot Air Balloon

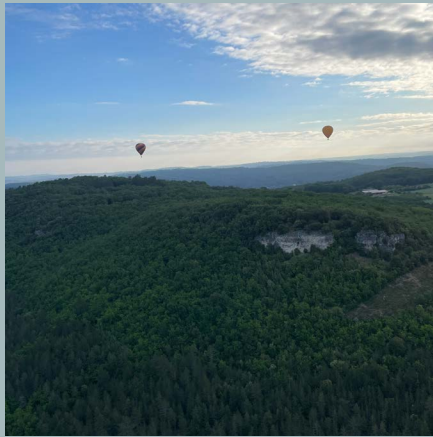
The owners of the B&B also run a hot air balloon company and we lifted off at 6:45am from the hotel property, which was very convenient. The region has generally desirable weather for hot air balloons, and there are 5 operators total in the area that are friendly with each other.

There were 5 of us customers in the balloon along with our pilot, Fabrice.













We landed safely in a prairie that Fabrice hadn't landed in before. Hot air balloons have no steering, so the only control is where along the wind's trajectory to land. Our chase car driver showed up almost immediately, and we all drove back to the B&B.

The views were almost unreal! It was hard to believe we were really in the moment. Definitely a fun thing to do.



LA ROQUE-GAGEAC
\$46 FOR TWO | CANOE DORDOGNE
Canoeing

Continuing our streak of unusual modes of transportation, we walked up to the Canoe Dordogne booth, and 2 minutes later we were canoeing down the river.

We chose the route that started in La Roque-Gageac and ended 2 hours later near Milandes, which was perfect!



They gave us a bucket with sealing lid. The water was very calm and our chances of falling in seemed very slim, but it was nice to be able to lock valuables safely away. I had shoes that could go into water, which was nice for landing. If one was very careful, you would have a chance of landing without needing to get your shoes wet, but you couldn't guarantee it. But a couple in a canoe could probably land with only one of the people chancing getting their feet wet.







The journey took 2 hours, so we had to wait ~40min at the landing for the pick-up van to come for us and take us back to our car in La Roque-Gageac. Canoeing was a lot of fun, relatively inexpensive, and didn't require advance tickets. Highly recommend!



LA ROQUE-GAGEAC | \$16 FOR TWO
Fort de La Roque-Gageac

Above the town is a historic fort with spectacular views. It takes less than an hour to stroll around.







I noticed thousands of abandoned insect holes that looked like perhaps solitary bee homes. It was suspiciously devoid of life now. I asked the worker if there used to be bees there but she didn't know what I was talking about.



You can see how this view makes this fort a strategic lookout location.



This area is known for walnuts, so you have to have some walnut desserts and liquors!

We attempted to go to the Musée National de Préhistoire in Les Eyzies, but it was closed in the middle of the day.



Town of La
Roque-Gageac



Domme

Along our drive, we stopped for an hour or so in Domme, which is a fortified hilltop bastide town perched above the Dordogne River. Founded in the 13th century, its stone ramparts and narrow streets open onto sweeping views across the valley. Our car barely fit through the wall opening!



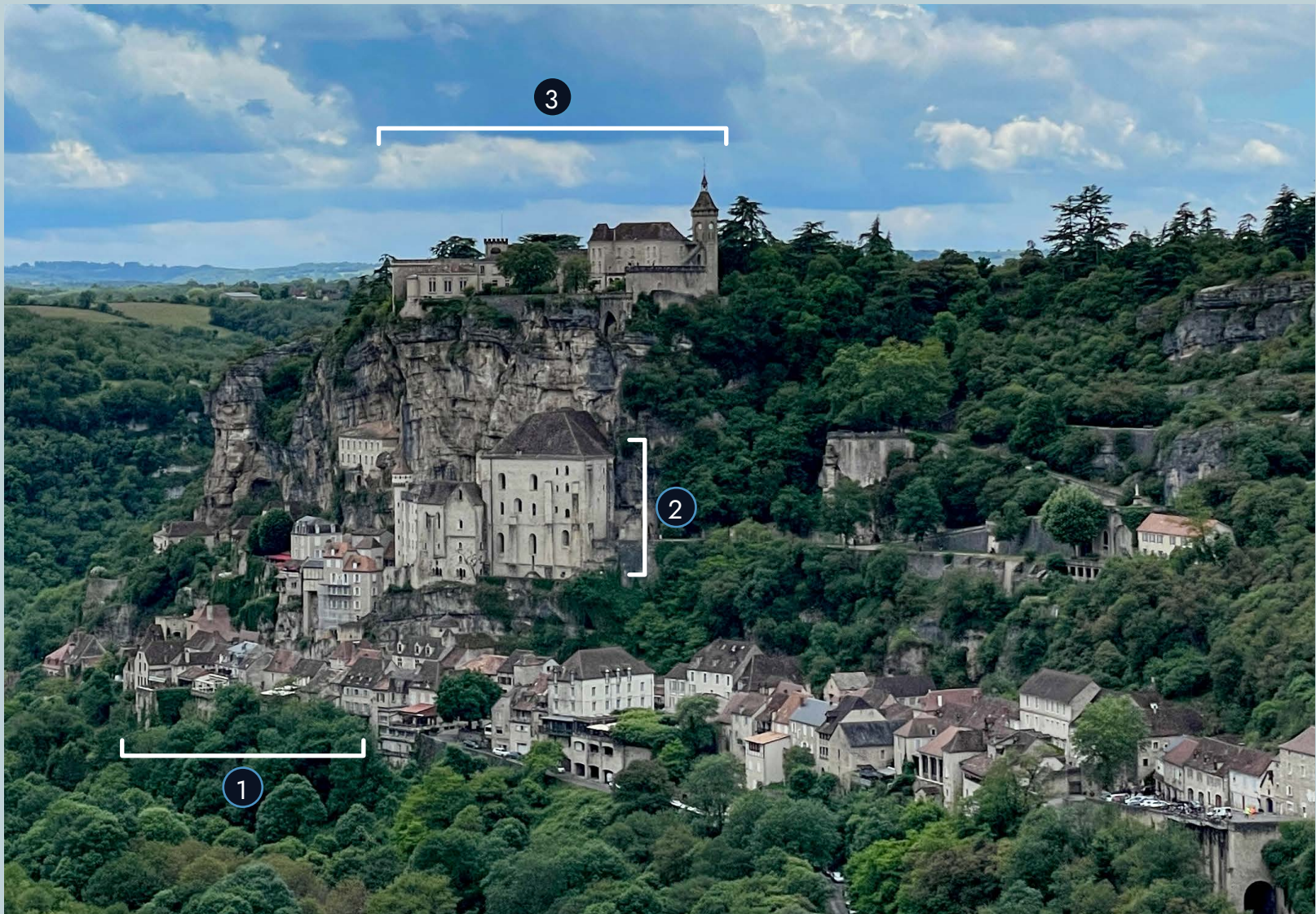




Rocamadour

We had an ~1.5 hour drive west along the Dordogne valley. Rocamadour is a dramatic cliff-top pilgrimage village in the Lot region. At its heart is a religious complex of chapels built in the cliff side. There are winding stairs and ramps that fold back on themselves to accommodate the terrain. Some of the buildings are so old they are considered pre-medieval.





1

The lower section has a strip of cute touristy shops, many of which are medieval themed, like this candy shop where we bought some licorice.



We had a nice lunch at **La Table du Curé**, which we would recommend! We had cider served in teacups, which is apparently traditional in France.







2

Saint Amadour

Apparently, there was a dead body found in a cave here in 1166AD, and everyone thought he had been dead a while but the corpse still looked good. So good in fact, that they considered it a miracle and called him *Saint Amadour* (the existing town name) and built the first chapel in its honor. The body disappeared during subsequent sackings, they have this empty niche labeled "Saint Amadour."

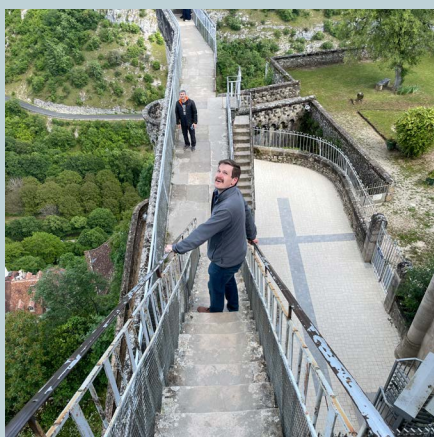


13th-century fresco of skeletons sword-fighting on the exterior wall



3

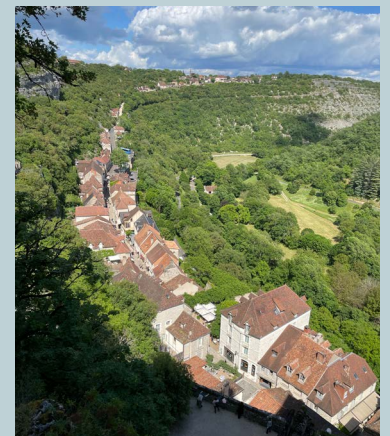
The upper section costs a couple Euros to enter the ramparts.





4

We parked a distance away from the main area and walked down this long ramped-road to the lower town (1), walked up the stairs of the religious complex (2) and up to the ramparts (3), and then walked along the roads tracing the top of the cliff back to our car (4). But, you can also park near the top of the ramparts if you don't want to do so much walking.



CALÈS, ROCAMADOUR
\$150 PER NIGHT | 2 NIGHTS

Moulin de Latreille

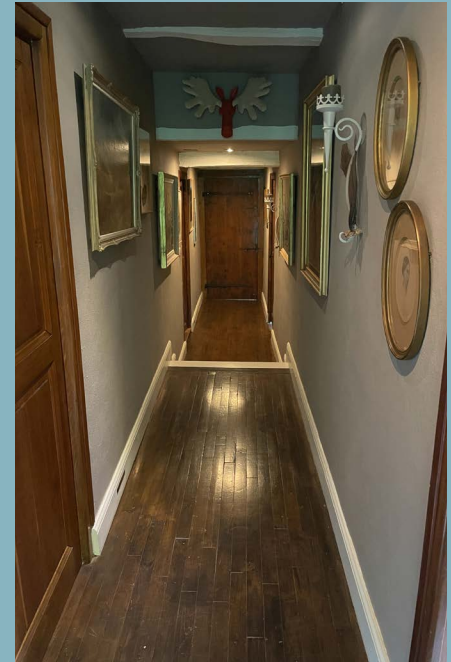
The site of this B&B is beautiful. It spans a crystal clear stream, teeming with life. The old mill paddles now power an electric generator. Fi & Giles Stonor are British ex-pats who moved to the area 25+ years ago and started the arduous restoration of this 13th century flour mill.

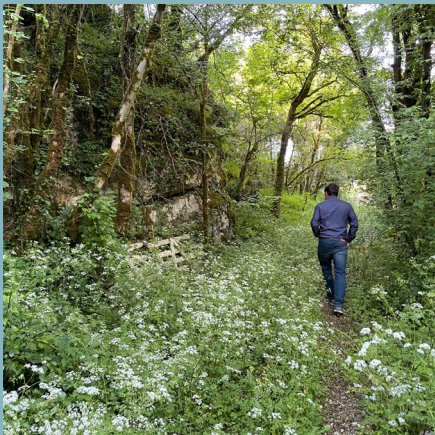
It was about 30min from Rocamadour and more isolated than I realized when we booked it. There is hardly a convenience shop within 20min. The drive down to the Mill is over a mile on a dirt two-track driveway.

There is nature everywhere here, and it would really make sense for a longer stay than just the 2 days packed-with-other-activities that we spent here. They only have a few rooms to rent out, and the family lives on site too, so there is a little bit of feeling like you are imposing on someone's home, even though Fi could not have been any kinder. But it's a smaller space than the B&B we stayed at before this one, so guests eat breakfast in the family dining room.









PADIRAC | \$55 FOR TWO TICKETS

Gouffre de Padirac

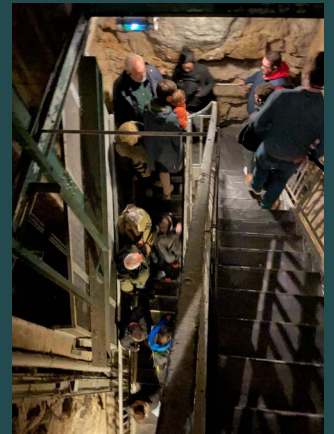
The tour starts off at this giant 250ft deep pit in the ground that you descend on a staircase. Once at the bottom, visitors enter a generous hallway with a turquoise river. It is the most beautiful cave I have ever seen.

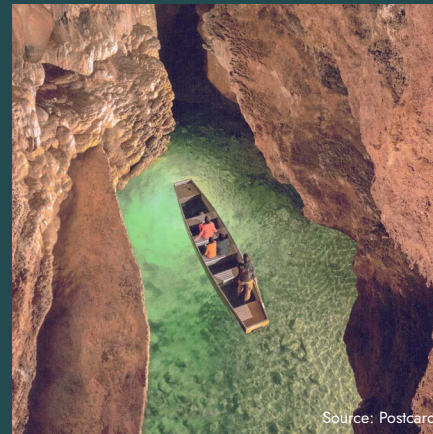


We happened to be there on a French holiday, so they were at total capacity. But it was still a totally enjoyable tour. They had audio guide headsets that let everyone go at their own pace, so there was no bunching or crowding.



The English language audio tour was funny because they chose very distinct cockney-accented actors to play all the Frenchmen who discovered the cave in 1889.

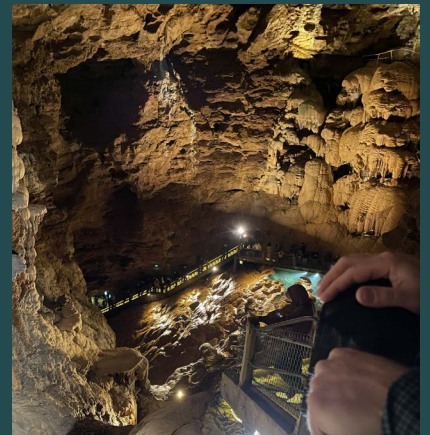


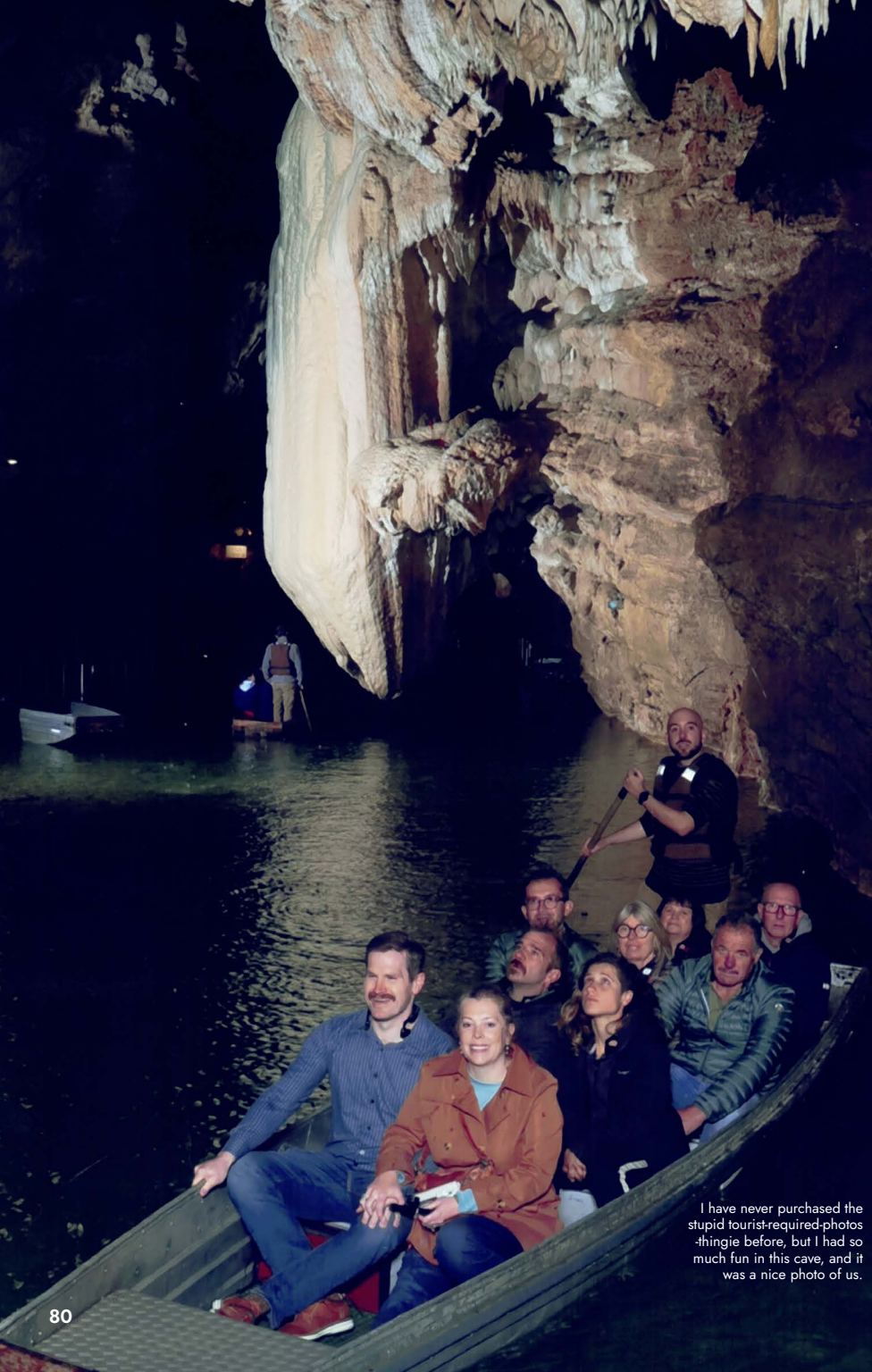


Source: Postcard

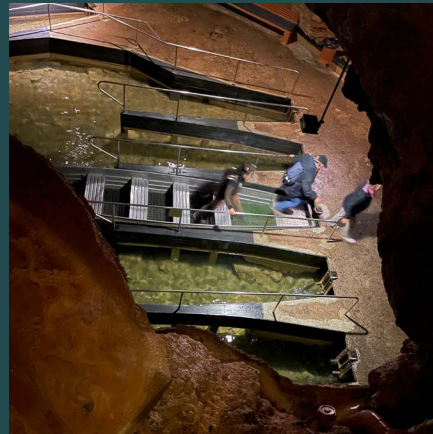








I have never purchased the stupid tourist-required-photos thingie before, but I had so much fun in this cave, and it was a nice photo of us.



After walking along side the river, visitors eventually come to a second ticket-check station for some reason, and then you get in gondola boats and are taken along an all-water section of the river. You are not allowed to take photos while on the boat for 'safety reasons,' but afterwards you can buy a professional photo for €11. 😊

Then you exit the boat and walk more through some huge ballrooms. Eventually, you come back the same way.

It's a spectacular cave, and they managed all the people pretty well despite the crowds. The main elevator was broken and only disabled people could use the back-up, tiny elevator. But it actually wasn't that bad to walk up. On busy days, you do need advance tickets. Parking was tricky: everyone was fighting over the closest parking lot, not realizing there were plenty of other lots, not far away. But leave extra time for navigating parking. The bathrooms were gross and it was the only place I saw that didn't even try to provide toilet paper, so make sure to bring some. Despite that, we highly recommend.



Loubressac

We stopped at L'Atelier, an artisan ice cream stand in the medieval village of Loubressac. It started to pour rain while we were there, but they had an overhang we huddled under.

ALVIGNAC, ROCAMADOUR | \$139 FOR TWO

Le Voyage d'Ernestine

Our B&B owners recommended this restaurant. We thought we made a reservation online that morning, but it turns out we were just putting ourselves on a wait list because we didn't understand the website. 🤪

But that afternoon they called my phone to let me know there was room (good thing my regular number worked).

This Asian-inspired French restaurant was one of the best meals we have ever had. It was wonderful, highly recommend.



Drive to Bordeaux and Train to Paris

We had a 3 hour drive to Bordeaux. Part of our drive was on an expressway this time, and we were able to pay the tolls with credit card. From Bordeaux, we took the fast train to Paris, which was a 2.5 hour train ride.

We had allowed plenty of time, thinking maybe we would find lunch in Bordeaux. But we needed every minute of it! The address for returning the rental car was just the giant train station itself. It was crowded, full of traffic, and definitely not a rental car return location. Some of the streets were closed down or one-way because there were buses parked everywhere. Every false turn was a 15 minute delay. Frenzied googling yielded more false addresses. Eventually we started tracing the streets like Pac-Man, and did eventually find a tiny Avis sign, where they took the car back.

We arrived at the train station with just enough time to use the restroom and buy a snack before boarding. This was the only bathroom we actually encountered that required a €2 payment.



We had first class train tickets again, and it was very civilized and nice.



We liked our Avis Renault Espace. It had a clear roof, and you could press a button and it would fade to opaque.

LE MARAIS, PARIS
\$373 PER NIGHT | 3 NIGHTS

Grand Hôtel Malher

This 5-story hotel has a very convenient location, very near the Metro. Our room was small, but clean and modern. Our balcony had a very impressive view. I wish we had been able to spend more time on our little balcony.





We went to an Italian restaurant right near our hotel, and then for cider (served in little teacups) and speculoos crepes.

That night I woke up very, very sick with serious digestive upset. It was terrible. I was still out of it the next day, and didn't rally at all until ~5pm.



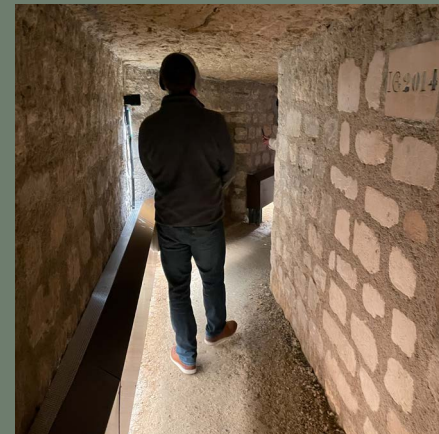
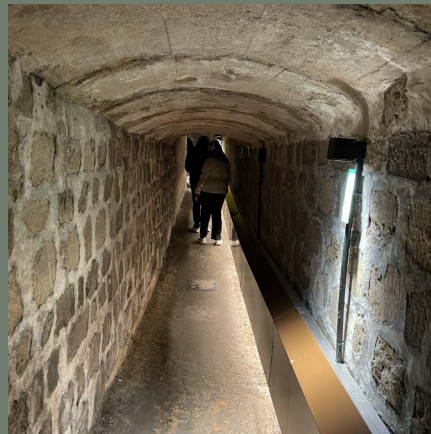
\$72 FOR TWO TICKETS

The Paris Catacombs

The tunnels beneath the Catacombs began as limestone quarries. By the late 1700s, the city's cemeteries were dangerously overcrowded and a public health hazard, so officials began quietly transferring millions of skeletal remains into the abandoned quarry galleries. What started as a practical solution to a sanitation crisis quickly became a tourist attraction in its own right. As early as the early 1800s, officials arranged the bones into decorative walls and patterns specifically to draw visitors underground.

I was barely holding on after being so sick and nauseous. Seeing all these dead people really reminds one that we will all die one day, and so does being violently ill all night. So I was feel particularly mortal.





Quarried stones to construct the buildings of Paris, like Notre-Dame and the Louvre, were hoisted out of holes like this one above.

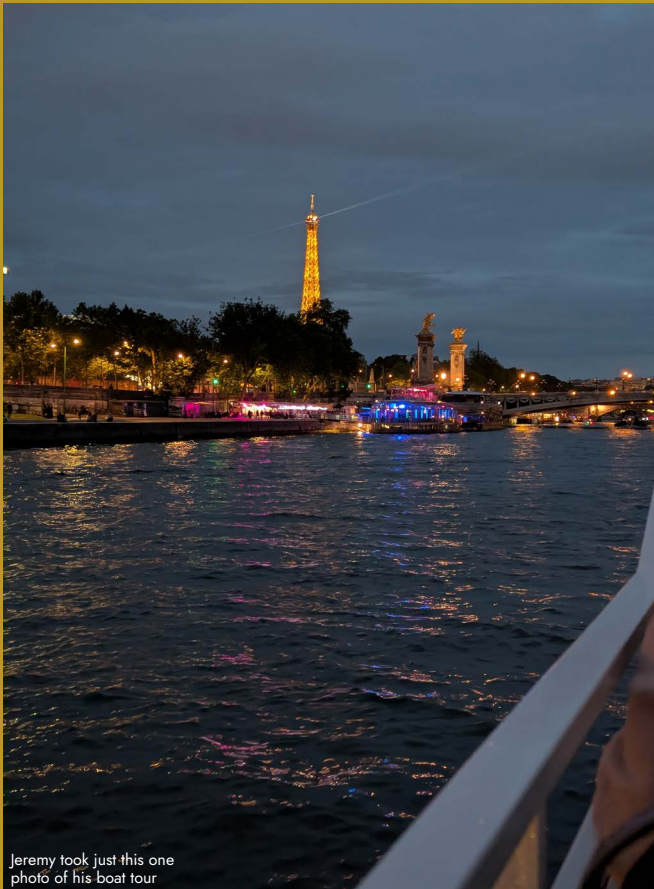


Since Jeremy and I were last here in 2014, they have greatly improved the signage. And there is now a go-at-your-own-pace audio tour with somber music that I actually really liked. Tickets needed to be purchased a week ahead of time for a specific time slot.

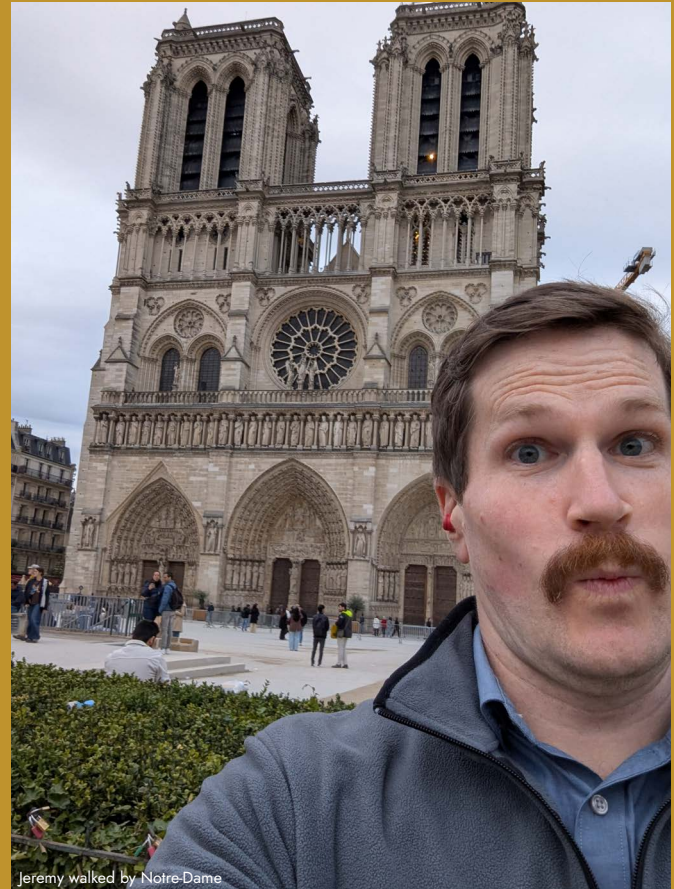
They made sure to remind you that each of these skulls was a person, just like you.







Jeremy took just this one photo of his boat tour



Jeremy walked by Notre-Dame

Although I rallied for the catacombs, I had to take more French over-the-counter anti-nausea tablets halfway through, and afterwards I was feeling drowsy and not great. I was not up for the champagne toast boat tour of the Seine we had tickets for.

Jeremy went on his own and complained that it was a really romantic tour where they asked everyone to kiss their partner under the bridges and he had no one to kiss.

I was able to finally nibble on some French butter with crystals of sea salt and saltine crackers. Salty French butter is amazing. It was actually delicious.

But by the next morning I was *fighting fit* again!



\$74 FOR TWO TICKETS

The Louvre Museum

You now need advance tickets, purchased ~2 months in advance for a certain entry time slot. And then you need to show up at least half an hour before that for the security line. The internet convinced us that we needed to go first thing when they opened in order to avoid the crowds. This turned out to be false, because even though we had tickets for the very first time slot, **it was already too crowded** to wander around enjoying yourself. And by going at 9am, we were denied a leisurely café croissant breakfast.





Marble Horse Head
500 BC, Athens region in Greece



1506, Leonardo da Vinci, Florence, Italy
Mona Lisa



Renaissance coffered ceiling
1550s, Henri II wing of The Louvre



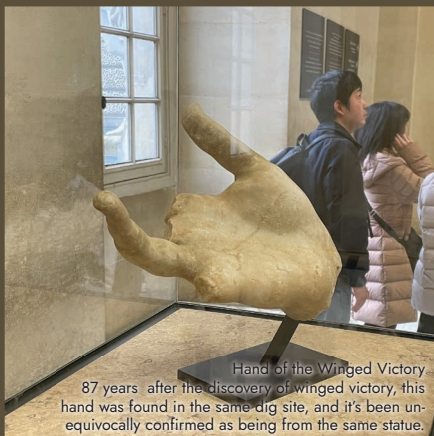
Joost SILLEMAN
Montre pochet
Dutch pocket watch
1600's



Venus de Milo
130 BC, Milos, Greece



Louis XVI furnishings
1780's, right before revolution
erupted. You can see why.



Hand of the Winged Victory
87 years after the discovery of winged victory, this
hand was found in the same dig site, and it's been un-
equivocally confirmed as being from the same statue.



Winged Victory
190 BC, Samothrace, Greece



Portrait of a Woman of the Court of Milan
1490's, Leonardo da Vinci, Milan, Italy

The Louvre was an ostentatious palace of ridiculous grandeur. Seeing the gold brocade and sitting room after sitting room really makes you feel like they were ripe for revolution.

In the 1790s the revolutionary National Convention stormed the palace and preserved everything in order to open one of the first public fine art museums.



The Louvre is massive



So, so crowded



Many, many, sections were closed

We listened to a Rick Steves' audio tour that takes you through the Louvre in a couple hours. In theory, I highly recommend this. It's nice to have a direction to head in, and to hear the stories that make the art come alive.

However, between the heist at the Louvre earlier this year, and the recent re-numbering of the rooms, we were unable to follow the tour, and it was really frustrating. I think a large portion of the museum was closed off, and even finding an exit that was open was hard. Looking up the locations of things we wanted to see online was just as hard because all of the internet was using the old numbering system.

Despite going very first thing when they opened, it was really **too crowded** to wander around enjoying the art. I would not recommend going to the Louvre on a spring weekend unless you really have to for some reason.



The Coronation of Napoleon
1807, Jacques-Louis David



\$63 FOR TWO Bistro Richelieu

We had coffee, French onion soup, and a hamburger at this nice bistro about 8 minute walk from the Louvre. We were ready for a bite after the museum, and this nice place *hit the spot*.

Galerie Vivienne

We wandered through this 1823 covered mall that was very Parisian. Definitely a cute alleyway to walk through.





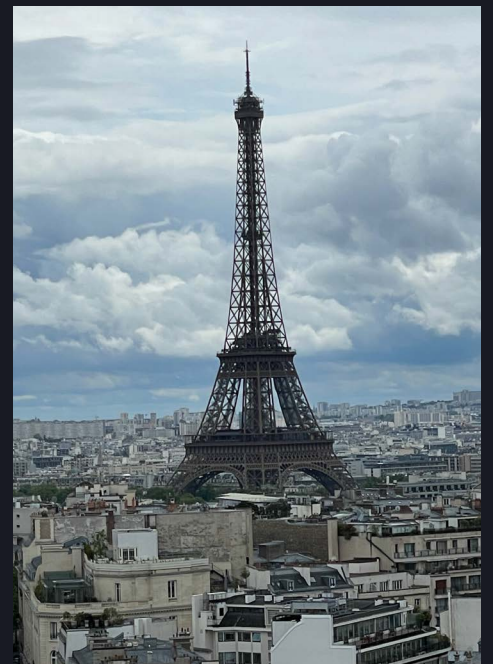
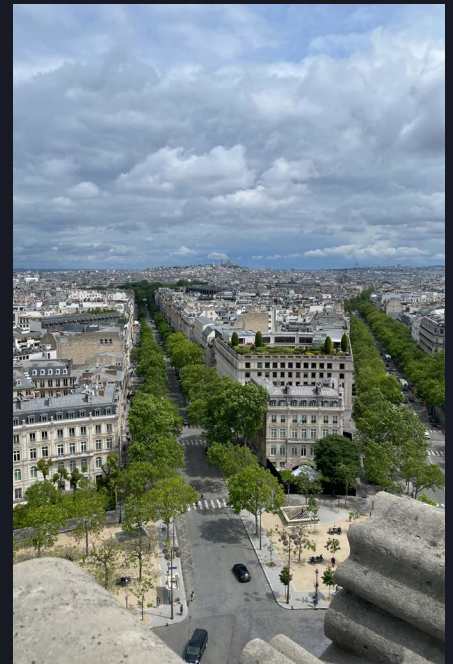
\$51 FOR TWO TICKETS Arc de Triomphe

Commissioned by Napoleon in 1806 to honor the French armies, the Arc de Triomphe wasn't completed until 1836, well after his fall from power.

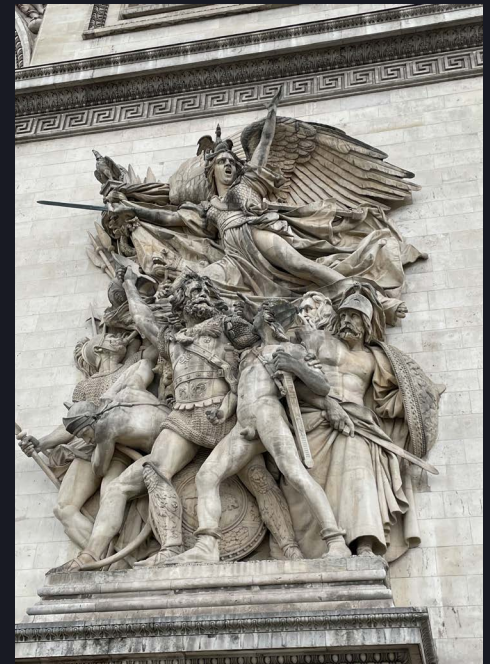
It offers great views of the twelve grand avenues that radiate outward like spokes, including the Champs-Élysées.

Access is now guarded by security process, and you need advance tickets purchased online weeks in advance.









These relief sculptures on the outside are so much larger than you think. They have a cast of this head inside (which should be a meme if it isn't), and it's huge!



We used the Paris subway to get around, and it remains efficient and excellent. We did encounter a ticket re-check point where officials make sure that your on-phone ticket *really* scanned. I was glad we were OK, because sometimes the doors are open or the scanning is taking a second because your app is being slow, and it's very tempting to enter the station. But then I think you would get a fine if you are unlucky and hit a re-check point.





Due to the Paris Bread Festival, there was a man on a loud speaker saying, "Two Euro Breads! Two Euro Breads!"

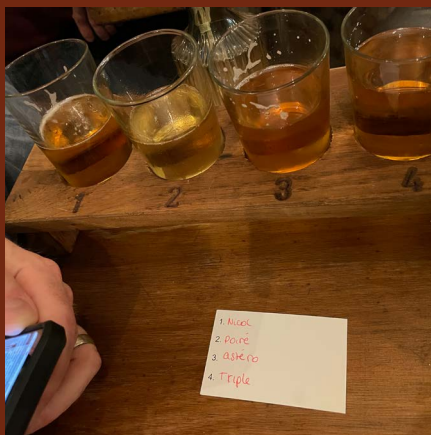
We got some bread.

Wandering around Paris is one of the most fun things to do in the city, so it was a shame that so many sites require advance tickets now that mandate a more structured schedule. But we still got to do a little wandering.

Cidrerie du Canal

We visited a more serious cider house than the one near our hotel. We tried some flights of cider. It was very busy, so a little hard to place an order, but the cider was interesting and good!

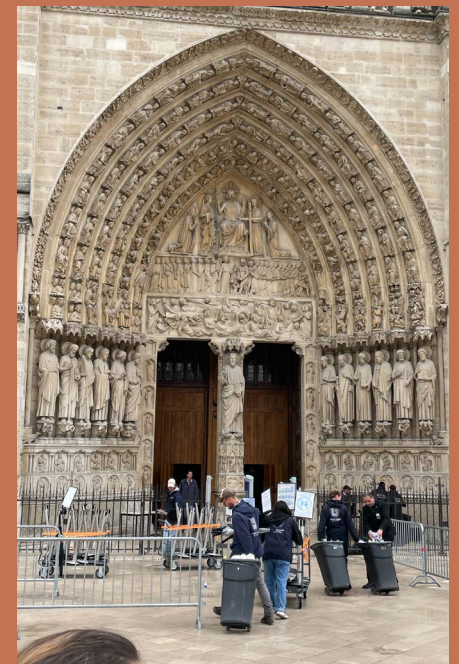
We bought a couple bottles to take home in our luggage.





Notre-Dame Cathedral

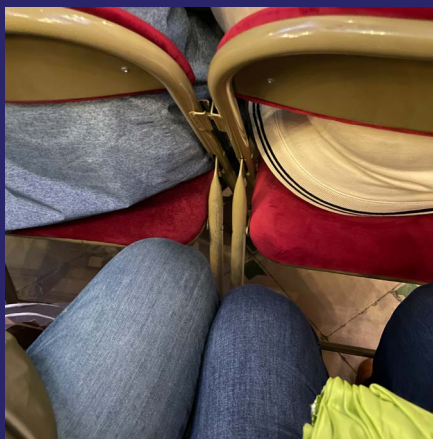
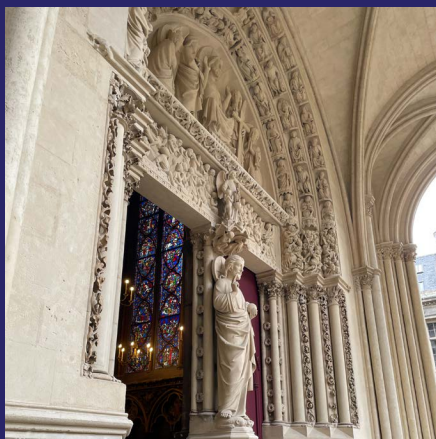
It's also recommended that you get advance tickets for Notre-Dame these days, although the tickets are free. The online reservation system was turned off for this weekend due to construction in the vestibule, and when we walked by, they were closing early for the day. So we did not get to go inside.



\$171 FOR TWO TICKETS

Concert at Sainte-Chapelle

We bought advance tickets to a classical music concert at Sainte-Chapelle. It's a Gothic-style royal chapel started in the 1200s. The main level was only used by the royal family until the revolution.



The musicians were excellent and the music selections were real crowd pleasers. However, I'm not sure we would recommend this for a short trip to Paris:

1. We had to arrive 40+ minutes early because of the security screening, which involved a mm wave scanner (like TSA).
2. We bought tickets that included champagne, but it turns out that was just a voucher to go get a drink at the bar across the street afterwards, which we didn't even do.
3. The folding chairs were tied together very closely, with less space than an airplane.
4. In front of us was a big mirrored box due to construction. Although I have to applaud the idea of making it mirrored.







Eiffel Tower

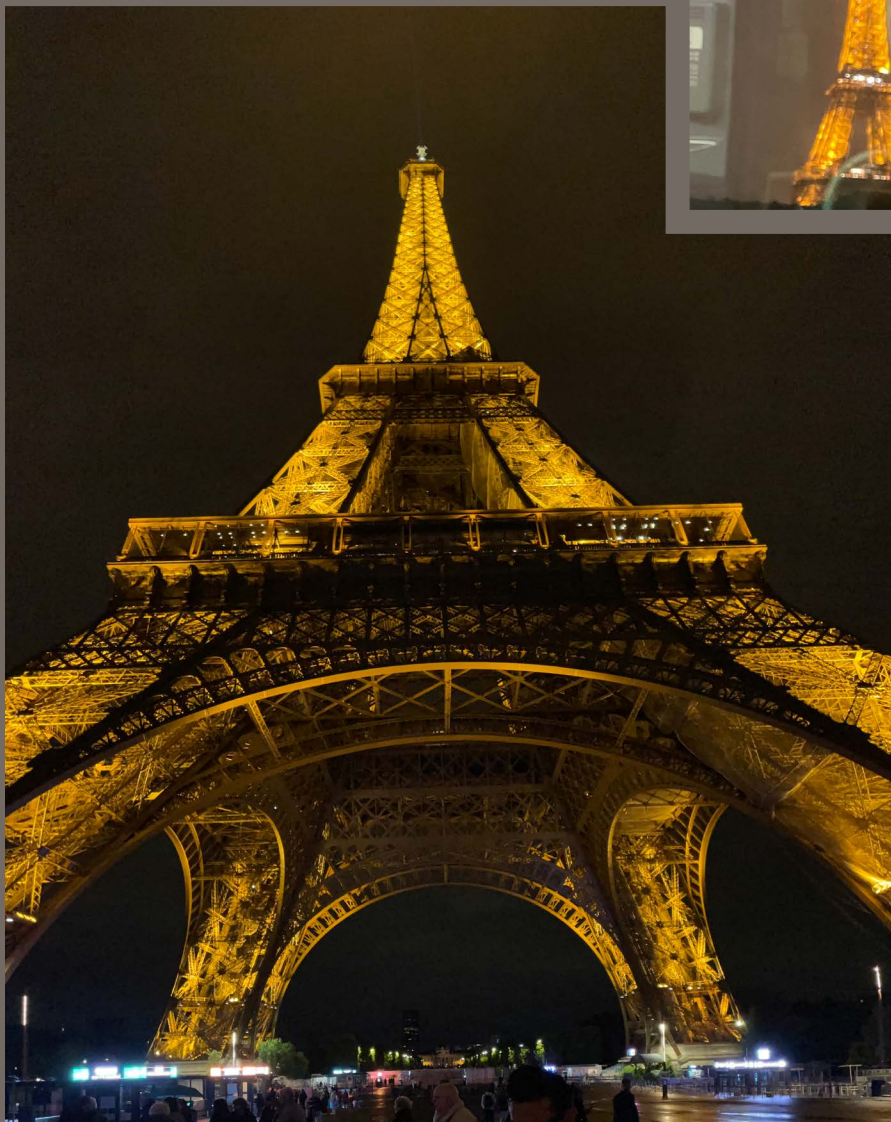
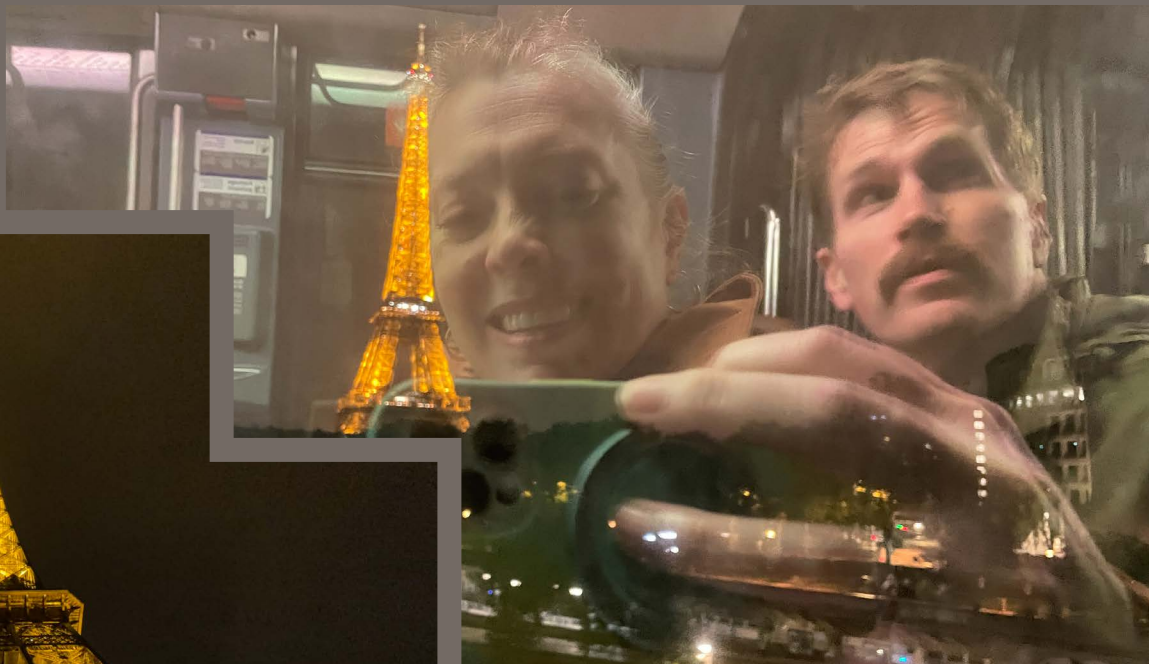
We thought we could wander over to the Eiffel Tower park. We did not realize that the whole park is now a security controlled area with ~14ft plastic walls. There was no fee, but we had to go through a security screening with metal detectors and opening up our bags (just to walk through the park).

We had bought some bottles of cider to bring home, and we weren't allowed to bring them in. Jeremy had the good idea of hiding them in a pile of recycling trash. We were able to successfully retrieve them afterwards! I was a little surprised since the whole area was crawling with people that looked like they might be pick pockets or at least not against pulling drinks out of the trash.

Honestly, the level of security and pre-ticketing required throughout Paris was depressing. Maybe if we had never seen it before, we wouldn't have felt that way.



View from the
metro train.



MONDAY, MAY 18TH
Flight Home



On the way to France, Jeremy's luggage had gifts from home for Aunt Bev, (like brown sugar and brownie mix). So on the way home, Jeremy filled it with cheese! It smelled so strong when we finally picked it up at O'Hare, but it was OK. Customs was worried about meat and fruit, but actually didn't mind cheese or butter.



There are a lot of people on the subway moving fast, and there are stairs at almost every station and transfer. So if you are carrying your full luggage, I would recommend that you be able to instantly lift it in order to take stairs. If you needed ramps and escalators, it would be tricky.



We had a whole row on the way home, which was luxurious!

Advance booking

It felt like this trip required a lot of advance tickets that were largely for scheduled tours at certain times. The result was a trip that felt quite scheduled, especially in Paris. This is at least partly due to security concerns, perhaps since the Olympics in 2024.

Item	Price	Advance Purchase	Recommended	Page
Flights (UA987/986), 3 seats with bulkhead row for the bassinet	\$3K	4.5 months	★★★★☆	p3, p107
Avis rental car (via Auto Europe)	\$572	3 months	★★★★☆	p4, p35, p83
Train: Paris to Angers, 1st class, top level	\$98	3 months	★★★★★	p4
B&B in Beynac-et-Cazenac, Les Hauts de Saint Vincent, 3 nights	\$495	2-3 months	★★★★★	p36
Cave with real prehistoric paintings, Font-de-Gaume, tour reservation in French	\$30	Tickets released randomly, about 4-6 weeks out, and sell out immediately	★★★★☆	p40
Replica cave with prehistoric paintings, Lascaux IV tour reservation	\$59	4+ weeks	★★☆☆☆	p43
Hot air balloon ride reservation, Vol en Ballon	\$577	2+ months	★★★★★	p44
Canoeing on Dordogne	\$46	1 minute	★★★★★	p51
Fort de La Roque-Gageac	\$16	1 minute	★★★★☆	p55
B&B in Rocamadour, Moulin de Latreille, 2 nights	\$345	2-3 months	★★★★☆	p70
Giant cave with river, Gouffre de Padirac tour reservation	\$55	few days - 2 weeks if it's a special holiday	★★★★★	p74
Dinner Reservation, Le Voyage d'Ernestine	Free at booking	We went on the wait list the day-of, but got lucky.	★★★★★	p82
Train: Bordeaux to Paris, 1st class, top level	\$129	3 months	★★★★★	p83
Hotel in Paris, Grand Hôtel Malher, 2 nights	\$1,115	3 months	★★★★☆	p84
Catacombs of Paris tour reservation	\$72	Tickets are released 7 days ahead, and sell out almost immediately	★★★★★	p86
Seine Boat tour tickets	\$62	2-4 weeks	★★★★☆	p90
Louvre Museum timed entry tickets, 9am	\$74	Tickets released 90 days out, 9am time slots can sell out in a couple days. We booked at 7 weeks.	★★☆☆☆	p91
Arc de Triomphe timed entry tickets	\$51	2-4 weeks	★★★★☆	p95
Notre-Dame timed entry tickets	Free	1-2 days	N/A	p101
Sainte-Chapelle concert tickets	\$171	1-2 months	★★☆☆☆	p102

Daily trip plan, 2026:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
MAY 3	MAY 4	MAY 5 p3 Park at Mom's 6:00pm: Flight leaves O'Hare	MAY 6 p4-p7 9:20am: Arrive in Paris RER train to Metro 1:25pm: SNCF Train to Angers 3:30pm: Rental car pick up Stay at La Gaucherie aux Dames Live music at Aunt Bev's	MAY 7 p8-p13 Preparing for Wedding	MAY 8 p14-p15 Move to Gîte in Vihiers	MAY 9 p17-p34 The Wedding!
MAY 10 p35-p38 Brunch at Aunt Bev's Drive to Dordogne Valley Check into Les Hauts de Saint Vincent Town of Beynac-et-Cazenac Dinner at La Petite Tonnelle	MAY 11 p40-p43 10:45am: Grotte de Font-de-Gaume 2:10pm: Lascaux IV 7:30pm: Dinner at B&B: Table d'Hôtes	MAY 12 p44-p59 6:45am: Hot Air Balloon Canoeing Dordogne River Fort de La Roque-Gageac Town of La Roque-Gageac Dinner at Hotel Du Château Restaurant	MAY 13 p60-p73 Town of Domme Town of Rocamadour Lunch at La Table du Curé Check into Moulin de Latreille	MAY 14 p74-p82 11:30am: Gouffre de Padirac Town of Loubressac 8:00pm: Dinner at Le Voyage d'Ernestine	MAY 15 p83-p85 Drive to Bordeaux Before 3pm: Return rental car 2:50pm: Train to Paris Check into Grand Hôtel Malher	MAY 16 p86-p90 Kate is sick 5:45pm: Paris Catacombs 9:45pm: Boat tour of Seine
MAY 17 p91-p106 9:00am: The Louvre Museum Bistro Richelieu Galerie Vivienne 2:10pm: Arc de Triomphe Cidrerie du Canal Notre-Dame Cathedral 8:00pm: Concert at Sainte-Chapelle Eiffel Tower	MAY 18 p107 11:15am: Flight home	MAY 19	MAY 20	MAY 21	MAY 22	MAY 23

Photos generally by Jeremy Ott-Holland & Kate Baldwin

Book by Kate Baldwin

K8Baldwin.com

