

Europe 1998

05/16/1998 – Saturday

This will be a little different kind of trip for us – we have only booked hotels in our arrival city (Paris – 4 nights) and our departure city (London – 3 nights) and will just go where we want to the rest of the time.

Splurged a little on the flight from DFW to Boston by using my coupons and upgraded to 1st class. What a nice way to fly. The food was good & the wine non-stop. We read (I'm studying for my Telecommunications class this trip) and generally laid out where we want to go. Had a 3-hour layover in Boston.

A note on packing – it seemed so easy this time. We really didn't have much trouble deciding what to bring and making it all fit into the suitcase. We both left the little zip-on day packs at home and will try the larger REI day packs that I hope will be able to fasten onto the larger packs.

Flew an Airbus A300 wide body to Paris. I was able to get us two window seats by themselves for this and the return flight – sure beats sitting in the middle section. This plane has LCD displays in the seatbacks with an interactive user interface. Neat feature – a real time map showing our position, altitude, speed, etc. at all times. Continued our eating and drinking marathon, managed to sleep more than usual.

05/17/1998 – Sunday (Paris)

Arrived right on time at 7:05 am. We were fairly well rested & had little trouble managing customs, bag claims, getting money, etc. The RER has a train right at Orly, and so for 51 Fr each we were whisked right downtown. It was a 7 – 8 block walk to the hotel, where we stored our stuff (the room was not yet available) and set out for a walk.

We just wandered around really. It was a beautiful, sunny warm day – almost hot in the sun and almost cool in the shade. Walked up towards the Latin Quarter and Notre Dame – found several thriving outdoor markets selling all manner of meat, fruit, and vegetables. We were also approached by far more betterers than we remember from our last time in Paris.

Had lunch, found our favorite restaurant from last time, and decided return later for a birthday dinner. Walked back to the hotel to get some sleep as were both running out of gas.

Menu Dur Jour – Best Value, 3 – 5 Course menu
Plat de Jour – Plate Meal
Wine – 1/4L Carafe (un quart)
Glass of water – une carafe d'eau

Guess whose favorite restaurant was closed on Sunday's? We walked past a bunch of interesting but totally empty restaurants on our way to the Latin Quarter near the river, which was extremely crowded and full of life at 7 pm. Had duck (me) and pasta (Kathleen) with a fantastic '95 Burgundy at a small hole in the wall place (a poor substitute for the place wanted) for \$53 with tip.

I had wanted to take some pictures after it got completely dark, but it stayed light later than we wanted to stay awake. We walked along the Seine then back to our hotel.

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We walked past the restaurants we had passed by earlier and found them to be full of people and full of life. We will try them later on this trip (Rue Mouffetard).

05/18/1998 – Monday (Paris)

Slept well and long: Got up after Kathleen at 10:00. We were very hungry and bought some chocolate filled croissants then sat at a sidewalk café & tried to enjoy our time, 20 Fr coffee while we mapped out our day.

Took the metro to Napoleon's Tomb (my legs are sore today!) where we bought our museum passes for 150 Fr each – they seem to be valid just about everywhere. We don't know why we didn't get one last time.

Next, we took the tour of the Paris sewer system. It was fascinating (and a little smelly) but well worth the time (and it was covered by our pass).

After the sewer tour we took a boat tour on the Seine. It was a beautiful sunny day and we sat on the top along with everyone else. Just missed getting soaked with water by some pranksters while we were passing under one of the many bridges.

Then headed over to the Galleria Lafayette that mercifully had a McDonalds where we relaxed and recovered over a bottomless diet coke. Bought 3 more miniature houses too.

Anyway, the next thing we knew it was 7 pm and the store was closing. We went back to the Latin Quarter to the La Petite Hostillerie for a dinner every bit as good as we remembered, at a much better price than last night (59 Fr vs 89), although the wine we chose was a little more common (ala Rene Juneau) – a French table wine.

Rode the metro back to the hotel, as we did most of the day. We had bought a book of 10 tickets and used them all.

05/19/1998 – Tuesday (Paris)

In spite of our best intentions we slept in again. I got up after Kathleen at 9:30. Had a bit of a discussion about effective communications on the corner outside our hotel, then proceeded with our day. Bought more chocolate croissants from a bakery that had a tin can retrieving dog that helped lift our moods a bit. Found a much cheaper place for coffee and apple juice (13 Fr).

Rode the metro to the RER station where we validated our rail passes and got our tickets (no cost) to Versailles, today's destination.

Whew! 5 pm and waiting for the train to depart for Paris. The palace was HUGH, and now full of art, at least in the sections we walked through. Several of the halls seemed larger than football fields. And the gardens! They seemed to go on forever. We couldn't do more than look at the paths through them with fatigue – we were both so tired after walking through the palace, which looks like a small city as you walk up to it.

Got ourselves a coke at McDonalds, caught our breath and headed to the train station.

On yes – we bought sandwiches outside the train station and ate on a park bench in front of the palace.

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05/20/1998 – Wednesday (Paris)

It might be quicker to describe what we didn't do today...

Did our usual circuit of bakery, take out coffee, then eating in a small plaza near the metro, then off to the Cluny. What a gem of a museum. It has the remains of an old Roman bath that has been "destroyed" several times, but those rascals really knew how to build it was a most fascinating blending of old and new buildings, and the relics were fabulous.

Then it was off to the metro to go to the L'Orange (the museum pass and buying metro tickets in groups of 10 worked well) so Kathleen could bury herself in two large rooms purpose built for 8 huge Monet water lily pictures. They were awesome.

Next, we zipped over to Notre Dame and did a quick walk-through. We both agreed that our earlier dour opinion of the cathedral on our last visit had been jaded by the lavishness of the Austrian cathedrals we had just seen. Seen with fresh eyes, Notre Dame is quite beautiful, but that wasn't what we came to see.

The Crypts of Notre Dame are a wonderful, below the street archaeological presentation that shouldn't be missed. It shows the runes of this part of Paris for hundreds of years. It was really interesting. We decided that the French have a real skill at presenting information in museums.

Next, we headed off to the La Chaise cemetery where, seemingly, everybody who was ever somebody is buried. They had many monuments to the holocaust (which Kathleen photographed), as well as the neatest above ground crypts and tombstones we have ever seen.

The highlight of the trip was seeing the 10 or so people around Jim Morrison's grave. We got there (finally) just around closing time (6 pm) and got chased out with all of the other Rock 'N Roll faithful.

We had planned on hitting the Louvre but just ran out of gas. We ended up having several beers in the Marais neighborhood that Rick Steves recommends. We liked it, and had we been able to get a hotel for the 5th night we would have stayed in Paris for another day.

Ate at our favorite restaurant (the La Petite Hostillerie) again (still love it!) and headed home.

05/21/1998 – Thursday (Paris)

In limbo in route to Mon St. Michelle...

Well, too bad we couldn't get a hotel for another day in Paris... Turns out that this is a holiday weekend (Ascension Thursday). So, few trains are running (we got to the station only to find that we had to wait 4+ hours for the next train to Caen). That got us paranoid about a hotel, and with good reason. We tired every hotel listed in Bayeux and found that they were all booked.

After much discussion and anguish we finally booked what must have been the last room available anywhere... at Mont Saint-Michel (for 800 Fr – not that we cared at this point).

We waited in the waiting room are read, bought some sandwiches, and got on the train at 2:30. Changed in Caen, and stop at Pontorson around 7 pm. Took a cab (110 Fr) and arrived in paradise.

The town is as beautiful as its pictures suggest. Our hotel room was so nice, and the town so beautiful, that we went down to the lobby and booked (the last room) for the next night too.

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Walked around, ate at one Rick Steves (in fact, the only) recommendation (Le St. Michel). Took some night shots of the cathedral, had a beer, then returned to our room and slept the sleep of the rich.

05/22/1998 – Friday (Mont Saint-Michel)

More about yesterday... We couldn't figure out why most of the stores at the train station were closed when we got there. The main display showed the next train to Caen at 2:30 pm (we arrived at 10:00 am!). We stopped at a Thomas Cooke currency exchange and bought a rail guide (and later a calling card) that showed many trains... Kathleen went to an info place and learned that it was a holiday.

Things began to escalate then. Kathleen kind of panicked about finding a place to sleep and got real irritated with the hustlers at the station that approached us (me). We went through very many hotels before we (finally) got a place to stay.

The train to Caen was what you would expect. We had 15 minutes at Caen to catch the train for Pontorson. We ended up sitting in the 2nd class smoking car on a train that similar to the ones we took all over England (self-propelled 2-car units). In Pontorson we walked out and took a can to the island.

This place is amazing. We slept like logs until 10:00, By the time we got down to the main walkway the hoards had descended. You could barely walk down the narrow street/sidewalk for all the people.

We tried to get a hotel in Bayeux (again). Went to the TI here in Mont Saint-Michel and got a better list of hotels and tried some more. Kathleen was great – almost none of them spoke English, but her French was superb. After having called at least 15 hotels we finally got one!

Fell into the restaurant by our hotel for coffee but decided to have breakfast/lunch as it was about noon. I had the island famous omelet (big deal – not!) and Kathleen had salmon. We then followed the crowd to tour the abbey.

This place is simply amazing... It is a little medieval city build on an island. I don't know how they did it – the amount of stonework is beyond belief. I don't know how anyone conceived the design, let alone actually executing it.

We had to change rooms for the 2nd night: the hotel moved our stuff, so we came back and rested for an hour or so before walking out to the beaches to get some good panoramic vistas. We certainly don't need the exercise – the steps and hills here would kill a mountain goat!

We came back, had a beer, wrote some post cards, then went to dinner at the same place (why argue with success?). Arranged for a 8:30 taxi (yuck) and a 7 am wakeup call (argh!) before heading to bed early (10:30) with the sky not yet dark.

05/23/1998 – Saturday (to Bayeux)

Had a 9:30 train that I didn't want to miss, so I insisted on an 8:30 cab, so we bid a regretful but fond farewell to Mont Saint-Michel. It was another brilliantly sunny (but delightfully cool) morning. The difference between the island with and without tourists is beyond description. I am glad we stayed and had the chance to enjoy the beauty without people jammed wall to wall.

Got our same cab driver to the train station. He wasn't so talkative this time – he must not be a morning person. The fare was only 75 Fr (vs. 110 Fr on the way in – damn holidays!).

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Since we had time to kill, I tried to get us some coffee from one of the nearby restaurants. My lack of French and their lack of understanding of why anybody would want to take coffee with them defeated me.

I did call and book Amsterdam and Brussels. We will be there for holiday weekend (joy!) and we figured we'd better get ahead of this game. It took several tries in Amsterdam to find a place, so it was good that we did.

We took the train to Bayeux (~2 hours). Walked past the TI on our way to the hotel (a Best Western!), dumped our bags and made it back to the TI just after they closed for lunch. Since Paris, nothing about this trip has been easy!

Kathleen had picked up a brochure on local attractions, and it reminded us that the hotel at the train station did van tours of the beaches. We stopped by there: what a dreary place (the people were too). They are already booked up for tomorrow (of course!).

We called a car rental place that had cars available, but they couldn't book us until 1:30. Then we called the local bus company – they will pick us up at our hotel at 8:30 and handle the whole day for us for 160 Fr each! So we made a reservation and relaxed.

If I haven't already said so, Kathleen's mastery of French has been a miracle. She has really hung in there through some difficult conversations – I honestly don't know what I would have done without her!

Anyway, we headed over to Caen for a tour of the Normandy Invasion Museum. It was interesting, but not nearly as much as our book had built it up to be. None the less, we spent 4+ hours there.

Spent no time waiting for the but to and from the Museum from the train station – in fact, we had to run to catch both!

Came back to Bayeux and had a beer at sidewalk café before changing and going out to dinner. Ate at the L'Europe Restaurant Brasserie on Rue Saint Milo – both had salmon in a sauce to die for. The smoked salmon appetizer was the best I've had since Scotland.

Our hotel has a nice restaurant and bar (it is a 3-star hotel and pretty nice), so we had a drink before retiring for the night.

10 pm and still light...

05/24/1998 – Sunday (Bayeux)

Well, things are looking better. Our hotel includes breakfast with the room. It was more like what we got in Scandinavia: bread, ham, cheese, boiled eggs (cold), cereal, juice, and coffee. Makes the rate (540 Fr) seem a little more reasonable.

While I'm on the subject, the hotel is nice. It's a few blocks off the main drag, but the dining room looks great, and it has nice little bar across the lobby. The room is clean and reasonable sized, and the beds are very comfortable. It has a toilet in one small room and a sink/shower in another.

Anyway, our tour bus showed up (at 8:35) after we had finished breakfast. It was a small van driven by David. We joined an older couple and an Army dentist, his wife and two small children, all Americans.

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The gods must be trying to make up to us because by some stroke of luck we managed to be on a Normandy beach tour on Memorial Day. We first visited the site of a former German gun emplacement stormed by the Rangers. While our guide was explaining what had gone on there during the invasion (an excellent overview), a small entourage of dignitaries arrived, laid a wreath, and left, escorted by two police motorcycles.

Next we drove by Utah beach. It was high tide, and a road has since been built on it (as well as many houses), so from a WWII perspective there wasn't much to see.

We then drove to the American Cemetery and observed a memorial ceremony with speakers, a British RAF flyby, a band, honor guard and 21 gun salute. 3000 Americans died on Utah beach on June 6, and 5000 – 6000 are now buried on this site that Churchill said "will always be a piece of America".

It was a very moving experience, and it was gratifying to see that the French still remember and honor the sacrifice made by our country.

We then headed into the British sector to see a museum dedicated to the harbor built by the British. It was truly a remarkable feat of engineering, turning a bay into a fully functioning harbor with docks and a breakwater in 10 days. A twin was built in the American sector, but that site had a sand bottom (vs. the rock bottom found in the British area) and it was destroyed by a storm before it ever became functional.

It was a superb tour that really helped me to understand the geography and the history of the invasion.

We got off the bus on the main street which was largely dead due to it being Sunday (and a holiday). We had lunch (spaghetti for Kathleen, Quiche with a salad for me, with wine that was excellent) and headed back to the hotel to map out and book hotels for the rest of our trip.

The holiday stuff has really cramped our care-free style of travel... We had trouble getting a room for our next town, but Kathleen and her mastery of French came through (again) so we are now booked for the rest of the trip. I figured out the train information, so I guess we are set. We made the calls from our room: hope we read the rates correctly or will cost us a fortune...

We set out again – went through the cathedral, which was beautiful. Apparently, it was spared from any damage during the war.

We stopped by the train station and got our seat reservations for tomorrow's TGV train (40 Fr), then had a leisurely walk back towards town interrupted only by a 0.5L Kroonenberg in a sunny terrace outside a bar where I scribbled these notes on our pleasures (so far) today.

I have to mention the weather. It looked gloomy this morning, and had rained, but it progressed into a beautiful sunny day. I am going to go home with a tanned face that will be the envy of Dallas!

We selected a Rick Steves recommendation for dinner – the Hotel Notre Dame near the church, It featured an English speaking hostess, a warm dining room, and gave new meaning to the term "slow service". The food was delicious: I had mussels in a crème sauce and a duck breast stuffed with apples, while Kathleen chose a duck/apple pastry and veal. The third course was a selection of cheeses (I passed – I was full and getting tired). For dessert we both selected the chocolate mouse (superb!), all washed down with a '93 Bordeaux.

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All together, it took 2 or more hours to get though it all. If it wasn't getting on towards 11 pm (with an early departure) I don't think I would have minded, but I was glad to finally get out of there (410 Fr – not cheap!).

We went back to the hotel and crashed.

05/25/1998 – Monday (to Arles)

A big travel day. We got up at 6:30, packed, ate, paid and left on the 20-minute walk to the train station. We have really enjoyed our stay in Bayeux.

Caught the 9:06 train to Paris, then the 12:06 (delayed to 12:12!) TGV. Had to catch the metro between Gare Saint-Lazare and the Gare de Lyon stations. We still had two tickets for the metro left over and made the trip in 20 minutes or so.

Bought sandwiches and drinks for lunch and got on the TGV. Somehow we got seats 4 rows apart but managed to trade and so were able to sit together. Th car was mostly full, so it was a good thing that we made our reservations when we did.

The trip has been relaxed and pleasant. We both got a lot of reading for school done.

I almost forgot to record prices, so here are some typical figures:

- Bee (0.5 L) – 26 Fr
- Wine: 18 Fr (Glass), 100+ Fr (Bottle)
- Dinners: Cheap set course starts at 70 Fr. We have paid as much as 140 Fr
- Coffee – 5 Fr (cheap), 10 Fr (typical), 20 Fr (ridiculous)
- Ham & Cheese Sandwich – 25 Fr in a train station

Got off the TGV in Avignon, waited about 40 minutes for the train to Arles (much bigger than I expected – not a local train).

Arles

This place is amazing.. narrow, twisting streets built on top of, around and beside Roman ruins. It has an almost mystical ability to render maps and a sense of direction useless. We have yet to go from point A to point B without getting lost.

Our hotel is a delight (Hotel St. Trophine – 13 Arles) – it is clean, has a beautiful lobby, and we have a neat room on the 2nd floor with a balcony. We had been told that we would have to change rooms after the 1st night when we booked, but that is not a requirement now.

We went immediately to the laundromat, or rather we tried to. In spite of 2 maps, directions from Rick Steves and directions from the front desk clerk we still managed to get lost. We thought we had found it and walked into some other kind of business, both of us babbling in English about laundry (they'll probably be telling that story for years) before we finally found it.

There was a convenient bar next door, so Kathleen checked out the restaurant scent while I mapped our train options up to Chamonix and Amsterdam (both look like very long trips – we must be nuts!).

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We dropped off our clean clothes and headed out for dinner. The food here looks fascinating, but we ended up at a so-so place with a waiter that drunk or on drugs. Our tomato Mozzarella salad was great, but he tried to skip our main course by offering desert next. Then when we did order dessert we didn't get the chocolate cake that the French couple next to us got (they agreed). Kathleen complained, was told that they were out, ordered apple cake but was served custard. Oh well, he didn't charge us for the 2nd pitcher of wine we ordered!

The town is full of Roman ruins (not so ruined). It should be fascinating to discover.

05/26/1998 – Tuesday (Arles)

No alarm today: slept until the light and noise woke us up around 8:00. We are in the front of the hotel on the 2nd floor (we have the only balcony!) and street noise is pretty loud, as is the noise from the adjacent rooms.

We had breakfast at the hotel (40 Fr for juice, bread/jam/butter and all the coffee we could drink), then set out on our grand tour of the city.

Found the downtown TI and got a brochure describing the city highlights, then walked over to the Antiquity Museum (Le Musee De L'arles Antique) which was fascinating. It has artifacts from the Roman and Medieval periods of the city's development. They have great models of the Roman circus (the chariot race arena), the Amphitheatre and the Arena as well as many other now destroyed (mostly) buildings. It really helped put some of the ruins we have seen in the rest of the city into perspective.

We next saw the outdoor theatre. It is still in use today, although not much of the original structure is left. Next we walked over to the Arena (also still in use for bull fights). These were both magnificent structures and, considering they were built entirely of stone, rival anything we could build today.

Somewhere along the way we had lunch (pasta for me, salad for Kathleen). Something at breakfast upset Kathleen's stomach (the coffee? The cream?) so she was not feeling well all day.

We also visited the Saint Trophime Cloister. I got yelled at for using a tripod, even though I was outside in the garden – who can figure? Nobody said anything to me in the church when I was photographing the stained-glass windows though.

Stopped off next door to the awful restaurant from last night for a few beers and to write post cards. Then to the hotel to change for dinner (it was cooling off and long pants were in order). Walked by many restaurants before finally settling on one.

Had a fish dish that was delicious – baked fish, potatoes, carrots and onions in a garlic cheese sauce. Kathleen had fish soup, I had mussels in a tomato sauce with carrots and other stuff served over a biscuit and a salad, so we could not begin to eat it all. Too bad, because it was good.

I took a few night shots of the arena after dinner (left Kathleen at the hotel). Hope they turn out.

We decided we are eating too many 3-course dinners. I think all the exercise the first week we were here kicked our appetites up, but now that we are used to all the walking we just don't need to eat so much so will try to cut back.

05/27/1998 – Wednesday (Arles)

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Slept until 8:00... this has been a most restful trip for us. Staying in a city for 2 – 3 days really lets us relax and catch up on our sleep.

Skipped breakfast at the hotel and headed down to the McDonalds instead, then walked to the street market. The end that started on was mainly selling clothes, belts, purses, and cloth goods. Kathleen bought several cloth serving devices that tie up at the corners and store flat (40 Fr each).

The market went on for many blocks, and the clothes soon gave way to food: Meat, cheeses, spices, breads, nuts, wine – we were practically drawling from the smells.

We gathered up the makings for a picnic lunch: Cheese, bread, cherries, green olives, and roast chicken, which we devoured in a small park the main city gate.

After digesting our food on the park bench for a while we meandered back to the hotel and took a nap to complete our lunch break. It was good that we were in the hotel because it rained buckets. The street outside our hotel was a river full of water and wet tourists.

Oh yes, before we went to the hotel we stopped by the train station information center and got help with our trip to Chamonix and onto Amsterdam. They have all the trains in a computer and can pull up an itinerary for two end points at the push of a button: why haven't we used this more often? Both trips will involve 3 – 4 trains and will take all day. We had to pay for expensive reservations for the Paris – Brussels leg (260 Fr for both of us) because it is such a congested route. It was good to have this information and the necessary reservations made. I was worried about the route I had mapped out because of the complexity and because our Cooks guide is only good to May 23.

Once the rain stopped (mostly) we did a bit of shopping and sight seeing until we got tired of walking. Stopped off at the Place du Forum again (we scowled at our waiter from the other night) and had a beer, then meandered (that is the best way to describe walking around this town) to one of Rick Steves dinner recommendations. It was simply superb! 85 Fr for Ravioli in crème sauce, Port in gravy with assorted vegetables for me, salad and fish for Kathleen, with strawberries and whipped cream for dessert. We washed it down with a local red wine (90 Fr) that was marvelous.

We wandered back to bed early (9:30) in preparation for an early departure tomorrow.

05/28/1998 – Thursday (to Chamonix)

Got up at 6:15, packed, paid (1028 Fr for 3 nights) and made the long walk to the train station. Caught the 8:00 train for the short ride to Avignon. Had an hour and a half wait for the next train so had coffee and a croissant while waiting. It rained (hard) again.

The train to Aix les Baines was late, so we only had about 7 minutes to catch the 3rd train (to Valence) when we reached Aix les Baines, and this one left 8 minutes late. It don't know why: it was in the station, it just didn't leave. It was an hour+ trip and we figured it would make up the time, but it didn't: it arrived 10 minutes late in Valence.

Luckily our connection waited, and it was right across the platform, so in the end was no big deal. It was a 4+ hour ride to St. Gervais: we got lots of reading done, and had a lunch of cheese, bread, tomatoes, and cookies. We bought a cup of coffee: it was a neat little drip deal that tasted just like American coffee – good!

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At St Gervais we walked right across the platform to our alpine train to Chamonix. It looked practically new. The route was awesome – a narrow track winding through beautiful mountains. In about 30 minutes we were there (the routing and connection information we got in Arles was great!). We arrived at 4:30.

Chamonix is a thriving alpine town, bigger than I expected. We got our bearings, then headed through town to the TI for a map, then uphill (of course!) to our B&B. It is quite pleasant, if a bit of a struggle to walk to with heavy packs. Our hostess is French, although she lived and worked in Dallas for a while.

Dropped off our stuff and headed back downhill into town to get our bearings by walking around. It is pleasantly cool and overcast, which does not bode well for the planned cable car ride tomorrow. Bought some chips and a bottle of wine, had a beer while watching the town walk by, then and at Rick Steves fondue restaurant (ho-hum!) before calling it a night.

05/29/1998 – Friday (Chamonix)

Slept well (together in the same bed for a change) and got up around 8:00. Did the usual morning things, and headed out to greet the day. Bought chocolate rolls, then English newspapers (USA Today and the Financial Times – our first dose of reality this trip) and bought coffee. One of the great things about France is that once you buy a single cup of coffee (or beer), nobody will ever chase you away from the table. You can sit there all day and they don't seem to care. Anyway, we stretched out over coffee and read.

Since the weather was the pits (our B&B host said it was worthless in this weather) we scrapped the big cable car ride and went instead on a train trip to the local glacier. It was really cool (no pun intended). The train was a cog driven one (the incline was that steep) and the view was fantastic. Once we reached the top we took a breath taking cable car ride down to the ice cave that they have carved into the glacier. Even after the cable car down we still had to walk down a bunch of steps to get all the way down to the cave.

Other than walking inside a glacier the cave was ho-hum.

Rode back up, had a beer in the restaurant, saw some BIG quartz they found around the area somewhere. There is a hotel up there that would be fun to stay in. In fact, we would both like to come back and spend more time in this area.

The weather was still crummy (overcast with occasional rain) so we decided to take a train ride into Switzerland. Bought sandwiches and drinks and jumped on the train to Martigny.

The scenery was marvelous – the train goes through the same valley as the cog train, although much lower, along the river. The trip was well worth the time, although Martigny itself looked very urban, bland and unappealing, so we caught the next train back.

Unfortunately, it stopped at the Swiss border, where we had to wait for an hour until the next through train came along. It was quite a little tourist trap, with several souvenir stores full of chocolate cigarettes and other things we can live without.

Got back to Chamonix and walked over to the part of town we hadn't seen yet (it was dead). Stopped off for a beer, then went to a "sports bar" for dinner. It was full of talking locals (the bar – it was early for

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dinner) the whole time we were there. The food was delicious. We ordered off the menu and got lots of vegetables, and the price was very reasonable (this was at the Bistrot des Sports – a great place). We then regretfully headed back to get ready for an early departure tomorrow.

05/30/1998 – Saturday (to Amsterdam)

A long travel day. We started with a 7:08 to St. Gervais, took a 8:28 to Shamberg, the 11:09 to Paris Gare de Lyon, two metro's (1 & 5) to Gare du Nord, the 14:55 to Brussels, then the 16:40 to Amsterdam, where we will hopefully catch a local train to Haarlem. Even without counting the Mero's, that's 6 trains in one day – a record for us.

The passed quickly. We studied, slept, and ate (we had purchased bread, cheese and apples yesterday) and generally had a pleasant time.

As promised, there were numerous trains to Haarlem, and the ride is only about 15 minutes.

I goofed us up a bit on the hotel reservation. We wen to the wrong place, which was full. What compounded the problem was the fact that they said we were the second couple that showed up with a reservation but no room. While the receptionist was calling around trying to find us a room, I realized that I could have made the reservation at another hotel (I had called several that day). She called the other hotel and confirmed that they had our reservation and were still holding the room for us (by this time it was 7 pm).

We, it was a bit of a hike, but we got there and into our room (hooray!), although it was 2 flights up and hot. At least it didn't face the street.

We had finished off the bread and cheese on the train up from Brussels, but were by this time hungry again, so we wandered around until we found a place that looked interesting and dove in.

The food was very good (we both had fish), but we made the mistake of ordering a salad. It too was delicious, but huge, and the meal came with vegetables, another small salad, and French fries. Needless to say, we were stuffed. And, their A/C was broke and felt like we were eating in a sauna. It felt really good to leave.

Watched "Patton" on the TV – this is seeming more and more like a great vacation.

05/31/1998 – Sunday (In and around Haarlem)

Woke up on our own a bit after 8. Breakfast here is nice: bread, cheese, ham, juice, and a big carafe of coffee. The owner seemed a bit gruff but was nice – interested in where we had been.

Decided to go up to the Zuiderzee museum in Enkhuizen. It was a fun train trip as we went by way of Alkmaar, so we got to see some of the countryside. Met and talked to an interesting young man who works for a shipping company. He recommended that we see the Zaanse Schans village in Zaandijk. We may, since the bulb display we wanted to see us closed for the season.

Anyway, the museum was real interesting. It has an actual dwelling from several hundred years ago – really small! The beds were like closets (literally). It looked like a hard life.

Europe 1998

Spent most of the day there but came into Amsterdam around 6 pm and took a fun boar ride through the canals. It is a big, busy city. The Central Station seems to b a bee-hive full of buzzing people, trains, and trams. We were glad to get out and head back to tranquility of Haarlem.

We had eaten some pizza hut pizza on our way out of the Central Station to the boat, so we weren't real hungry when we got to Haarlem, so we sat off the square at a real popular café and drank beer and watched the people.

By the time we got up to eat at McDonalds they were closed (it was by now 10 pm) so we settled for more pizza and wine at the only place that seemed open (it was, but barely).

06/01/1998 – Monday (In and around Haarlem)

Wike up on our own at 8 again – I guess we are settling into a rhythm here. Breakfast was improved by the addition of a couple of soft-boiled eggs: I like these Northern customs!

We went to Zaanwijk on a cloudy, cool morning. There was virtually nobody up and about – must be a tradition to sleep in on this holiday. We followed the signs on a 10-minute walk to a section of town that has a collection of houses and windmills clustered on the water (naturally... what isn't "on the water" in this country?).

These have been mostly moved her from other parts of the country, but are for the most part lived in, working house and businesses (Kathleen pointed out that it was a lot like Silver Dollar City because you can see them making and doing the crafts). The windmills still grind, and we saw them making wooden shoes, boats, etc.

Shortly after we arrived, the sky cleared into a brilliantly sunny day, and the people emerged from wherever they had been hiding, and we had a crowd!

We took a great boar tour – got to sit out on the back in the sun – took a zillion pictures. Drank a cup of marvelous coffee: Really enjoyed it!

Went into a museum dealing with the writings of a woman who recorded the details and customs regarding death – quite fascinating – we could see a lot of the Victorian mourning traditions there (wearing black, morning periods, etc.).

We also went up (and I mean up – narrow, steep steps that were more like a ladder) into a working windmill. This one ground pigment used to die paints.

We found a store selling Delft pottery at great prices. We bought ourselves our big trip memento's - two hand painted plates. We also bought a clock for my mother, vases for my sisters and a gift from Kathleen (tiles). The whole thing was more than 1000 F. The plates are beautiful – we just hope the clock makes it to us before we go to Chicago.

After our purchase we sat in the sun and had a beer (there is something about spending a lot of money that builds up a thirst). We were shocked to see that it was 5 pm already.

We headed back to the train station past a chocolate manufacturing plant – the smell has been tantalizing us all day – and went back to Amsterdam. We wanted to go to Zandvoort, but the only trains left before noon, so we headed back to Haarlem.

Europe 1998

When we got there, we found that there was a full schedule of trains to the coast, so off we went (I don't know what the cost of the train tickets here is, but is sure seems like we have used the hell out our rail pass. It has paid for itself just in convenience alone here).

Zandvoort is a beautiful, trendy coastal city. On this day (a sunny holiday), it was apparently THE place to be. Although it was late afternoon, there were still a lot of sun bathers. There were a great number of chair rental operations, and a seemingly endless row of tiny beach houses further down (two deep). We finished off our long walk with a beer at one of the beach front bars before catching the train back to Haarlem.

We agreed that Haarlem has been a wonderful base of operations. The prices for everything have been wonderful – we must come back and spend more time here.

We tried our luck at the Nar King Chinese/Indonesian restaurant. The prices were great, and the food was wonderful. Mainly pork and chicken, but the sauces were to die for. We got to the restaurant just after several large groups and had to wait 20 – 30 minutes to be served, so we put a good dent in an excellent White Bordeaux – so good we ordered another when the food showed up.

After we ate, I struck up a fun conversation with two American men who have just finished college and who are on a 3 or 4 week trip abroad before settling down to work. One had lived in Germany as an exchange student for a year. It was fun talking to them.

We walked back to our hotel and crashed.

06/02/1998 – Tuesday (Amsterdam and Brugge)

We woke up at 7 and got ready to hit the road again. Packing is such a hassle, but we are getting better at it.

Our Innkeeper remembered something I said at breakfast yesterday and fried some eggs for me! He was fun...

Caught a train into Amsterdam and stored our bags in a locker (4 F each) and walked over to the Ann Frank house. It was an incredibly moving experience to be in the same room as where she and her family stayed while she wrote her remarkable diary.

We were lucky – there was quite a line waiting to get in as we left. We just walked right in!

Next, we walked to the Van Gogh museum for a very quick look at a collection of his paintings. It was brief, and we took the tram back to the station... And we witnessed an incredible scene of anger on the part of a woman against something in the train in front of us. She appeared to be Eastern European and had two small children in hand, and was literally jumping up and down, yelling spitting beating the tram with her purse. Quite a scene.

Our Cooks rail guide had indicated that there were departures to Brussels every half hour on the hour/half hour, but our train left at 13:24. We made it with 3 minutes to spare. I honestly don't think we waited more than a total of 20 minutes for trains the whole time we were in this country, and we rode a lot of trains. Their rail service is great!

Now, on to Belgium and what looks like a cloudy and potentially rainy afternoon.

Europe 1998

It was and it did (rain, that is). It was a good afternoon to be on a train. Had a bit of trouble finding a train to Brugge on the platform schedule. According to it there was one in 10 minutes, but it turned out that the next one wouldn't leave for 4 hours.

All of the trains leaving Brussels seemed to be running 5 – 15 minutes late, but ours finally pulled in. It is a one-hour ride to Brugge.

At the station we changed the rest of our Netherlands money, bought a phone card, got a map and some information at the TI, then took a bus (40 Fr each) to the city center. We were tempted to get off at a large flag surrounded plaza with a fountain in the center, but didn't, and got off at the correct stop.

Walked from there to the house of our host, then 4 more blocks to the duplex we are renting for the next 2 nights. It is the nicest place we have stayed in so far – a kitchen/living room on the 2nd floor and bedroom/bath on the 3rd floor. Ours for 2500 Fr a night!

We went out for a look at the town and for dinner (a marvelous beef stew. I had a smoked salmon appetizer; Kathleen got a baked mozzarella and tomato dish). The wine (a red) was especially nice, and we pigged out on 2 bottles.

Took a few pictures and called it a night.

06/03/1998 – Wednesday (In Brugge)

It was an alternating sunny/rainy day: it went from brilliant sunshine to pouring rain every 30 – 45 minutes all day long. It didn't get in our way though.

It was market day in Brugge, so we spent the morning walking through the stalls and admiring the beautiful fruit, vegetables, meats, cheeses and bread that were on display.

I climbed the 366 steps to the top of the bell tower. The steps were very narrow and steep, but the view was worth the effort. Kathleen remained at ground level with a cup of coffee and a Wall Street Journal.

Had a big lunch in the midst of some shopping, then called the US to get Kathleen registered for school. I used the rest of the time on the calling card to call Jean, and talked to mom until we ran out of time.

Bought a pillow and a matching weaving to make into another one – both copies of the tapestry we saw at the Cluny in Paris. Also bought a lace decoration for Hope. Checked out Cognac prices too – will buy that in London.

Saw a lot of cheap Delft pottery for sale – hope we did good with what we got in the Netherlands. The exchange rate is really good for us here right now.

We had stopped in for several beers, so headed home for a quick nap before going out to dinner at a basement restaurant near our "house".

I had the famous steamed mussels (they were good – certainly fresh – but I prefer them in a white sauce). Kathleen's fish (salmon) and sauce was superb, as was the white wine (Entremers – '95).

The restaurant was small (maybe 10 tables) and was run singlehanded by one man. We talked to him as we were paying the bill – he went to school for 6 years, speaks 6 languages, and has been working at this restaurant for 10 years. He plans to buy it in 4 years... He was a very impressive person!

Europe 1998

Wandered around and took pictures (I had left everything in our room but went back after dinner to get the camera and tripod because the light was so good). It had stopped raining and was a pretty evening.

We didn't want it to end, but finally gave up after 10 (it still was not completely dark) and retired.

06/04/1998 – Thursday (To London)

Woke up at the shrill insistence of the alarm clock at 7 am. The loft where we slept has windows and a skylight that opens, so it was really cool. The beds were very comfortable and warm. It was hard to get up, but we did.

Walked back to our host's house and paid our bill, then walked to the town square to catch our bus. It was pulling up to the stop just as we walked up so we got right on. Once at the station we caught the 8:34 instead of the 9:08 we were planning on, so there was absolutely no waiting for anything.

Had coffee (that little drip kind again – still delicious!) on the train into Brussels and got caught up with this journal.

The Chunnel Train was, well, sort of like a long tunnel. Other than knowing that we were actually under the English Channel it was much like any other train tunnel.

Customs procedures were in effect – had to show a passport to get into the waiting area in Brussels, had to fill out immigration cards in London. At least they stamped my passport!

It was a long, cool walk to the hotel, the Melbourne House at 79 Belgrave: I only mention it so that we know never to stay here again. Whatever possessed us to abandon the Windemere? Anyway, after a quick shower we were off.

Went to Leister Square by bus (#24, runs right past the hotel) and bought discount tickets to see "An Ideal Husband" at the Abbey Theatre. Walked around looking at restaurants and window shopping before eating at Bauns, a restaurant next door to the theatre.

The theatre was beautiful, the show fun. We sat in the 6th row on the main floor (there weren't many people in attendance) for £36.

Took our faithful #24 bus to within a few blocks of our hotel.

06/05/1998 – Friday (London)

Saw the War Cabinet facilities first thing. It has been preserved pretty much as it was at the end of the war. It was fascinating to walk through and see where so much history occurred.

It was extremely vulnerable to a direct hit by a bomb – I can't help but wonder how the course of history might have changed had Churchill and his ministers been wiped out early in the war.

We also went through the Egyptian Wing of the British Museum. The highlight for me was touching the Rosetta Stone, but they had a great deal of absolutely beautiful statues, columns, mummy's and other artifacts. One wonders how the Egyptians feel about having had so much of their heritage pilfered.

Europe 1998

The museum is huge and fascinating (and free, although a donation is strongly requested). I would like to go back – like so many large museums, I think it would be best taken in smaller, shorter visits. Otherwise we just get tired and numb to the significance and beauty of what we are seeing.

We listened to a piano recital at the St. Brides Church on Fleet Street (after lunch at a tavern). The music was a new composition by a female composer, performed by a female pianist. Great music to rest to (it must have been – we both nodded off a bit).

Had dinner at what we suspect was the Italian restaurant we loved so much on our honeymoon, but we are not sure. It was a so-so meal (Kathleen got a salmon pasta, but it was smoked and she didn't care for it all that much. I broke down and had a steak that was pretty good).

The restaurant was located in Soho, and the streets were jammed with people: Friday nights are obviously a time to go out and party – the bars were overflowing into the streets with business-types. It was hard to navigate our way down the street on our way back to the hotel.

The Leicester Arms on Glasshouse and Warwick Street – Off Regent Street ad Austin Reed (becomes Oxford Street) – Excellent bar & food!

06/06/1998 – Saturday (London)

Our last full day – and Kathleen's birthday. After breakfast we took the bus up towards Big Ben and watched the rehearsal of the Queens Guards trooping of the colors for her birthday celebration.

We had purchased the tickets on Friday, and it was well worth it. The music was worth the price of admission – we were both amazed at how well a marching band could sound (and march!).

It was quite a spectacle. We had been told to arrive an hour early. The security was tight – metal detectors and searches of all bags. They take it seriously and appear to have had a lot of practice doing it.

The marching of all the troops was amazing – they looked like toy soldiers! It was fun to watch, and the time passed quickly: before we knew it, it was 12:30 and all the pageantry was done.

After a lunch of Fish & Chips (finally!) we set out to find discount china on Regent Street. We found several discount stores, but not the one Kathleen remembered from several previous shopping trips. We went back and forth twice without finding it – it must have gone out of business is all we can figure.

Headed back to the hotel to rest a bit (we were beat!) and get cleaned up for dinner. We took the bus again – it is really an enjoyable way to get around and see the city. Sitting up top, especially in the front seats, is quite thrilling given the way that the London bus drivers zoom in and out of traffic.

We had 8:00 reservations at the English House (#3 Milner Street, Chelsea). Took the tube up there – ran into what must have been the mob from a sporting event (cricket?) on the train. They were very rowdy and had obviously drinking – a lot. We never felt threatened – just assaulted by the noise.

Dinner was superb. It was a lovely restaurant in a very quiet neighborhood. We got a table right at the open window, and Kathleen greatly enjoyed the cool breeze. I had smoked salmon (a HUGE serving) and duck: Kathleen had grilled scallops and Beef Wellington, and we split chocolate raspberry cheesecake to die for, all washed down by a Muscadet wine. We both feel like we have eaten our way across Europe.

Europe 1998

The Delft house I gave Kathleen as a gift was a surprise!

We chose to walk “home” and we are glad we did – we got to see a very quiet residential portion of London that we have never seen before. It was almost eerie because there was almost nobody else walking around except us.

Watched a bit of TV before dozing off. The TV selections available in Briton are horrible.

A few notes on the hotel...

- The bed was really bad – a hard mattress, and you could feel the springs. My ribs and knee are actually sore because of the bed.
- The street noise was bad. We were on the 2nd floor facing the street, and the windows and the curtain didn’t do much noise-wise. Fortunately, the traffic died down late at night.
- The walls between the rooms did little to stop noise: we could just about make out words when people were talking.
- And it is old. It seems over-priced at £70/night.
- On a positive note, the English breakfast was OK.

06/07/1998 – Sunday (Going Home)

Got up at 6 am (I woke up at 4:30 and it was full daylight outside!). Packed and took the tube to Victoria station (only one stop away, but it saved quite a bit of walking).

Flying American Airlines out of Gatwick is VERY convenient – you can check bags right at the train station and take the train direct to the airport. We had stopped in the day before and were told that getting to the station by 8:00 would be fine, but they all seemed a bit rushed and dealt with us like we were late.

We didn’t have much time at the airport. Just cashed in our VAT refund (got about \$45 back), bought coffee, walked to the gate (through much security) and got right on the plane (a MD-11) which took off at 10:20 for a nine and one half hour flight.

What Worked and What Didn’t

- As much work as it is, planning the trip and booking ahead seems like the best way to get the lodging want, when and where you want it.
 - Just remember to ask for a quiet room, off the street
- Check for holidays!
- The REI day packs work much better than the little zip on bags. We did not miss them at all.
- Paying for everything by credit card or with cash from an ATM makes it harder to track a budget than using travelers checks. It is convenient though.
- Need to pack enough clean T-shirts, underwear and socks for half the trip.
- The shell/liner coat combination was fantastic! It allows me to pack fewer long-sleeved shirts (I only had 2 this trip), although the number will depend on the temperature and time of year, but it worked well this time.
- 4 oz of shampoo was more than enough (use less than 3 oz).
- Our bar of soap was not quite enough for 3 weeks, but it was close enough.
- Shoes – glad I brought tennis shoes. They were a comfortable break from the hiking boots.

Europe 1998

- I never did use the rain pants. They are probably a waste of space, especially since Kathleen doesn't have any. Hard to imagine my using them: Maybe if we had gone hiking or biking.
- Umbrella's are a good idea, especially one that folds down small.
- The TI's in France are nothing like the ones in Scandinavia. Always book ahead in France!

Kathleen

- Didn't need the dress
- Only needed two pair of long pants (not 3), and one pair of shorts (not 2).
- A light cotton sweater or coat that is a bit dressier would be nice.

We ate too well. Need to eat lighter lunches (sandwiches, cheese and bread, etc.) and scale the dinners back a bit.

Should know more about what is going on before/when we arrive so we don't miss out on big events.

Consider doing laundry twice to cut down on what we pack (pack for one week)

Kathleen – bring some darker shirts that travel better.