



Log of the Gey

We complete the check-in of the *Gey*, head to Toulouse for a day, and then journey on to Paris.

11 October 2014

The base at Négra is much less well-developed than the one at Lattes. Instead of a marina surrounded by high-rises, we are in the country, just upstream of a lock, and the base office occupies part of a building that has been here for centuries. None-the-less, the staff are friendly and quickly have us cleared. They hail a taxi, who will take us the 30 km into to Toulouse, where we have reserved a hotel across the canal from the train station.



We arrive at Hôtel Icare well before noon. Once settled in, the lady at the desk suggests a simple walking tour of town. We head out, and the first thing we notice is a statue to Pierre Paul Riquet. The Canal du Midi joins la Garonne (river) in Toulouse, and la Garonne continues the water route to the Atlantic.

The walk into the city center is pleasant, despite the gray skies. At one point, we encounter Place du Président Thomas Wilson, dedicated to the U.S. President. Who? This History major had to dig deep into his memory to recall that his full name was Thomas Woodrow Wilson. For some reason, the French use his real first name.

Wandering farther, we encounter Square Charles de Gaulle, bordered by an impressive government building. We return to Place du Wilson for lunch at a sidewalk café.

After lunch, we pay a visit to Basilique Saint-Sernin and then walk through the city to return to

*To see pictures of our visit to
Toulouse, overlaid on a map,
click: [Toulouse](#)*

the hotel. Dinner is found at a café adjacent, after which we retire. Tomorrow we will take the TGV to Paris.

12 October 2014

We chose our hotel in Toulouse because it was an easy walk across the canal from the main train station. After breakfast and checking out, we are in the station, waiting for them to post the platform from which our train will depart. Fifteen minutes prior, the posting is made and we have plenty of time to find the train, the proper car, and our assigned seats.



The trip to Paris is speedy, with the TGV going over 120 mph at times. Five hours and 30 minutes after leaving Toulouse, we arrive in Paris. We find a taxi to take us to Hôtel Le Petit Trianon.

We had reserved a room in a hotel centrally located in the 6th Arrondissement. We were within walking distance of the Louvre, Notre Dame, and train stations with routes to Montmartre and Versailles. For €100 per night, we thought it quite a bargain.



The hotel sits above a restaurant, and has no elevator, only a narrow circular staircase. Our room was four flights up, but the hotel staff helped us with our luggage. Once there, we appreciated the central location, even though the place was a bit shabby (although quite clean).

We spent the rest of the day exploring the neighborhood, finding several places willing to serve us a beer and, later, dinner. We have four busy days in Paris ahead of us.

13 October 2014

Today will be devoted to the part of the city near La Seine. We had breakfast at the café below our hotel, and then set off toward the river. Crossing the Pont Neuf (new bridge, only a few hundred years old), we made note of a river cruise location that we would visit later in the evening.

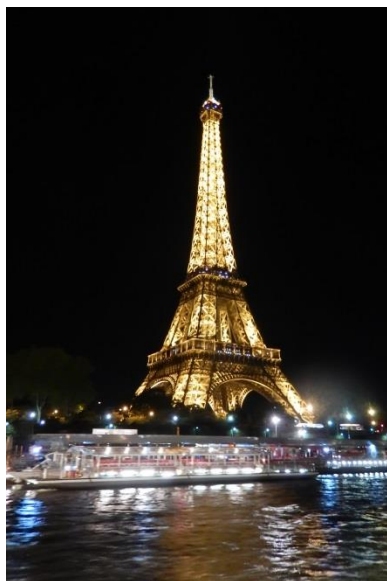
We walked alongside the Palais de Justice and past La Conciergerie, the prison where Marie Antoinette and several others spent their last days.

Encircled by the Palais de Justice, Sainte-Chapelle is a medieval gothic chapel built in 1248 to house sacred relics such as the Crown of Thorns and a piece of the True Cross. It is no longer in use as a church, or reliquary, but the magnificent stained-glass windows are still in place. One could spend hours pondering all the beautiful windows, which depict the history of man, from Adam, through Moses, Jesus, until the end. We spent an hour, and then were off to see more.

After lunch, we made our way to Notre Dame, formally known as Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris. The entry line was very short, and we were soon inside. Inside and out, the cathedral has beautiful statuary and dramatic stained-glass windows. The inside is hushed, as appropriate for a church, but visitors are welcome to walk in most areas and pictures, including flash photography, are permitted.



We spent more than an hour making a circuit on the main floor, often stopping to read about the history and significance of a particular object. Regardless of your feelings for this religion or that, you have to be impressed by the devotion of those who constructed such a monument to their faith.



The remainder of the afternoon was spent on a meandering stroll back to our hotel. We ate dinner early, by Parisian standards, so we could take an evening ride on La Seine.

It was a beautiful night for a ride. A bit of advice, get in line early, especially if you want to take pictures. We managed to get the last two seats on the upper deck, but otherwise would have been below.

To see pictures of our visit to Sainte-Chapelle, Notre Dame, and Sacré Cœur, overlaid on a map, click: [Paris Churches](#)

14 October 2014

The Musée du Louvre is closed on Tuesday. However, the Château de Versailles is not only open, but has music playing throughout its gardens on Tuesdays. Today we made it to the proper RER (suburban train line) station and took the train to Versailles. We *should* have purchased our tickets in advance, but had not, so there was a line. We *did* purchase tickets for both Versailles and the Louvre once we got to the ticket booth, saving us time tomorrow.



The music, classical of course, provided the proper mood for a stroll along the paths, past many statues molded in the Greek and Roman style.

There are several cafés concealed in the gardens, and we found one for lunch.



Even with tickets, there was a long line to get through security and into the palace, so we elected to visit the gardens first. It was a beautiful, sunny day and we were able to capture many scenes “on film.”



Afterwards, we stopped to admire the fountain in the Bassin du Miroir, its water jets sequenced to dance to classical music.

By the time we returned to the entrance, the lines had subsided and we were quickly into the Château itself. We passed the Chapel, through the Hall of Mirrors, and saw the Apartments of the King and Queen. The opulence on display is incredible, and it is easy to understand why the peasants of the time might revolt.

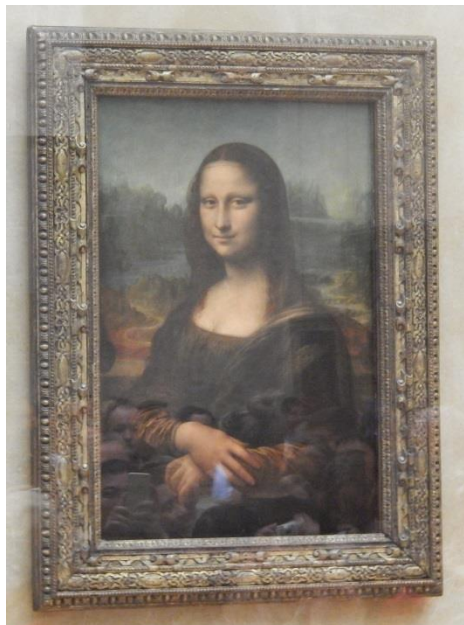
To see pictures of our visit to Versailles, overlaid on a map, click: [Château de Versailles](#)

Satisfied that we had gained an appreciation for Versailles, we made our way back to the train station, and Paris.

Several cafés lie on the route from the Paris station to our hotel. We stopped in one with a Greek décor that had chickens roasting in the window. Well-fed, we returned to our hotel with its many steps and retired for the evening.

15 October 2014

Like the Château de Versailles, the Musée du Louvre was once a royal residence. Fortunately, both were spared the wrath of the French Revolution. The Louvre is a sprawling complex, three major buildings occupying an area of several city blocks. The buildings are interconnected, and the main entrance is (now) through a pyramid, which seems somewhat out of place in the middle of these Renaissance (and older) buildings.



The majority of the 35,000 articles on display are European or Mediterranean in origin. The museum is building its collections of art from Oriental, Islamic, American, and Pacific regions, but most of your attention will be drawn to the paintings, sculptures, and artifacts from Egypt and the Near East. There are the well-known – the *Mona Lisa* and *Venus de Milo* to name but two – and thousands upon thousands of other works of art.

We spent about five hours inside, with a break for lunch. The free guide map does a good job of leading you to the major items of interest. We intend to return – there's way too much to see in one short visit.

To see pictures of our visit to Musée du Louvre, overlaid on a map, click: [Musée du Louvre](#)

16 October 2014

Our last full day in France! Two major sights were left on our list – Montmartre, crowned by Sacré Cœur, and Avenue des Champs Élysées, with the Arc de Triomphe at one end.

Montmartre is one of the Arrondissements of Paris, newer and to the north of the center of town. Our hotel was a block from a Metro station that would take us directly to Montmartre, making the journey quite easy. Once off the subway, a few blocks walk took us to the funicular and a ride up to the steps of Sacré Cœur.

This is a very modern church, by European standards, having been built in the late 1800's. Like Notre Dame, it is an active church; unlike Notre Dame, taking pictures is prohibited. That did not seem to dissuade most of the visitors, who were happily snapping away, and I hazarded a shot or two myself. Without flash and a quiet shutter, I do not think I disturbed anyone's worship.

The steps of Sacré Cœur offer one of the best views of Paris. Leaving the church, we traverse the hillside to one of the many squares where hip people like us sit around and drink coffee – which we did.

The narrow streets of Montmartre are full of small shops and street vendors. Lots of artists who would like to draw your portrait (I resisted the temptation to get one to use as my Facebook picture!).



We found a square full of open-air restaurants and selected one for lunch. Great place to watch the hustle and bustle.

After lunch we walked down the hill, past historic windmills that are now only decorative, to the rather bawdy district by the Moulin Rouge. Took some pictures, did not go in...

To see pictures of our exploration of Paris, overlaid on a map, click: [Paris Scenes](#)

A handy Metro route gave us the chance to ride to Place Charles de Gaulle, site of the Arc de Triomphe and one end of Avenue des Champs Élysées.

We walked the length of the avenue, about a mile, stopping often to admire the fancy stores, the adjacent park, and eventually the obelisk in Place de la Concorde. The base of the obelisk is decorated with drawings of how it was moved from Egypt to France in 1833.



From the Place de la Concorde, we walked across the river and caught a bus back to our hotel. We had walked plenty for one day, and were about ready to take a vacation from our vacation.

The evening found us packing for the trip home, and dining at a nearby restaurant.

17 October 2014

Today we awake in Paris and go to sleep in Bellingham, with a nine-hour time change to make it possible to do all that in one day.

Finishing packing, we checked out and had breakfast. A taxi stand was two blocks away; there we hailed a taxi to take us to the airport. Although it is possible to take trains (plural) to the airport, we decided to spend a few more Euros for the convenience.

Our flight left Charles De Gaulle at 14:10 CEST, landed in Keflavík at 15:40 GMT (3:30 later); our connection left Keflavík at 17:00 GMT and landed at Seattle-Tacoma at 17:45 PDT (7:45 later).

We had enough time to retrieve our bags, clear immigration and customs, and catch the Airporter Shuttle at 19:00. Our neighbors met us in Bellingham at 21:30 and we were home, only 31 days after we started.

