

Ormand Family Activity

June 2014: Charity's France Trip

I have always wanted to visit France, ever since I started taking French in high school. My teacher talked about how wonderful the food was, the history, and the beauty of the country, which made my inner foodie and history nerd very excited. Plus, I enjoyed the language, so I was always set to nervously try out my French on whatever French person might be available (I'm looking at you French waiter at Epcot). After taking three semesters of French in college I still enjoyed French, but didn't really want to increase my knowledge by continuing on or studying abroad; 1) if I was going to study abroad, it would have been in England, and 2) once you get into the French conditional tense it gets a bit confusing. So I left after 202, but my roommate and good friend Brenna, who had taken the classes with me, decided to go on and double major in French. Part of the qualifications for a French major is to study abroad for a period of time, and pretty much the only time Brenna could fit it in was after our senior year. There were two trips and she wanted to get as much French speaking experience as possible, so she decided to do both. I told her she'd love it, because Europe is amazing, and was happy for her.

I had been planning to go back to Ireland with the missions group I'd gone with last summer, only for a longer period of time and maybe to see if I'd like to work with kids in theatre. To make a long story short, I didn't get the trip that I wanted and I did not have time to fundraise for any of the other, more expensive trips, so I figured this was God closing the door on that idea. So I was a little disappointed because now being addicted to travel and seeing new things, I really wanted to go back to Europe. After Brenna had decided that she was going to go on two study abroad trips in France, we were talking about it, and I joked in passing that maybe I could meet her over there after she was done. However, she thought it was a good idea, joking aside - having an adventure is always more fun when you have it with one of your best friends. So I decided to try for France with Brenna, and after getting a job at Payless, I figured God was giving me the okay - especially since it was only for a week ?

So I saved up the money that I earned from work, as well as the gifts given to me for graduation (also signing up for a credit card along the

way), and prepared to fly to France. I bought my ticket to fly in and out of the airport of Charles de Gaulle in Paris, and packed a suitcase this time (instead of a backpack, hooray for more room!). My flight flew out of Tucson at 5:45pm on Friday the 20th of June to the LA airport, from where I would fly to London at 9:45pm and arrive at 4pm on the 21st. Then I'd take a flight from London to Paris and arrive at 8pm local time, where Brenna would meet me at the airport. After mom dropped me off at the Tucson airport, I checked my bags and boarded the plane for LA, where upon my Paris adventure began.

June 20th

The plan ride from Tucson to LA is only about an hour and a half, so it was pretty uneventful. However, upon landing at the LA airport, I discovered I was in a tiny little terminal and after trying to see the gate where my flight was leaving from, found that there was none on the screen. I assumed this was because I still had two and a half hours until the flight left, so I sat down to charge my computer for an hour. When it was done charging, I looked at the screen again and still saw no gate number, so I figured I'd better ask. The lady I did ask looked at me like I was something of an idiot and told me that I had to go to the main terminal. I would have to take the shuttle, and then she pointed me towards the outside doors. I had thought that this terminal was a little small to be the LA airport, and now I prayed that I wouldn't be late for my flight, now only having about an hour and a half to make it over to my gate. So I hopped on the shuttle, which drove 10 minutes from the terminal I had been at, to the main terminal. Upon entering the main terminal, I fully realized how much I dislike the LAX.

The LAX looks like the Chicago ORD airport, but with many more people and with a lot less good signs. After wandering around a bit, I found another departures screen, and then saw again that I did not have an assigned flight gate. I learned from my previous mistake and asked right away, and learned that I had to leave this terminal and go to the International terminal across the way. The girl pointed me down the hallway towards a sign that pointed down some stairs (it was either the stairs or another security gate, and I assumed I didn't have to go through security again. Ho ho ho). I walked down the stairs... to a pickup area for passengers and baggage. Thoroughly confused, I walked back up the stairs, then back down and towards the information desk... which no one was sitting at. I then went outside and questioned an employee (with about an hour left til my flight took off), who giggled and told me I had to walk around the parking garage to an entirely other building and pointed me toward what looked like more exits. But I

trusted her and walked towards them, eventually finding the International terminal departures entrance. I already had my boarding passes, so I could pass all the people checking their bags, and then went to the back of the room for "All Gates". Where I found myself in another line. For security. Again. I don't believe I put my passport back in my bag for the next half an hour, until I had gotten it checked and gone through security - well aware now that lap tops go in a separate bin. Now when I checked the departure screen, my flight had a gate number, which I basically ran to and arrived 10 minutes before boarding commenced. Lesson 1 of travelling by yourself: Never be afraid to ask for directions.

In the 10 minutes that I was waiting for the plane to board, I discovered that I would be flying over most of America and the Atlantic Ocean on a double decker plane. This was a first for me, and for a second I thought this would come with special perks - such as a fold down seat/bed like the ones I saw upon entering the plane. But then I looked at the seat numbers and walked all the way down to the regular steerage like what I was used to. Although, there were a few perks, like having my own tv in the seat in front of me with unlimited movie options, as well as very polite flight attendants (as I was flying British Airways they all had British accents), Indian food for dinner, and a fancy little breath refreshing toothbrush for the morning. Upon liftoff, I did make use of my tv, watching *Winter's Tale* and *The Muppets 2* before sleeping and then *The Lego Movie* before we landed. It is also my personal belief that this plane went faster than the normal one I took to get back, because despite flying over the continental U.S. as well as the Atlantic Ocean, the flight did not feel as long and I wasn't nearly as uncomfortable as I was flying Paris to Chicago. We landed in London at 5:45 local time, and I found my way to my gate much easier than in LA (although London Heathrow also needs better signage in regards to finding the main terminal from the shuttle train). My flight to Paris was delayed for a little while, so while waiting to board, I used the 45 minutes of free wifi (whoo!). After waiting an extra 10 minutes or so, we boarded the plane, but then had to wait another 20 minutes while the airport staff unloaded bags of passengers who hadn't made it to the flight, and then reloaded all the baggage. Finally, about half an hour or 45 minutes after I thought we'd be leaving we took off for Paris.

June 21st

On the flight from London to Paris, which is about 40 minutes over the English Channel (for perspective, this is around the same time a flight takes to get from Phoenix to Tucson), I thought about how I was going

to find Brenna in the Charles de Gaulle airport. When we had talked about finding each other, she had sent me a map of the airport which I found extremely confusing and impossible to read. I looked for maps for myself, and basically every single one was entirely unhelpful. So I felt like I was going into Paris a little blind - she told me she'd be waiting by the metro entrance from the airport, but unless that was right next to my terminal exit or there was excellent airport signage (which I found unlikely), I was pretty sure I was going to wander around and never find her. This was also a scary prospect because neither of our phones work in Europe, and while I am sure we would have eventually found each other, I wanted it to be as quick and easy as possible. Which thank God it was. As I exited my terminal into the airport, there was her smiling face waiting for me, and after hugging it out she told me this was the same terminal she had exited from, and if she'd known that ahead of time, there would have been a lot less worry on both sides. Then she led me through the airport to the metro entrance (which I definitely would have never found on my own), and thus began our Paris adventure!

First we had to board an RER train, which are the metro lines that go outside the city limits. Tickets are a little more expensive than regular metro tickets, but not by much (regular metro tickets are about 1.70 euro, or about \$3.00). The train ride was about 20 to 30 minutes into the city and we caught up most of the way there - she told me all about both her study abroad trips, her host family, and we talked a little about what we would do with our week in Paris. When we got off the train, we had to catch another line into the city - having never been on this train herself, Brenna had to look at some maps to make sure we got on the right train and off at the right stop, but eventually we made it to the Volontaires stop in the 15th arrondissement. This is the 15th district of Paris; there are about 18 or 19 arrondissements. When I booked our hostel, I had thought I was booking in the 6th arrondissement, which is close to a lot of sights, but it ended up that we stayed in the 15th - which was fine with me because it was probably cheaper. Our hostel, Aloha hostel (why is the name Hawaiian? I really don't know), was about 5 minutes walking from the metro stop, and we got there quite easily.

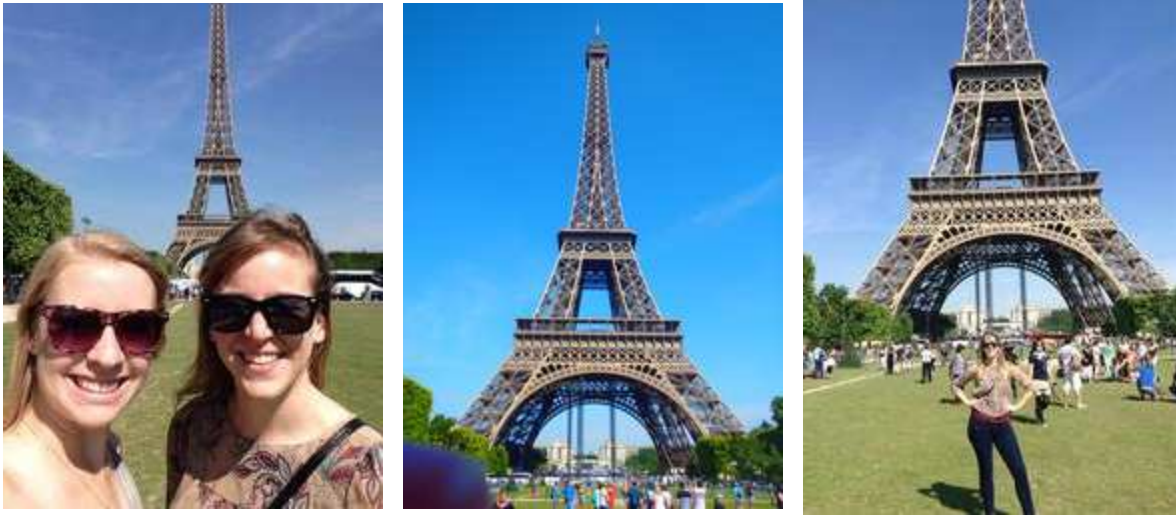
Brenna had already checked us into our room, so all we had to do was go up the stairs and use the key card she had rented for 1 euro. It was a really nice hostel; key cards to get in the room, lockers you could use just in case you didn't trust your roommates, really nice colors, and breakfast served every day from 7 to 9 in the kitchen downstairs. There was high speed internet, and our room had windows that opened out onto a nice little view of the surrounding neighborhood. It did have its

own little surprises as well: 1) We were supplied with a bunk bed, pillow, and blanket, but you had to rent sheets and a pillowcase for the bed for 5 euro. We thought this was weird, but we wanted sheets so we complied. 2) The showers are the push kind where the water stream only lasts about 10 seconds, so you basically have to get wet, soap up, and then rinse. Plus the water was pretty much always freezing. 3) Breakfast was nice to have every day, but by the end of our 8 night stay, I was pretty tired of cereal and bread with butter and jam. However the staff was always polite to us and we never had any roommate troubles, so I considered my first hostel booking a success. After dumping my stuff in the room, we went back out to an Italian food place down the street (which would become a staple part of our diet over the next week), which had really good pizza and calzones. Plus, it was cheap, which I always enjoy. Then we went back to the room, and I was glad that my flight had gotten in at 8pm local time, so that way I only had to stay up another 3 hours before going to sleep, beating jet lag at its own game. And yes, you did read that right, we went to bed at 11pm only because it stays light in France until basically 10.30 - it's still not completely dark at 11 o'clock. So I conked out for the next 9 hours, and slept like a rock.

June 22nd

We got up around 8.30 to take advantage of the breakfast. There was a cereal similar to Special K, and a cereal similar to Coco Pebbles, as well as a small baguette with butter and strawberry jam. These things together are more filling than you'd think. Then we took a quick shower - navy style which, as I said, is the only way to do so. Then we started off our first day in Paris by walking to the Eiffel Tower, which I could see the top of over the rooftops next to our hostel. I thought this meant it was close by, but actually it's so tall it looks like it's close to EVERYTHING. So our walk was about 20 or 30 minutes, but I like walking and Paris is beautiful, so it wasn't bad at all. We got to the park in front of the Eiffel Tower and took some pictures like real tourists. The Eiffel Tower really is enormous. Pictures make it look regular size, but it is hugely tall. Not skyscraper tall, but pretty close. Actually, here's a fun fact: when Gustave Eiffel made the tower, Parisians hated it. They are really into their skyline, and they thought it ruined the aesthetic of Paris. But after all the wars and trouble, and the fact that everyone else thought it was pretty great, it became a symbol of France and now they all love it. Another fun fact: there are skyscrapers in Paris, but the tallest one isn't even that tall, and it has been made illegal to make buildings any higher than the tallest one already present because, once again, Parisians don't want anything ruining their skyline. This is

understandable because it really is pretty fantastic, and I think even improved by the Eiffel Tower.



I also got to have my first run in with illegal immigrant souvenir sellers. Since they are illegal, selling souvenirs is really the only thing they can do. So in my "nice American" frame of mind, when a man comes up and says hello, I instinctively say hi back, despite the fact that Brenna is motioning me not to. He then proceeds to take my hand, while I make sure my purse is still zipped (visions of pickpockets dancing through my head), and puts a loop of colored string on my finger. I ask if this will cost anything, and he proceeds to blatantly lie to my face and tell me it will cost nothing. After making a little bracelet and tying it around my wrist, he then asks me for money, and I refuse and get him to take off the bracelet, whereupon he walks away in a huff. Brenna then explains to me that this is a common practice; they basically force you to buy the merchandise by already putting it upon your person and then trying to argue you into giving them money. So luckily I escaped that one, and from that moment on resolved to be more aware of who was trying to talk to me.

After this, we walked towards a nice looking building which turned out to be a military school, and I also saw that nothing is unimportant to the French, at least in Paris - most things look beautiful and old and really important, even if it's only a military school or the police station. We also got to go to the art museum in the Petit Palais. The Grand Palais is a big museum across the way with other exhibitions and an auditorium where speakers come to lecture, and the Petit Palais has a lot of 17th-18th century paintings, and artifacts from all time periods. There were Greek vases with scenes on them, Roman busts, Medieval keepsake boxes carved entirely from ivory, Byzantine art and icons, art

deco furniture; basically a small collection of beautiful old things that I could have only dreamed of seeing. We spent about two hours in there and definitely didn't see everything we could, but we were hungry by then so we walked outside and down a ways to a park (there are tons of parks in Paris) where they were having a 24 hour bike-a-thon, to presumably do something with the Tour de France. There was also a push for Evian water, so lots of Evian employees were out, as were little food carts - we bought some sandwiches and water. It was one of the first real times I got to order in French, and would progressively become good at ordering food as the trip progressed. As we ate, we got to watch a man trying to teach people how to folk dance, and some of them had horrible rhythm, which made it even more entertaining.

We then walked past the square of Concorde, which has a very tall obelisk monument to the French Revolution standing in the middle. It looks like the Washington Monument, but with a gold cap and covered in hieroglyphics - don't ask me why. However, the interesting part was that the square the monument was standing in was where they used to decapitate aristocrats at the guillotine during the Revolution, and where everyone would come to watch. That was a real history nerd moment for me, and was one of the first of the trip; this trip was actually pretty much a geek out moment for my inner history minor, with all the old things and historical places that I've always learned



about and read about and now got to see. Brenna wanted to go see Montmartre, which is the artsy district of Paris, so we hopped on the metro again, and took it to Montmartre, which is one of the two hills that is found in Paris - the other one is Montparnasse. We did have to climb a little ways from the metro station, past the home of Pablo Picasso, until we got to the top and found all the little souvenir shops. There were also some performance artists, as well as artists selling their paintings of Paris, and street artist who would draw your picture. Some were caricature artists, some were silhouette

artists, and some drew superbly accurate pictures in pencil. It was amazing. The basilica of Sacre-Coeur was also on top of Montmartre, and we got to climb more stairs and join the throngs of people going inside to view the church. Like all the churches I got to see in Paris, Sacre-Coeur is beautiful, and when you go inside it smells incredibly old. Like musty, but not in a bad way, in a "I've been here forever, and

I've seen more than you will ever know" kind of way. And it's still a functioning church - it was a Sunday and we had missed Mass, but they had a priest in one of the confessional booths all ready to hear confession in any one of five or six languages. Because there were so many people in one, long, continuous line, we didn't really get to look around a great deal, but what I did get to see was pretty awe inspiring.

After seeing Sacre-Coeur and Montmartre, we got some ice cream and then headed back to the metro station to take the metro back home. We ate a little earlier than usual because it was Sunday, and a lot of things were closed, and we didn't want to take the chance that we wouldn't find a place to eat when we were hungry. We walked down three or four blocks from our hostel, where we found a French cafe (these are everywhere), and ate dinner, with the best raspberry tiramisu I know I will ever eat. I will now take this time to explain French dining practices. In France, they are very low key; the waiter is really only there to take your drink and food order, then to go away and leave you alone to enjoy your meal. If you want him for any other reason, you have to make eye contact from across the room, and then and only then will he come ask you if you want the next course. After the main meal (we never ordered entree/appetizers, so I have no doubt if we had the meals would have taken longer), you have the option for a cheese course, and then a dessert course, and then after you are done eating they bring you coffee or tea. If you are finished at any point, you have to ask the waiter for the bill; he will not bring it to you of his own accord, he will wait until you tell him you are done. And during this week, I learned I am very bad at making eye contact with the waiter to bring him over. Maybe my stares are not very compelling, or I just look confused. Either way, we were often waiting a little longer than usual or had to use social cues by leaving a credit card at the edge of the table. However, the fact that tax is already added into the prices and tipping is never expected made up for this little nuance tenfold. After finishing at the cafe, we went back to the hostel and ended our first day in Paris.

June 23rd

We started off most of our days the same - waking up, eating the same breakfast, getting dressed, and then walking out of our hostel to some distant location. We usually only took the metro at the end of the day when our feet were tired, and were ready to sit or stand in one position for 15 or 20 minutes. I will now take THIS moment to talk about how much I love the subway system. For one thing, it is super speedy. Tucson just got a trolley car downtown, and it is SUPER slow compared to the French metro system. Secondly, basically all of underground

Paris is full of subway tunnels, and you can get anywhere you want to in a matter of minutes. No more long commutes or waiting in a taxi in horrible traffic, just hop on the metro and you'll be there shortly. There are a lot of people who do this, so at 5 when everyone gets off of work, the subway is jammed packed. This, in addition to the European disregard for personal space, make for semi-intimate journeys, but it's still fast - you just have to fight your way to the door more, or fight your way onto the train. So by the end of the week, I was really jealous of any major city that has a metro/tube/subway system to transport people around; the metro is really amazing.

On the second day, we walked over to Notre Dame from our hostel. Brenna wanted to get there early, because from past study abroad experience she knew that the line gets long pretty fast. It was already long when we got there, and we had to scout around for a little bit to find the end of the line because there was no set line direction. At places in



America, the lines are made with barriers and those little things with seat belt straps. While they do have places in France with those things, for the most part people are free to make their own lines. Thus, at Notre Dame, the line snail shelled in on itself and was twisting around and around like a snake. We finally found the end and inserted ourselves into the line. It was around this time that I also got to experience real gypsies for the first time. I had heard of them before, of course, and read about them in novels - they are always the darker figures in stories, usually as witches or thieves. While these are definitely stereotypes, there is some truth to it. While we were standing in line, there were people going around with what looked like political petitions, asking people if they knew English or gesturing to them to sign. After telling me that these people were actually gypsies, Brenna explained to me their tactics; while one distracts a civilian or tourist with the petition sheet, another picks their pocket to steal from them. Thus, when one came up to me, I was all set and ready to act like a real Parisian and ignore them. They popped up a couple more times during our trip, like out in front of the Louvre, or in the Luxembourg Gardens, and it was another interesting moment to see firsthand something I had only read about.



The inside of Notre Dame smells really old and musty, and it is allowed to because it has been around for at least 700 years. Just like Sacre-Coeur, it is still a functioning church and masses are still said several times a day on Sundays. The stain glass and the rose window are amazingly beautiful, and despite the fact that there were hundreds of people in there, it still had a feeling of incredible stillness. It was darker than your standard church, but this only added to the ambience, especially when we sat in the sanctuary portion and I could look up at the flying buttresses and the light coming in the stain

glass and turn around to see the humongous pipe organ. This was one of my favorite moments, I would definitely go back there again.

After this, we walked over to Saint Chappelle, which was the chapel of the royal family, but it was closed for a concert, so we decided to come back another day.



Then we walked over to the Cluny Museum, which is the museum in Paris solely dedicated to artifacts of a medieval nature. It is housed in what used to be an old Roman bath house, and they are still restoring parts of it. This museum was really cool; there were more ivory carved objects, suits of armor, numerous statues of saints, the original heads of the king statues of Notre Dame (they had to be

rebuilt after the Revolution, since most had been decapitated by civilians), illuminated manuscripts, jewelry and golden reliquaries, and my personal favorite, the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries.

These were made in the early middle ages, and are so big that they cover the entire wall (which was their purpose, tapestries being made to keep out the drafts in buildings made entirely from stone). There are six of them; each one represents one of the five senses, and the last represents the paradox of love and desire, or something like that. This one is the tapestry representing touch. They were all very beautiful, and I wished that they were hanging in my room. Also, looking at them made one imaging the HOURS it must have taken to weave all of these tapestries. Kind of incredible, the man hours and concentration of people back in the day.



We had lunch in the Latin Quarter, which has lots of eclectic little restaurants and shops. Then we walked over to the Luxembourg Gardens, one of the bigger Paris parks. In the middle of the gardens is a big house/palace, which used to belong to the mother of one of the Louis, after they had a falling out and she was exiled there. So the park is what used to be the private grounds of the palace, and they are quite extensive; big fountains, tall hedges, and statues dedicated to all the strong Queens and female Regents that France has ever had (these were placed there later, however). It was a very nice place to relax, and lots of people were doing so. After a little stroll around the gardens, we walked over to a little macaroon shop close by, and I got my first taste of real French macaroons. They come in many different flavors, such as chocolate, champagne, pistachio, and any number of fruits, and they are AMAZING. Like you could eat 50 and not even know it except for the magical taste in your mouth. At the Haagen-Dazs we went to on the Champs Elysee, there were macaroon ice cream sandwiches, which I'm sure were fantastic. After purchasing our macaroons, we took the metro back to the hostel, and ate them before going to dinner at our nearby Italian restaurant, and then heading to bed.

June 24th

On our next day in Paris, we walked (yes, we walked a lot) to the Musee d'Art Moderne, which was free if you were only going to their permanent collection. A lot of the museums in Paris are pretty cheap for students (which you are until you are 26), unless you are a student within the EU, and then you can get in for free. I always find modern art museums interesting, more so than contemporary art; this one had a lot

of early French artists that I didn't recognize, except for the few Chagalls and Picazzos that were there. But it was a little break from the grand art that IS Paris, and the older art we had been seeing from the 17th and 18th centuries. After eating at a cafe, we walked along the shops outside the Musee d'Orsey (where all the Van Goghs, Monets, Degas, etc. are held). There were some pretty interesting things in these shops, since the area was a little more upscale, and if I ever go back - after I see the Musee d'Orsey - I will go see these shops again.

The Louvre is right next to the d'Orsey, and while we were saving that for another day, we did walk over and sit in the park outside the Louvre to take a rest. Where upon we watched school kids who were taking a break from their field trip play with each other, and I decided that children are the same wherever you go, and always entertaining even if you don't understand what they are saying. After our legs felt usable again, we took the metro back to the hostel, and had dinner at a nearby cafe/gastro pub (it's mostly a pub, but they do serve food). After dinner, we walked back over to the Eiffel Tower, because we were going to climb the stairs to the second level, and see Paris at night.



We hadn't climbed the Eiffel Tower when we were there previously because Brenna said there were less people at night, and it's much more fun to see Paris by dark. So we got there around 10.30, when the sun was going down, and went over to stand in line for tickets. After running into my friend Colton from high school, who was also traveling in Europe for the summer, we bought our tickets and began to climb all the stairs. By all the stairs, I mean over a hundred, fairly steep, old metal steps. It was the second time Brenna had made this trip (kudos to her climbing stamina), the stairs being much cheaper than taking the

elevator. With the elevator, you can get all the way to the top, while the stairs only take you to the second level, in about the middle of the tower. However, the second level is tall enough to see all that you could ever want to see, so I was fine with the stairs. By the time we got to the second level, it was completely dark, and all the lights of Paris were spread out before us.



That other tall building in the distance is, I believe, the skyscraper which made all other skyscrapers illegal. And the bright yellow object to the left is the dome of Napoleon's Tomb, which is a fairly massive building. Notre Dame is the further yellow object, to the back left of Napoleon's tomb, and behind the Eiffel Tower is the Seine. It was pretty spectacular, and I was glad we climbed it at night. There was also a cool breeze, which was definitely a bonus. And after dark, every hour on the hour, they light up the Eiffel Tower in a glittery spectacular, where all the little lights attached all over the structure



light up and glow and look beautiful. That was pretty great. And then after the light show, we walked all the way back down the stairs, which is much easier and faster than going up. On our way home, we stopped by a street vendor selling crepes, and I had a Nutella and banana crepe, which was amazing. We did get a little lost on our way back to the hostel since we took a different way than we had come to get there, but with Brenna's good navigational skills and her map, we made it home

perfectly fine.

June 25th

The next day we walked over to a bakery that had really good turnicotti (basically a cinnamon roll with chocolate instead of cinnamon), before we took the metro back over to Saint Chappelle. There was going to be another concert, but we made it into the line before they closed it, so it was fine. Saint Chappelle is located in the middle of what is now the Palais de Justice (most larger buildings and palaces being repossessed for government usage). It used to be another residence for a king, kings having to build their own palaces when they came to the throne, not being content to use palaces other kings had made. But now it houses the divorce courts and courts of other natures, and something to do with the police, so we did have to go through security to get in. After waiting in line for about a half an hour, we got into the chapel.



The stain glass in Saint Chappelle is the most beautiful stain glass I have ever seen. The windows are hugely tall, so the walls are pretty much entirely stain glass. It was a little cloudy on the day we went, so I can only imagine the cacophony of color that is Saint Chappelle on a sunny day, but even so, it

was gorgeous. Also, most of the stain glass is made up of biblical scenes, so the detail is pretty incredible. The big stand in the middle of the picture is the altar upon which the Crown of Thorns used to lie when it was kept in Paris. I don't know where it is now, having been split in two and separated, but it used to be here, and that alone made visiting seem even more amazing.

After Saint Chappelle, we walked to Pompidou, the famous modern art museum of Paris. It is famous not only because its collection is quite extensive, but because the architect built it inside out. So all the pipes and such appear to be on the outside of the building. And it does look inside out. The big tunnel running up the side is the escalators you have to take



to get to the separate levels. Brenna really likes modern art, so this was her treat, and I loved seeing her get super excited about all the modern art. And this modern art was much more interesting than the art at the Musee d'Art Moderne; some of it was weird, some of it was beautiful, and most of it was making a statement about the turn of the century,



which is always intriguing to me. My favorite pieces were these two paintings by Henry Valensi, who painted in the 20s or 30s, and experimented with color and music. The results, like these two paintings, are amazingly beautiful, and I could have stared at them all day. There was also an exhibition called "The Clock", which sounded weird at first, but when we went inside, we found a

dark room with couches and a giant movie screen. This was showing clips from both old and new movies that had to do something with time. As the clips progressed, we realized that the times referred to on the screen were mirroring the actual time, as Brenna realized when she looked at her watch. That was pretty neat. Someone had spent hours and hours collecting all these clips that had one specific time from different movies, and had compiled them all together and timed them perfectly so that it would make an accurate clock. But we didn't want to stay a super long time, so around 5:30 (by the movie's reckoning) we left the Pompidou. We took the metro home, had dinner at our Italian restaurant (I think we were recognized by this time), had dessert at the cafe with fruit tiramisu, and then went to bed.

June 26th

The next day we went to one of the oldest and tallest castle keeps in Europe, Chateau de Vincennes. This was in place of seeing Versailles, because Versailles is way out of town and apparently very expensive and very crowded, similar to Disneyland but without the happy music and fur costumed employees. And it ended up that Vincennes was a very interesting and not nearly as crowded place to go, that was also conveniently located at the end of a metro stop, so we didn't have to pay anything extra, other than the regular 1.70 euro for a ticket. We took the metro to the end of the line, where we got off and came up right next to the wall of the chateau. It used to be a hunting lodge for the royal family, but in the early or late 1100s the king decided to build a castle out there instead, to be his home away from home but still relatively close to Paris. This is the same king who had Notre Dame built and who was one of the first to use Sainte Chappelle, so he was kind of important.



Chateau de Vincennes has three parts. 1) The medieval keep, which is basically a very large tower with multiple levels. It housed the king in the upper part, and the lower part was a prison for important aristocrats and dignitaries. 2) The Sainte Chappelle. This is a different one from the previously mentioned

Sainte Chappelle in Paris proper. I suppose that all of the chapels used by the royal family acquire this name. 3) The surrounding wall and barricades. These were created by Napoleon (yes, that one) to house and train the giant military he was building up to conquer Europe, and now holds the military library, although it still has some connection with the French army.

After buying our tickets, we went to see the Sainte Chappelle first, because it closes earlier than the keep. It is not made of dark wood and stone like the Paris Chappelle, it is made of bright stone which makes it seem much more open and airy. The stain glass was beautiful, if not as greatly preserved as the other Chappelle, but it also has a fantastic rose window. I liked this rose window the best, though I liked the Paris proper Sainte Chappelle better on the whole. After the chapel, we



went to the keep. As seen in the picture above, it's a very large tower with several floors. The king's chambers are in the middle of the tower; he had his bedroom in the biggest room in the middle, with four adjoining closet rooms. One was his private chapel, one was his closet, one was his treasury and study and bathroom all wrapped up in one. And the other was the stairs. It was pretty interesting for medieval architecture, and they had a lot of signs about the preservation process for old buildings. We also went down to the dungeons and looked at the prison cells where there was graffiti older than the United States of America. That was pretty crazy.

After we finished at the keep, we walked the battlements and walked over the moat that is now full of grass, and then wandered around a bit to look at the barracks and courtyards. That was pretty much all there was to see, so we headed out for lunch. There are a few restaurants in the vicinity of Vincennes, and we picked an Italian restaurant (realizing as we ordered that it was owned by real Italians, which suddenly made sense. Real Italians would own Italian restaurants if they could just hop over from Italy, why would it be anybody else?). The food was amazing of course, and we left very satisfied. We started to walk off our meal by walking around the chateau, but I suddenly realized I had to pee. Really bad. And there didn't appear to be any public restrooms in sight. As we walked along, however, we spotted something that looked like a park or a zoo, a little ways behind the chateau. It had little kiosks in front of it, making it look like you had to pay to get in, but these were closed, so we figured we could go in and look to see if there was a bathroom.

Luckily there was, and it was free (some public restrooms have to be paid for in France); we also discovered that what we had wandered into was indeed, a park/zoo type thing. Normally it was not free, but there was some special going on, or it was some kind of holiday, I never really discovered why it was free on the day I needed the bathroom. There were lots of children apparently on day trips with their schools, and a map which showed different little areas of interest. However, as we were tired of walking, we sat down in the grass and napped for a bit.

After our legs were feeling better, we walked around a few of the little shops in the area, and I bought a new shirt for work. Then we took the metro back to our hostel and relaxed a bit before going to dinner. All in all, it was a very pleasant day.

June 27th

Today was the big day... THE LOUVRE!! All my historical nerd and art loving dreams were about to come true, and then some. We ate breakfast and then took the metro over to the Louvre, getting there around 10 because Brenna said if you wait too long after it opens then the lines get really long. Before getting in line to go in, we took some pictures with the giant glass pyramid. The pyramid was made at the beginning of the millennium to bring a bit of modern life to the Louvre, which the government was worried was looking too old and outdated. Some people think it's ugly, but I thought it looked really cool - and always



good for some fun pictures. We also went to the Lock Bridge, which is right next to the Louvre. It is literally what it sounds like, a bridge that looks like it's made entirely of locks because there are so many hooked to the fence. It is primarily used by couples, who put a lock on the bridge and throw away the key. However, I think there is also a story that if you have a secret, you can dedicate a lock to that secret and then throw the key into the river. But regardless of how you use your lock, the bridge looks pretty cool.



After looking at the Lock Bridge, we went back to the central square of the Louvre to get in line. As we were walking through the big courtyard, I couldn't help looking at all the windows and thinking of all the people who used to live and work there. Fun fact: the Louvre used to be a royal residence and housing for the French court, so

there used to be thousands of aristocrats who lived there and loved there and walked around in the gardens and told secrets to each other. This is what I was thinking of as I walked through, and partly what makes European historical landmarks so intriguing to me: people just like me used to live in them and use them, and now they are gone, and I am here.

To get into the Louvre we didn't have to wait in line very long, although we did have to have our bags checked, just to make sure we weren't carrying any bombs. We then walked down the stairs into the main lobby, which is underground. This has entrances to the three main wings: Richelieu, Sully, and Denon. It also has the gift shop, restrooms, cafeterias, and coat checks (yes, these still exist, although they were closed when we were there since it was summer and no one was wearing coats). There was also an information desk, of course, as well as the ticket machines, and large signs telling you to watch your things and to keep an eye out for pickpockets. Apparently, pickpockets are a big problem at the Louvre, since the maps also had lists inside of things you should do to prevent theft of your possessions; things like "don't flash your cash", "do not put your wallet in your back pocket", "do not follow the advice of strangers at ticket machines". So needless to say, whenever there were large groups of people walking near us, I had to make sure my bag was still zipped, and since it's the Louvre, there are large groups of people everywhere, so checking my bag happened often throughout the day.

The thing about tourists at the Louvre is that most of them attempt to do the Louvre in a day by hitting the big pieces of art and then going home. These are the *Venus de Milo*, the *Mona Lisa*, and one or two

others. However, after spending a day in the Louvre and attempting to see as much as possible, I can tell you that the Louvre-in-a-day method is IMPOSSIBLE. There are too many sculptures, paintings, and artifacts to correctly appreciate in a month, let alone a day. We really had to pick what we wanted to see before we even started to navigate the Louvre, because they have things there from Europe, Egypt, ancient Mesopotamia and Iran, ancient Greece and Rome, and even a little bit from North and South America and Oceania. Also, some areas are one way only, so you have to go through the whole exhibit to get out; an example is the ancient Egypt exhibit, which took us almost 15 or 20 minutes to walk all the way through to get out and go to lunch. There were two whole rooms for sarcophagi alone. So now that I have given a small look into the massive size of the Louvre, I will hit a few of my favorite points.

1. We went to the fourth floor first. (Disclaimer: in Europe they call the first floor the ground floor, and then the next floor up is the first floor. However, in the Louvre, there is the floor underground, so there are technically four floors, and we went to the top first, although on the map it is called the 2nd floor since it's two up from the ground.) This was the most quiet and empty floor, since there are not many famous works of art up there. However, this does not mean they are by any means substandard; they were all beautiful and there were some by Albrecht Durer and Eugene Delacroix, who is one of France's most famous painters. This floor was not full of wall to wall tourists, so I could look at each painting for as long as I wanted without feeling like I was in the way. Another thing about French art museums is that they are very trusting with their artwork. Most of it was simply hanging on the wall, without any glass protection (one of the few exceptions being the *Mona Lisa*), and if you were feeling so inclined you could potentially just reach out and touch this 200 year old painting or sculpture. Now, there are a lot more docents and security people just walking around watching you, so maybe this alone prevents hooligans from being naughty.

2. The Louvre houses the Code of Hammurabi in its ancient Mesopotamia exhibit, and I got to stand right next to the oldest surviving written law code in history (I'm not including the 10 Commandments because nobody knows where they are). While the *Mona Lisa* is a lot smaller than you would think it would be, the Code of Hammurabi is hugely tall. My head would probably only come to beneath the two figures at the top, and I'm 5'9", so the code is at least 6'3". The area under the figures is entirely covered in cuneiform, the earliest form of writing. Getting to see this was definitely a highlight of my day.



3. Right next to the Apollo Gallery, which is also a big draw for the Louvre, there is a long gallery full of large paintings, some of them so tall that they basically go from floor to ceiling. This is the area where the *Mona Lisa* is, but the smaller room where they keep her was so full that I really only looked at her for 5 minutes, from about 20 or 30 feet away. This is the same with the *Venus de Milo*, which we really only saw in passing, to say we'd seen it. However, what people miss is the other giant paintings in the area around the *Mona Lisa*, which things like *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, and the *Consecration of the Emperor Napoleon I*, and that painting that's basically the poster for *Les Miserables* and the French Revolution.



All of these were amazing to look at despite the mass numbers of people, and all the faces in them are so individual that you could spend like 15 minutes just looking at one painting. You can see from the picture how big the *Consecration of Emperor Napoleon I* is.

4. I wanted to make sure we went to the sculpture galleries, of which there are several floors, so we couldn't take as long as I would like, but we did get to see a great deal. There was lots of Greek myth sculpture and busts, as well as some sculptures by Michelangelo called *Captive (The Dying Slave)* which are apparently famous but



which I have never heard of. However, I really wanted to see the statue of *Cupid and Psyche*, of which there were lots of variations, but I think this one is the most beautifully simplistic. Luckily it was also put in the map as something to see, which I think makes it the most famous. It was also a little smaller than I was expecting, but it was still beautiful; how people make the proportions so accurate when they are carving it straight from a block of marble is kind of amazing.

5. There are apartments in the Louvre that are still there from when Napoleon III (nephew of Napoleon I) was emperor of France in the late 1800s and lived in it as his palace. He was the same emperor that had the Opera House commissioned, and his apartments are just as opulent. These are a must see, just to see the chandeliers, the velvet red duvets, and the dining table that seats at least 30 people (we counted).



6. We did eat at a cafeteria in the Louvre, and the food there was just as good as any restaurant food. They also had little to-go cups of macaroons, with an assortment of flavors, and this was a nice thing to get on a lunch break before going out again to look at more artwork.

All in all, we spent 7 hours at the Louvre, and really only got to maybe see almost half. Even the half that we saw we only saw in passing; I

could have looked at some of those rooms for a lot longer. We only left when we did because it was going to close in half an hour, and we wanted to beat the rush. After getting a Starbucks in the underground cafe, we took the metro back home, got dinner at our favorite Italian cafe, and then went straight to bed, two weary travelers.

June 28th

This was our last real tourist day in Paris. After getting up and having breakfast, we relaxed for a bit before heading out to the metro to take the train to the Champs Elysee. This is like an outdoor shopping mall, but if all the stores were really expensive. There was an H&M, but most of the clothing stores were similar to Gucci or Prada, and there were show rooms for Lamborghinis. There was also a Disney store, which we went into look at, partly because we wanted to and partly to escape the rain which was drizzling pretty much all day. We had lunch at the fancy McDonald's there, with the machines where you can order your food through technology and then it will be made to your order for you to pick up. It also had its own little McCafe with macaroons in it, but we saved our dessert for the Haagen-Dazs across the street. At the end of the Champs Elysee is the Arc de Triomphe, which is basically Napoleon I's monument to how awesome he was and the many French victories he brought. Although now it is more of a French war memorial, where they also put their Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. If you stand at the front of the Arc, you can look straight down the Champs Elysee all the way to the Louvre. This was intentional, so that Napoleon could march his armies in and out of Paris down the main road in a kind of power show for all the citizens. Despite the fact that it is no longer used this way, it's still a pretty cool sight, especially in the rain.



It was around this time that we needed to walk to our next site, and the one I had been waiting the whole trip (and several years) to see: The Paris Opera House. Yes, this is the same opera house that Gaston Leroux used for the set of his novel *The Phantom of the Opera*. I am also sure that this is what brings in most of their tourism business; the Opera

house is now primarily used for ballet, while the opera goes on somewhere else. We had special after-hours tickets which I had purchased, so we got to be there when there weren't lots of people milling about. The tour guide showed us the Hall of Mirrors, based on the one at Versailles, the Grand Staircase, and the auditorium. Brenna had been to the Opera House before, with her grandma, but during the day they do not let people go in the auditorium without a tour guide, so this was the first time she was getting to see it as well. And it was amazingly beautiful. The chandelier is huge and gorgeous, as are the

rows and rows of red velvet seats (the architect thought that red velvet made ladies look prettier). We did get to see Box 5, which was also smaller than I imagined, but being there was kind of a dream come true and I may or may not have cried a little bit.



After we finished at the Opera House, we took the metro back to the Latin Quarter to look around some more of the little gift shops before going back to our hostel. For dinner on our last night in Paris, we decided to go out with a bang and went to the fancy French restaurant down the street, called La Toucan. We had the full course meal, with appetizers, entree, and dessert, all of which were fabulous. Then we went back to our hostel for the last night.

June 29th

After eating breakfast for the last time at our hostel, we packed up our bags and checked out. We had the front desk call us a taxi, which took us to the hotel we would be staying at for our last day in Paris. The taxi man drove very quickly through the crazy Paris traffic, which was a little nerve wracking, but brought us safely to our hotel. We got there a little early, so they couldn't let us check in, but they did let us leave our bags there, so we walked around the neighborhood a little bit. However, it was quite empty and a little sketchy, so we decided to wait in the lobby until they were ready. Perhaps this sped things up a bit, I'm not sure, but they had our room ready for us pretty quickly after we started sitting in the lobby. The rest of the day was spent napping, eating lunch at a little crepe restaurant at a movie theater complex down the street, watching some French tv, eating dinner at an Italian restaurant in the same complex, and then going to bed early because we had to be up early.

June 30th

Brenna and I were leaving at different times from different airports, about which I was a little nervous. She got up much earlier than me, at 5 o'clock Paris time, but I hadn't slept very well the night before, so I got up easily to see her down to the shuttle which was taking her to the airport. I then went back up to the room and got ready and packed my stuff, and then went downstairs to check out and wait for my shuttle, which was EXTREMELY late, practically 45 minutes. Around the 15 minute mark I was a little worried, and by the 30 minute mark I was praying out of panic. I didn't have a cell phone, and who would I call? My French is not very good. My money was running a little low by this time, what if I needed to buy another ticket because the shuttle was late and I missed my flight? This was another lesson in patience and trusting God, because eventually the shuttle did come, and inside was another family also going on the same flight as me to Chicago. They were very friendly and the mom rather took charge of me, making sure I had my tickets and everything when we got to the airport. This is when we discovered that our flight had been delayed for another hour (thank the Lord), so we were able to eat a leisurely lunch and make it to our gate with time to spare. I thank God for these people because it was exactly what I needed when travelling on my own and being very worried about getting where I needed to go.

Eventually our flight left, and even though the flight was 8 hours and much shorter than my flight to France, this one felt like it went on FOREVER. I was tired, but I couldn't sleep well, and I was very uncomfortable the whole time - I'm still not entirely sure why this flight was so unpleasant. Getting to Chicago was welcome in two ways: I could get off the plane, and I also am very familiar with the Chicago airport, and so I could navigate there pretty easily. When the plane landed the weather was looking pretty good. However, while I was waiting for my flight, it suddenly began pouring outside and as I looked at the departure board, it became apparent to me that over half the flights were getting cancelled, my flight to Tucson included. What to do now? I still didn't have a cell phone, having left it with my mom, and now I was stranded in Chicago. This is why travelling in any capacity is a true test of faith in Jesus; anything can happen at any time. So I took my lessons from the beginning of the trip, and set off to ask some questions. The helpful employee at the info desk gave me tickets for my redirected flight the next day (flying to Tucson via the dreaded LAX airport... sigh). He also gave me a number to call for a discounted hotel room close to the airport, since I didn't want to sleep in the airport. I noticed that there were some pay phones in the airport, so I was going

to use my one cash dollar to use those, to call my mother and then the hotel, but not using pay phones very often I did it wrong and it ate two of my quarters before I actually did it right, called my house, and got a busy signal. So then I had to ask nice looking strangers if I could borrow their phones, which turned out okay since I asked some old people, who are always very kind (if in doubt always look for friendly old people). Thus I was able to call my mother and let her know the situation, as well as book a room at a nearby hotel.

I had to take a shuttle from the airport to the hotel, which was also late, but when I got to the hotel I was mostly just glad to have a room, with a bed, that was dry (it was raining like crazy outside). I didn't have any of my clothes, because my bag was still in route to Tucson, so I was going to have to wear the same clothes the next day. Oh well. After dining in the Outback Steakhouse that was present in the hotel, and having a nice conversation with the very friendly man next to me, who was also stranded in route to Tucson, I went up to my room and went to bed. If nothing else, this trip was a reiteration to me of how God is always watching over me, and always sends me who I need at the right time, whether it's a nice family, friendly, helpful old people with a cell phone, or someone else's father who can make me feel a little less alone when I'm stranded thousands of miles from home.

July 1st

This was, I was hoping, the last day of my trip. I had to wake up early, to take the shuttle back to the airport, since my flight was at 8, and I had to go through security (for the 40 millionth time this trip). However, because of all the rain, there was a lot of flooding on the roads, so the shuttle took us to the train station, and the train went all the way to the airport. This trip was also a lesson in the wonders of public transportation. I got to O'Hare pretty quickly, and also got through security pretty quickly, since they opened up another line as soon as I got there (another blessing, thank you Jesus). I even had some time to eat breakfast and relax a little before getting on my flight to LAX. Upon arriving there, I had to take the same little shuttle bus to get back to the smaller terminal for Tucson flights, but I made it just in time to sit on the small plane for the hour and a half flight back home. When I made it back to Tucson, my bag was waiting for me, and after a little bit of waiting, my mother and sister came to get me. Thus ended my summer adventure in Paris, a wonderful experience beyond all imagining.