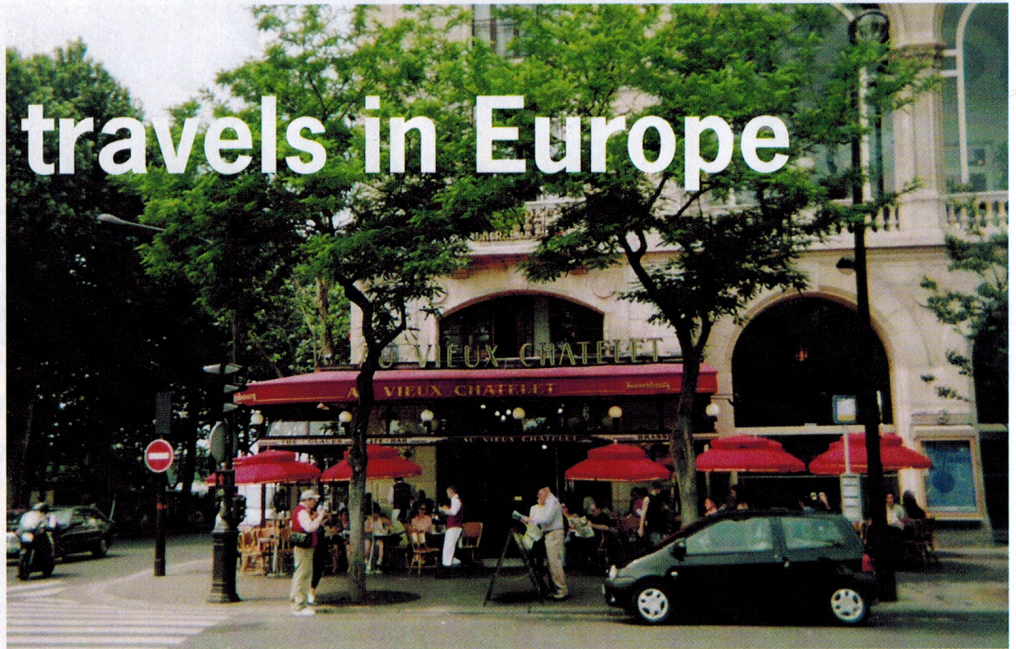


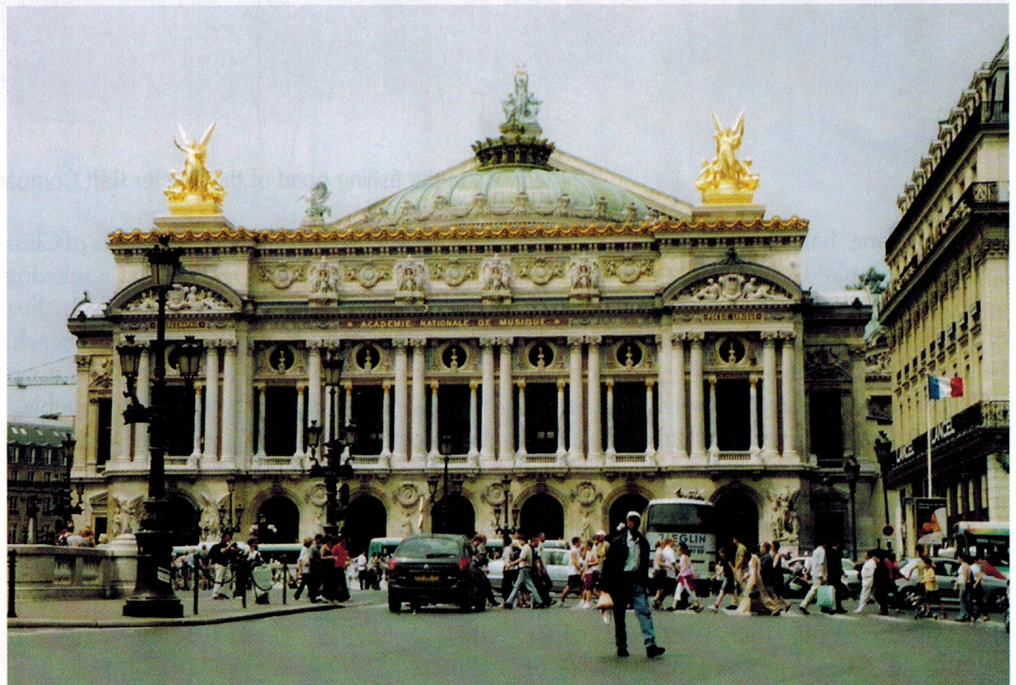
culinary travels in Europe

French Pastries, Dutch Masters, Belgian Lace & Chocolate, and German Wine

By Paula G. Cullison



Paris street café



The Opera Garnier is Paris's first and grandest opera house, as evidenced by its marble décor and magnificent chandeliers; an architectural marvel.

a shoulder bag for under the seat contained sufficient supplies and clothing for a 15-day trip to Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, Cologne and a boat ride along the Rhine River Valley.

With pre-purchased local transportation and museum passes, my daughter and I were able to take the train directly from Charles de Gaulle airport into Paris. Most cities have such passes, thus simplifying travel for maximum enjoyment. Couple this with the ever-popular hop-on-hop-off buses which stop at all the top sights, and you have the

makings for an unforgettable trip.

Five nights in Paris gave us ample time to reacquaint ourselves with this fascinating city and the Metro. Walking along the banks of the Seine River to the Notre Dame Cathedral (built from 1163 to 1365), we were enticed to climb the 387 steps for an unforgettable view.

One morning, while walking though the park towards the Champs-Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe, we encountered the inaugural press coverage for Train Capitale, a major exhibition of 30 French trains. Being

The call to travel and revisit certain key cities in Europe tugged at me, especially since it was coupled with visions of French pastries, Dutch Masters, Belgian lace and chocolate, and German wine. Booking a flight and finding centrally located international hotels is such a snap with the Internet. Travel light in luggage and heavy in pocket was my mother's advice to me... many moons ago. Now, debit and credit cards make for smooth travel. With careful planning, a small wheeled carry-on for the overhead and



Paris landmark Arc de Triomphe on the Champs-Élysées



The Sacre-Coeur: A stunning example of Romanesque and Byzantine architecture.



The Eiffel Tower was built by Gustav Eiffel in 1889 for the World Exhibition and centennial of the French Revolution.



Strolling along the banks of the Seine River toward the Notre Dame Cathedral built from 1163 to 1365



Hours can be spent in the Louvre studying the old world masters' works of art.

on the Champs-Élysées when it was closed to motor vehicles was a unique experience. It was somewhat like being on Wall Street on a Sunday.

A walk in the courtyard of the Conciergerie, where Queen Marie-Antoinette and the other imprisoned royalty spent their final days, was quite something. *Les Misérables* for real! The stark accommodations were a dramatic contrast to the luxurious surroundings to which they were accustomed.

The Sacre-Coeur, which sits high on the hill in Montmatre, affords all visitors an appreciation for Romanesque and Byzantine architecture beautifully intertwined in one monumental structure.

The Rodin Museum and gardens, filled with strong overpowering figures sculpted by a genius, is a must, as is Invalides – Napoleon's

Tomb, designed by Liberal Bruand in the baroque style during the 1670s at the behest of King Louis XIV, originally as a place for the wounded and invalid soldiers.

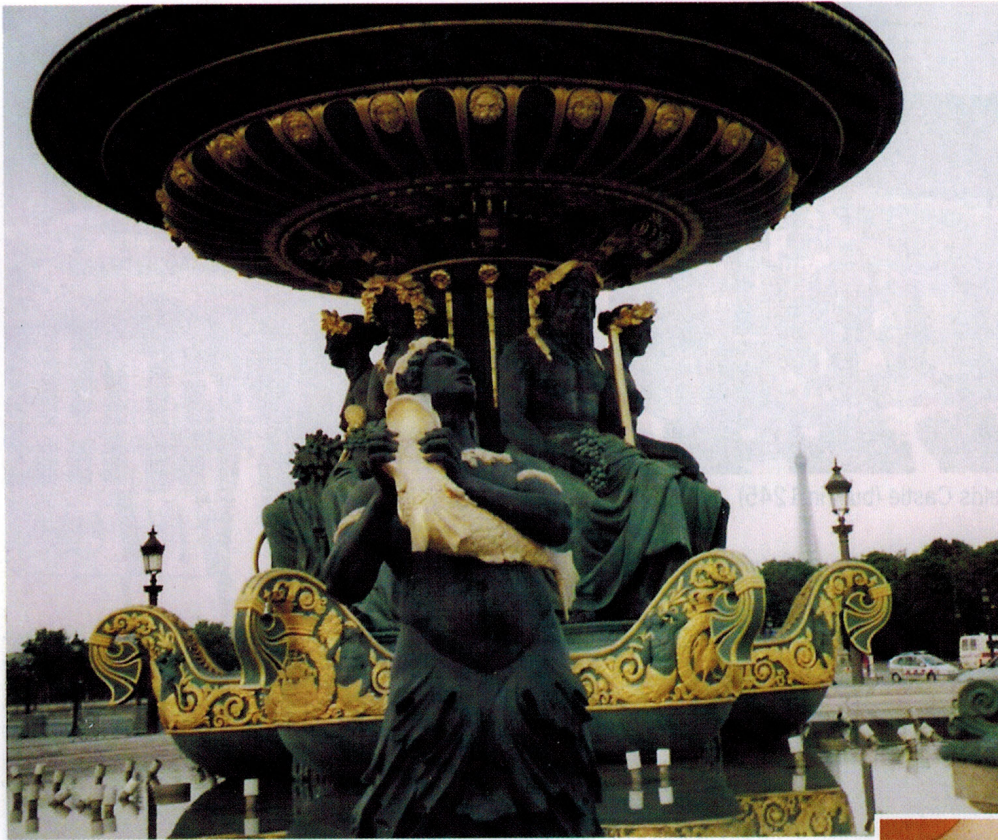
At the Eiffel Tower, built by Gustav Eiffel in 1889 for the World Exhibition and centennial of the French Revolution, we enjoyed breathtaking views from atop this famous 7,000-ton symbol of Paris. What a pleasure to be able to spot the main attractions, most of which we had visited.

After a walk through the Tuileries Gardens, we spent time at the Louvre with a few great women: Mona Lisa and Venus de Milo and the Three Graces. A stop at the Pompidou Center and a visit to the neighborhoods of Les Halles market, St. Germaine, and the Sorbonne made for another delightful day in Paris. In doing so, we



Above left and bottom left is the Amsterdam Canal used for boating in the summer and ice skating in the winter.

Top right is an Amsterdam street performer; and bottom right is Amsterdam House, built in the 1600s.



Paris fountain: Neptune and friends

got a sense of the daily rhythm of the city from the Parisienne's perspective.

The Opera Garnier is Paris's first and grandest opera house, as evidenced by its marble décor and magnificent chandeliers; another architectural marvel. The Pantheon, designed by Germain Soufflot over the course of several years (1764 to 1790), was originally commissioned by Louis XV as a church. Now a monument to France's historic figures – including Voltaire, Zola and Rousseau – it houses a giant 220-foot steel pendulum commemorating Jean-Bernard-Leon Foucault's 1851 experiment to prove the earth's rotation.

A climb to the top of the Arc de Triomphe, which stands 164 feet high and was completed in 1836 to commemorate Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz, enabled us to see how 12 boulevards converge in one gigantic traffic circle.

We took the Metro to Le Cordon Bleu, the internationally acclaimed 100-year-old cooking school, and then headed for the Palace of Versailles (Château de Versailles). It was a beautiful day to be visiting the Palace and its surrounding gardens.

It was now time to head for five nights in Amsterdam. At the train station we were able to secure first-class seats on the Thays high-speed train. In less than three hours, we

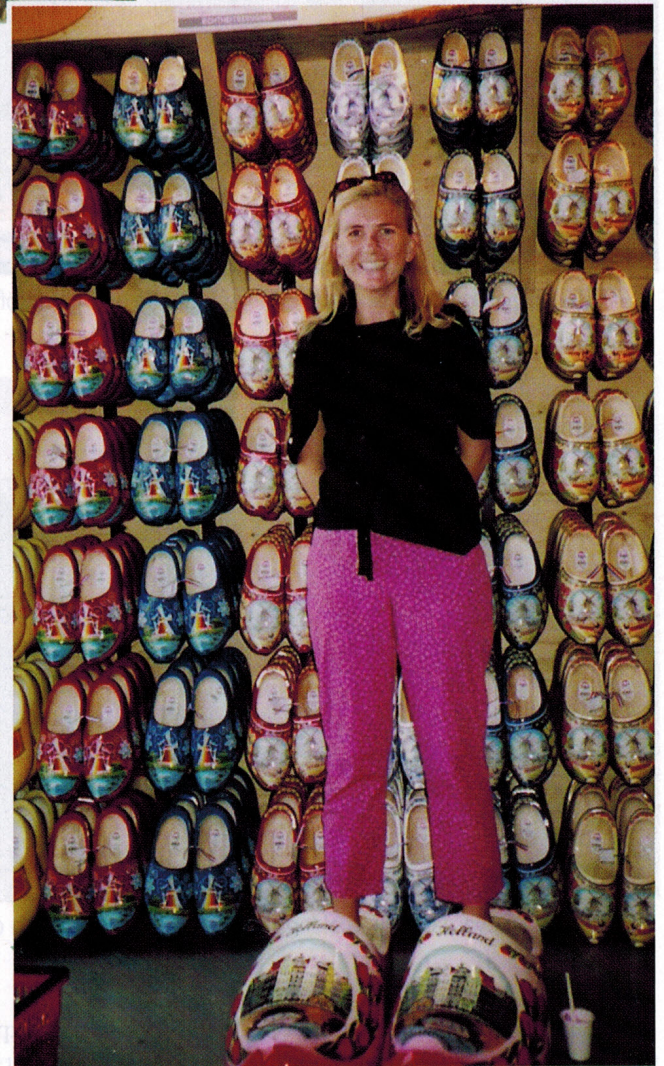
were in Europe's most 17th-century city filled with living history, 800,000 inhabitants and thousands of bicycles – the favored means of transportation. At the train station we purchased some tram tickets and headed for the hotel.

With an Amsterdam transit pass and museum card in hand, we were set. While at Dam Square, we visited the Madame Tussaud Museum where we saw the likes of movie stars and world leaders; even Elvis was there. By stark contrast, we later visited the Anne Frank House, where Anne Frank and her family hid during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands during WWII. They were just one of the many families who were secretly sheltered during this horrific period in history. The video interviews of Otto Frank and his colleagues, which was part of the presentation, moved us to tears.

While taking a wonderfully relaxing canal ride through the city, I was surprised to learn that Amsterdam has more canals than Venice. From the boat, we admired the architectural design of the homes built in the 1600s, all equipped with a clever pulley system to hoist furniture through the windows.

Our visit to the Van Gogh Museum that featured 200 of his works was another highlight of our stay. Stedelijk Museum, which focuses on modern art, was less thrilling. We walked about the very crowded Leidseplein filled with outdoor cafés, and took the bus to Volendam, a fishing village and popular vacation spot.

After a visit to the Rijksmuseum, where we were able to see masterpieces by Rembrandt and other Dutch Masters, we visited the Rembrandt House and saw the living quarters of this "master," including his bed and studio where he entertained potential art dealers and patrons.



Pamela finds these Dutch wooden shoes hard to fill.



St. Gorhausen with a view from the Rheinfelds Castle (built in 1245)



Bacharach on the Rhine with Stahleck Castle and home of the fabled Lorelei

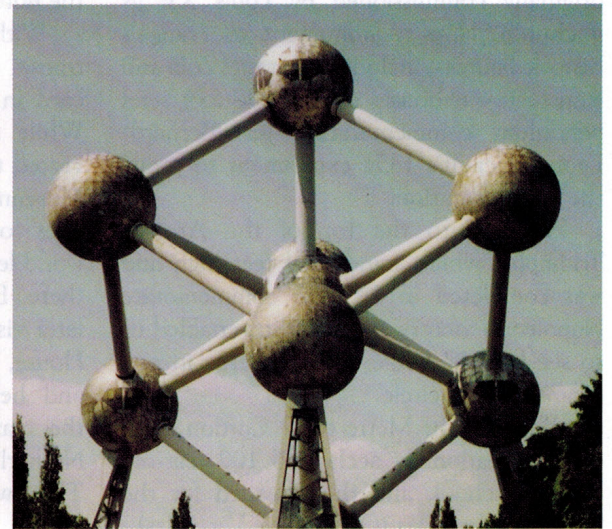


Castles and vineyards abound along the 35-mile scenic stretch of the Rhine River Valley.

The ever popular Heineken tour enabled visitors to experience the inner working of a brewery as well as enjoy the results of the process. Needless to say, a good time was had by all.



Local Brussels artist at La Grand Place, one of the most architecturally beautiful historic town squares in Europe; 17th Century Flemish Renaissance baroque guild houses.



Atomium, a monumental molecule, is the symbol of the 1958 World's Fair held in Brussels - now the Capitol of the European Union.

A local bus took us to Molen van Sloten, the only working windmill constructed to provide electricity for the municipality and, at the same time, provide living accommodations for the family of



Typical street in Rudesheim, Germany, is the center of the region's wine trade with Riesling being the most popular variety.

the worker taking care of it.

Later, we visited De Oulde Kerk for an exhibition of Impressionist painting and De Nieuwe Kerk for an international press photo exhibit.

At the Amsterdam House – a typical house of the 1600s, which included a chapel with an impressive organ – we noted that climbing those steep narrow staircases certainly kept the Dutch in shape.

Shortly after arriving in Cologne, Germany, (a three hour train ride) we headed for the Cathedral with its magnificent stained-glass windows and tapestries. The Dom, as it is known, was completed in 1880 and is one of the most massive Gothic structures ever built. The spires, at 157 meters (510 feet), are quite the steep climb, but the view from the top is breathtaking. A bus ride showing us the rebuilt areas around the city made us realize how much of the city had been destroyed during WWII. Interestingly enough, the Cathedral remained unharmed.

While planning this portion of the trip, I discovered a town named Boppard. Once there, we enjoyed a hotel room with balcony and spectacular view of the Rhine River Valley. As we sailed along the Rhine, we made a few stops: St. Goar for the fabled Lorelei, an outcrop of rock where a maiden was said to have sat combing her

long blonde hair while luring passing sailors to watery graves and St. Gorhausen for a visit to the Rheinfels Castle built in 1245 by Count Dieter von Katzenelnbogen. Our final destination was the charming town of Rudesheim with its many beer and wine gardens. On the return trip to Boppard, we stopped at Bacharach for a few hours. With the landscape dotted by vineyards and castles, the ride on the Rhine was magnificent from start to finish.

Our journey was coming to an end, and so we boarded the train for Brussels via Cologne. Spending the night in Brussels, which is less than a two-hour train ride to Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport, enabled us to immerse ourselves in the city famous as the center of culture during the Middle Ages. Using the Internet, we found a fabulous rate at the Royal Windsor Hotel, a five-star property ranked as one of the best hotels in world. It was conveniently located in the heart of the city and a few blocks from the Brussels Midi station. At La Grand Place, the main square, we enjoyed the scenery as we shopped for lace, Godiva chocolate and watercolor paintings; visited the City Museum to see the many outfits for the famous Manneken Pis statue; and ate our first Belgian waffle. The hop-on-hop-off bus provided us with an open-air tour of Brussels, including: the headquarters of the European Union EU, of which Belgium is the Capitol; the Atomium, a giant molecule (symbol of the 1958 World's Fair exhibition); as well as the Royal Palace and Gardens.

Lasting impressions: Western Europe is very internationalized, as evidenced by the abundant supply of ethnic restaurants, Internet cafes and ATMs. With living history at every turn, great museums, great architecture, no border checks thanks to the EU, great public transportation systems and tourist-friendly locals, you have all the makings for a great trip.

My bags are packed for the next trip! ■



Fellen-Keller, a popular spot for local beer, wine and eats while in Rudesheim