

2009 FRANCE AND CHANNEL ISLANDS

Monday, April 20, 2009. Scotti and three of her friends decided to celebrate their 60th birthdays in Paris. Since I know two of them (one is Ninna, our foreign exchange student daughter), I decided to barge in on the last night and then take Scotti and do the Channel Islands and the Seine River. Thus I found myself in the Delta Crown Room on Concourse T¹. It's a lot nicer than the one on Concourse E.

The first delay came when they had to make a change of equipment. Then there was another delay for another change of equipment and also a change of gate. After two hours they announced they were now ready to fly and we all cued up at the elevator and waited and waited. The elevator was broken and would not come. Then we were told the astonishing fact that there was no stairway! What do they do in a fire? The lady in charge of the Delta Crown room came and led us down a long corridor back toward the terminal to an elevator that did work. The only problem was that it was the wrong direction to the gate. I had to walk all the way back and then some. I got there as they were in the final boarding.

Once aboard I thought the problems were over but one couple never showed up for the flight. They had to off load all the baggage to find their luggage for luggage doesn't fly unaccompanied anymore. Once reloaded we finally were underway.

Tuesday, April 21. We were only about an hour and a half late reaching Charles De Gualle Airport. There was a man with my name on a sign to greet me but he had to wait for another party coming in from Houston 20 minutes later. I waited in the van and finally he came with four ladies in tow. I was glad I had gotten the front seat for they were really jammed in behind me. One poor lady had to sit back with the luggage piled all around her. We drove into Paris and the driver tried to make it interesting pointing out a Concorde² aircraft on display and the Eiffel Tower in the distance. It was a long drive to the other lady's Best Western and then they still had to take me to mine. There are many Best Westerns in Paris, sometimes two in the same block.

The Best Western Carousel Opera St Lazarre³ is much closer to St Lazarre than the Opera. Scotti and Ninna were waiting for my arrival and escorted me up to Scotti's room since mine was not ready. The girls left for excursions around Paris and I took a four-hour nap only interrupted briefly when the maid came to make up the room. I moved into my own room next door to Scotti and Ninna and found a small but pleasant room with twin beds.

Scotti had signed us up for a boat and Paris Illuminations tour⁴ so we went to get our tickets and to find a place nearby for dinner. Right across the street was Le Carrousel Bar with a limited menu but it included escargot so we went right in. I followed my escargots with duck that was good enough. However the waiter who had been singing some form of "Happy birthday" did not get us a cake.

The bus was a double-decker and we drove along the Seine to find our excursion boat. It went down river and around the Ile St Louis⁵ and the Ile de la Cité⁶ and returned to near the Eiffel Tower⁷. Every hour all night they light the Eiffel Tower like a Christmas tree so we got a good look at it.

Then it was back in the bus for the illuminations. I was somewhat disappointed with this because I was on the wrong side for the Arc de Triomphe⁸ and other places. When we made a stop at the Opera I decided four hours was enough. Scotti and I abandoned ship and took a taxi back to the hotel arriving about 11:30 PM.

Jane, Cathy and Jane continued on to the end for the promised cake but found the bar closing up for the night. They got back to the hotel not too long after us. Ninna had retrieved my camera that had been left on the bus.

¹ <http://www.yelp.com/biz/delta-crown-room-t-concourse-atlanta>

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concorde>

³ <http://www.h-st-lazare.com/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.pariscityrama.com/>

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%8Ele_Saint-Louis

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%8Ele_de_la_Cit%C3%A9

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eiffel_Tower

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arc_de_Triomphe

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Tuesday, April 21. Woke at 6:30 and decided to check out the itinerary. We are not leaving until 9:00. Scotti had told me 8:00 last night! I was leisurely getting up when a knock at the door told me Scotti had not reread her itinerary. I hurriedly finished my packing and pulled the larger suitcase downstairs in the tiny elevator. We went in to breakfast and soon Ninna joined us. After breakfast we checked out and were sitting in the lobby when the other girls appeared to say goodbye. At last David from Quest For the Classics⁹ appeared.

We mentioned we would like to stop and see Chartres Cathedral as our itinerary named that as a suggestion. He was very surprised since that was off our route. We decided not to make a fuss. However our route turned out to be the motorway and like most motorways was rather monotonous. We did not stop at Giverny because we will do that from our River Cruise but we did talk him into showing us Rouen Cathedral¹⁰.

The only place to park was an underground garage and he mentioned that there would be a climb back up to street level and suggested we might want to get out of the car and wait for him. "Cross two streets and then wait" he said as he drove off.

Dutifully we crossed the street and admired the modern church on the other side. Then we passed through a covered vegetable market to reach the second street. From here we had a nice view of the restored half-timbered houses and there was a cute little carousel, which a small child was riding. We waited some time but David never appeared. I thought David must have meant we were to meet at the cathedral so we finally decided to go on by ourselves.

We passed under the "Gros Horlage"¹¹ which dates from the 15th C and finally got to the cathedral square. I was disappointed to see the figures on the great door were not only covered with the soot of centuries but many of them had lost their heads as well. Inside we admired the long nave but realized most of the original stain glass was either a piece of fragment or gone altogether. When we reached the back of the church we found the answer. In 1999 the church was hit by a tornado, which brought the roof down. It has been repaired but of course the glass was lost. In the back of the church we also found the original statues of saints that once adorned the façade of the church. The soft sandstone was badly eroded and they were inside to preserve them from more loss. Here is a casket in which the heart of Richard the Lion Heart was buried. The poor man was cut into pieces. His entrails and brain are in Chalun¹² and his body at Fontevrault Abbey¹³. In short, the cathedral was lovely, as all gothic churches are but I felt sad that it was in such a bad state of repair.

We walked back to where David had lost us pausing at a MacDonald's for the restroom. We had to buy a couple of cokes to get the code for the restroom door. Toilets are not free in France! There he was across the street from where he had let us off. He seemed surprised that we had gone beyond the second street that turned out to be a sort of turning lane separated from the main street by a small cement siding! It never occurred to us this was a street at all! Scotti and he traded cell phone numbers so this won't happen again. While we waited for him to fetch the car a nice gentleman approached us and asked how we were enjoying Rouen. He recommended that when we come back by boat that we should go inside the modern Joan of Arc Church. It may be modern but some 12th century stained glass windows had been found in storage somewhere and installed inside. We shall check this out on our return.

We drove on to Bayeux¹⁴. This small town was not bombed during WW 2 so everything is original. We drove around and then parked the car to eat at the nearby Hotel Reine Mathilde. I had a wonderful omelet with salad and pommes frites washed down with a glass of the cider for which this area is known. It is too cold for them to make wine in Normandy so they grow apples and first make cider and then Calvados, which is an apple brandy. Then we walked back through the town to the Cathedral, another magnificent Gothic creation. Here we found original stained glass and the relic of St Catherine.

⁹ <http://www.iqotc.com/>

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rouen_Cathedral

¹¹ <http://www.travel-tidbits.com/tidbits/003964.shtml>

¹² <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/104787/Chalon-sur-Saone>

¹³ <http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/projects/middleages2000/famouspeople/famouspeople.html>

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayeux>

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Nearby we found an ice cream store and I enjoyed a delicious pistachio cone. It also gave me a chance to sit a moment.

We looked in on a lace place and found they were teaching the children how to do this traditional bobbin lace art of Bayeux¹⁵. One boy was working hard with his spindles and using pins to mark the pattern.

Nearby we came to the Bayeux Tapestry Museum¹⁶. It is not a tapestry in the usual sense of the word, but one piece of cloth 20 inches tall and it is long enough to go around the ambulatory of the cathedral. Once a year for the last 2000 years the tapestry was displayed in the church at eye level so the people could learn about William the Conqueror's conquest of England¹⁷. The figures are depicted in different colors. You can feel the tension building as they prepare for war and then feel the tragedy that so many died in the Battle of Hastings. It only lasted 14 hours but when King Harold was killed, William the Bastard became King William 1 of England.

At last David brought us to the Hotel D'Argouges¹⁸, built as a townhouse by Lord D'Argouges during the reign of Henri IV (1553-1610). It is beautifully appointed and has a quiet garden. I promptly laid down on the bed and took a nap!

Then Scotti and I worked on pictures and journals until it was time to go for dinner. We picked a restaurant very near the hotel, La Taverne des Ducs, and I had oysters on the half shell for an appetizer. The special was kidneys! What a treat and they were delicious.

Thursday, April 23. David picked us up promptly at 9:00 and we headed for Mont Saint Michel¹⁹ about two hours away. We drove for a time on lovely country roads stopping to photograph the Chateau de Villers Bocage that not only served as a refuse for the nearby town which was totally destroyed in the battle of WW2, but it also served as a hospital. You are reminded of WW2 in each village, which has a monument to the dead and we also spied a small British Cemetery. Just before the motorway we also saw a picturesque private home complete with half timbers and thatch.

Mont Saint Michel is an island connected to the mainland by a causeway. The bay in which it sits is silting in and it will not be long before it is an island no more. There are plans to replace the causeway with a bridge to allow the tide its normal flow in the hope it will stop the silting but I think it may be too late.

David drove us right up to the gate and went to park the car. I prepared my self for the 300+ stair steps climb to the summit. Let me say that I made it but not talk about the time required.

The town on the island used to be much larger but now only about 20 people live there, most running souvenir shops and the like. There is a small graveyard. Like the ones in New Orleans you only lease the land and if there comes a time when no one in the family wants to pay the rent, the grave is cleaned out and rented to another family.

1300 years ago St Michael approached the Bishop- of Avergne in a dream and told him to build a chapel on the rocky island now totally covered with buildings. Michael had to come on three nights and finally burned the Bishop on his forehead to convince him. The first building was a small chapel and may still be extant but not for the public. Now a lovely Norman-Gothic church adorns the summit. Half the original Norman church fell down and the apse was replaced with a gothic structure. Despite the numerous schoolchildren present it impressed me as a solemn holy place. We walked down through the ancient refectory and scriptorium. One interesting sight was a human tread mill such as guinea pigs use by which humans in the treadmill pulled the enormous blocks of granite and other materials to the top. There are 30 monks and some nuns in residence bur we only saw one num preparing for the noon mass.

We continued by car down the Brittany coast²⁰. There are many old windmills along the way that people have converted into weekend houses. The stone houses and the buttercups and daisies in bloom made for a picturesque ride.

¹⁵ <http://dentelledebayeux.free.fr/dentelledebayeux1u.html>

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayeux_Tapestry

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_I_of_England

¹⁸ <http://www.ohotellerie.com/dargouges/>

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mont_Saint-Michel

²⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brittany>

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The road south was under detour and we took a detour across farm lanes through the polder area where farms now sit where the sea once was. At one point the road was badly rutted and David hadn't expected this but we made it through to the main road.

We came into Cancale²¹ for lunch. The village sits on the hill above but the waterfront is one restaurant after another specializing in mussels and oysters, which are grown in traps in the sea beyond. At La Mere Champlain²², Scotti and I enjoyed an orgy of oysters while David had a huge pile of mussels cooked in a cider sauce. Everything was delicious. I really didn't need the pistachio and raspberry tart at the end.

Then it was a short ride to Saint Malo²³. We drove through the medieval town with all its ramparts intact. At one point we were even driving in the moat! I could see why it was so difficult to dislodge the Germans during WW2. The town was destroyed then but has now been completely restored. After a false turn we eventually got to the Condor Ferry²⁴ to Jersey. There were not many people taking the trip so we had lots of room to spread out.

We took a taxi from the ferry to Saint Aubin²⁵ and the Somerville Hotel²⁶, which is a lovely old-fashioned hotel. We have a view of the harbor where all the boats rest on their side waiting for the 40-foot tides to come back in. Jersey's tides are second only to the Bay of Fundy! It must be hard on the boats to rest on their keel so much.

We ate in the hotel's dining room. The prices were extraordinary but we settled on the Jersey half lobster filled with Jersey Crab. I was delicious and Scotti and I feel I have now had the \$50 lobster we turned down in Madrid so many years ago.

Friday, April 24. Paul Nicole picked us up at 9:30. He felt we would enjoy an island tour more than the city tour and we agreed although we pointed out we had to be at the Durrell Nature Center by 1:30.

The island is lovely with narrow switchback roads. All around are remnants of the wars that have wracked this island located so close to the French mainland. Periodically you see watchtowers built at the time of the Napoleonic Wars and everywhere you see the remains of battlements that the Germans set up during WW1. Our tour started at Noirmont Point²⁷ where the gun emplacements were such that they could fire shells several miles away. Europe was finally liberated on August 8, 1945 but on Jersey liberation came a day later so firmly were the German's entrenched. Conditions during the war must have been very bad with insufficient food.

We then drove to St Brelade's Church²⁸ a sweet parish church that dates from the 11th century. We walked in through the old graveyard. At first the church was Catholic but then the Calvinists/Huguenots came and they whitewashed over the frescos to establish a much more stern religion where the whole emphasis on the sermon. The ceiling was very interesting being composed of small red granite stones. The exceptionally lovely stain glass windows were done by Harry Thomas Bosdet. The faces were beautifully done.

We drove on and Paul pointed out Les Lumieres a pure white modern building built in the early 1900s that was in such contrast to the lovely red granite stone buildings all around.

The Corbiere²⁹ lighthouse was built in 1873 and was probably named for the crow, the bird of ill omen. All around we could see rock outcroppings and I would not like to be in a boat that came near them even at high tide. The light was the first to be built of concrete in all of Britain.

Paul pointed out that the Martell family of brandy fame came from Jersey. The Martello towers³⁰ were built at the time of the Napoleonic Wars and were used during the first part of the 19th century. He also told us that Jersey had once owned New Jersey but had sold it. He wondered

²¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cancale>

²² <http://www.lamerechamplain.com/>

²³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint-Malo>

²⁴ <http://www.condorferries.co.uk/home.html>

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Aubin,_Jersey

²⁶ <http://www.dolanhotels.com/>

²⁷ <http://www.jaynesjersey.com/phototour5.htm>

²⁸ <http://www.stbreladeschurch.com/>

²⁹ http://jersey.typepad.com/corbiere_lighthouse/

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martello_tower

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how rich Jersey would be if they had kept it and I wish I was quick witted enough to point out that we would have taken it back during the Revolution. He was full of stories and facts about the island but I found it hard to keep my attention on them in the warm car. I nodded off a couple of times. He pointed out one house made of lovely pink Jersey granite. He bragged about the Jersey Royal potatoes³¹ which all stem from one potato that was cut so each of its eyes formed a plant. I hope we get a chance to try them.

The St Mary's parish school built in 1901 had separate entrances for the boys and girls. Everywhere you look you see the yellow gorse bushes³² and he also pointed out Mexican Fleabane³³ in the hedges that can serve as an insect repellent.

I lost track of all the cute little bays he pointed out but remember the legend of the black dog of Bouley Bay³⁴. This was the haunt of pirates but the natives started a rumor of a black dog that only came out at night with eyes the size of saucers dragging its chain behind and went for pirates. The pirates moved their operation elsewhere. We saw Rozel bay with its red fishermen huts. We stopped at Gorey where an old fortress castle looms overhead³⁵. It was built in the 13th century to protect the island from the French only 14 miles away. The town was once a shipbuilding town and there is a commemorative keel which names some of the ships made at Gorey.

He pointed out where the French came and attacked in 1781, a battle known as the Battle of Jersey. John Singleton Copley³⁶ (1738-1815) painted the battle and his painting shows on the Jersey 10 pound note³⁷. I found it strange that Jersey has its own money although it accepts British money. However the Jersey money is not accepted in the rest of Britain.

If you want to lease or buy property in Jersey you must have had continuous residency for 12 years. This makes it very difficult for a foreigner to come here. The only exception seems to be that a company can import needed talent and house them in company housing. At the end of ten years the person can buy the house he has been living in. Taxes are low but property is very expensive.

We finally got to the Durrell Center³⁸. Gerald Durrell (1925-1995)³⁹ was a naturalist who traveled the world collecting endangered species. The zoo concentrates on breeding them and relocating them back where they came from. It is not a zoo in the usual sense having no lions, elephants or giraffes. Many of the animals are not crown pleasers.

We had lunch at the Dodo Café and then met volunteer John for a golf cart tour. They only had one operable golf cart so I was glad Susan made the reservation early on the website.

Our first stop was at the Lowland gorillas⁴⁰ where Kwanza lived with his harem. We heard a docent describe each gorilla in the harem and noted that there have been no babies for seven years. Kwanza was the result of artificial insemination and it looks like they may have to try this but they are unsure how he would react to a baby he had not conceived.

We watched the Sumatran orangutans⁴¹ for a while. One is expecting any day. Then we viewed the marmosets⁴² that are delightful tiny monkeys.

There are two types of flamingos at the park. The South African flamingos⁴³ are not as pink as the Chilean ones and have not bred for five years although it is thought they are too young.

³¹ <http://www.jerseyroyals.co.uk/>

³² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorse>

³³ <http://www.gardeningexpress.co.uk/ProductDetails.asp?ProductID=2656>

³⁴ http://www.bbc.co.uk/jersey/myisland/folklore/black_dog.shtml

³⁵ http://jersey.typepad.com/gorey_castle/

³⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Singleton_Copley

³⁷ <http://www.jersey.co.uk/jsyinfo/battljer.html>

³⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durrell_Wildlife_Conservation_Trust

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald_Durrell

⁴⁰ http://images.google.com/images?q=lowland+gorilla&oe=utf-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=DPQJSvi5NOKwtge5xu3fCw&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&resnum=1&ct=title

⁴¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumatran_Orangutan

⁴² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marmoset>

⁴³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilean_Flamingo

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We watched Wolfgang and Barbara, the Andean bears⁴⁴. They are smaller than our bears. Playing around them was a cute otter⁴⁵. It was time to feed them and the attendant threw bamboo stuffed with fruit to the bears and a piece of fish to the otter. She commented that the otter thinks she is a bear. Her mate died of old age but since she is so happy in the bear enclosure they have left her there.

At last we came to the lemurs. They have several ringtails⁴⁶ and two pairs of gentle lemurs⁴⁷, which are small and brown. Then we went into the Aye Aye enclosure⁴⁸, which was very dark for the Aye Aye is nocturnal. After our eyes adjusted we spotted the Aye Aye with his big bushy black tail and the long fingers to pick insects out of trees. Only a mother Aye Aye could love one they are so bad looking. This is why they are endangered for the natives think they are devils and kill them!

We caught a local bus back to Saint Helier⁴⁹ the capitol of Jersey and found Bella Italia Restaurant⁵⁰ for a lovely meal much less expensive than the hotel. Then we caught a bus to St Albans and walked up hill to the Somerville. It had been a lovely day.

Saturday April 25. A halcyon day to go in search of cows! We were up early to get to the airport and fly to Guernsey⁵¹ fifteen minutes away. Eric Grimsley, our guide, was there and he took us to a teahouse to plan our day. The teahouse was closed. However the nearby silver and gold shop was open. I would have bought some bullion but they only sell it when the gold markets are open and not on Saturday.

Our first stop on the tour was the Little Chapel⁵². In 1904 the French Government passed anti-religious laws. This is why the Salle Brothers came to Guernsey in June 11904 and acquired Les Vauxbelets to establish their Catholic school. The Little Chapel was built by Brother Déodat who started work in 1914 to build a miniature version of the famous grotto and chapel at Lourds. This miniature building was completely covered with scraps of pottery contributed by Wedgwood. It is a sweet little chapel maintained by the students of the nearby Catholic school.

Our next stop was at Sausmarez⁵³ Manor where a Saturday market was selling everything from vegetables to flea market items.

On we went to St Peters Port dominated by Castle Cornet⁵⁴. The rocky promontory on which the castle sits was once an island but is now connected by a causeway to the island.

The Guernsey Yacht Club⁵⁵ takes up part of the causeway. They have a large pool adjoining, about 3 feet deep and they were teaching young children how to sail in prams⁵⁶. Some of the kids looked to be only four or five years old. The instructor could wade up to the boat and tell the kids what to do. It looked like a great way to learn sailing. Later, when we returned we found a race going on with radio controlled model boats.

The castle is an old fort and presently houses three museums. We first toured the historical museum where dioramas with life size figures depicted the history of the island.

From the ramparts we had a view of Herm and Sark two of the other main islands in the archipelago. No motorized vehicles are allowed on those islands. In the haze we could see Alderney the furthest away.

⁴⁴ <http://www.andeanbear.org/>

⁴⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otter>

⁴⁶ <http://www.wcs.org/globalconservation/Africa/madagascar/madagascaranimals/ringtaillemur>

⁴⁷ <http://www.arkive.org/alaotran-gentle-lemur/hapalemur-alaotrensis/>

⁴⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aye-aye>

⁴⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Helier

⁵⁰ http://www.bellaitalia.co.uk/locations_restaurant.php?id=66

⁵¹ <http://www.visitguernsey.com/>

⁵² <http://www.thelittlechapel.org/>

⁵³ <http://www.sausmarezmanor.co.uk/>

⁵⁴ <http://www.museum.guernsey.net/castle.htm>

⁵⁵ <http://www.gyc.org.uk/>

⁵⁶ <http://www.optiworld.org/>

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We toured the maritime museum and then had lunch. I had a prawn sandwich but Eric gave us a taste of two native dishes: Gâche (pronounced Gosh) bread and the Guernsey bean pot which were delicious⁵⁷.

Our next stop was at the Bailiwick Tapestries⁵⁸. There are ten parishes on Guernsey. To celebrate the Millennium each parish has made a tapestry depicting one of the centuries between 1000 and 2000. Almost everyone on the island contributed at least a stitch. Since many different embroidery stitches are used the tapestries have texture quite different from ancient tapestries. We really enjoyed listening to the taped dialogue describing each one.

Eric showed us pictures about Guernsey's past. Some of the occupation memorabilia included a censored letter sent through the Red Cross. The island of Guernsey almost starved to death during the occupation and like Jersey celebrates Liberation Day a day later than the UK. He also remarked on how Victor Hugo⁵⁹ lived on Guernsey for eight years and wrote one of his books here. Eric also proudly showed us the book he wrote about the Martello Towers, which dot this island just as on Jersey.

We drove along the coast. Picturesque bays were punctuated by sharp outcroppings of rock and it is obvious these are treacherous waters in which to sail. Cobo Bay was exposed to the north wind and Eric told us how in storms rocks fly up and hit the houses there. What a price to pay for a view!

We stopped at La Guet point for a scenic overview of the area. Huge old Monterey pines shadowed the area planted by the fourth Baron Lord Sausmarez⁶⁰. Nearby there were loud noises coming from the stock cars racing on the beach. Another reason not to live at Cobo!

We stopped at another interesting Fort Grey Shipwreck Museum⁶¹. It is housed in one of the old Martello Towers and with the addition of a top story looks a bit like a cup and saucer. It was well displayed how they rescue some of the people from shipwrecks and so forth. We then had tea in the coffee shop.

I had been looking and looking for meadows full of Guernsey cows⁶² but none were to be found. Indeed the high hedgerows popping with wildflowers made it hard to see anything but the narrow road itself. Twice a year the hedgerow must be trimmed but even so most of them were higher than our car. Eric laughed that crazy tourists wanted to see a cow but at last after heading inland and twisting and curving we did find a small herd of Guernsey cows!

We flew back to Jersey and took a cab to Saint Aubins and found a delightful French restaurant, Bon Viveur⁶³, for dinner. I had coquilles St Jacques and Scotti had duck. We walked up the hill to the hotel and prepared to leave tomorrow.

Sunday, April 26. Checked out of the Somerset Hotel and took a cab to the airport. The driver was from Vancouver, Canada and had come here with his now divorced wife. He does not like the government of the island and only stays because of his kids. Soon we were on the ferry back to St Malo.

Olivier met us in St Malo and we were soon speeding toward Le Havre at 80 mph. After two and a half hours we reached the quay where the Viking Seine⁶⁴ was moored. She is a lovely ship and our stateroom is perfectly located just steps from Reception and on the deck with the dining room. We had to wait a bit until the room was ready but they had light food in the lounge for lunch. We have a huge bedroom with large picture window.

They had cocktails in the lounge where we met Captain Davy Pontieux and his crew. We were also given a lesson on life jackets but since the water will never be deep enough to cover the ship it does not look like we will need them. The Cruise director is Monique Vanmierlo. She gave us the bad news that we will have to hurry to Paris to get there before May first when all of France

⁵⁷ <http://www.goodfoodguernsey.com/recipes/traditional.aspx>

⁵⁸ <http://www.guernseytapestry.org.gg/>

⁵⁹ <http://www.victorhugo.gg/>

⁶⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baron_de_Saumarez

⁶¹ <http://www.museum.guernsey.net/fortgrey.htm>

⁶² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guernsey_cattle

⁶³ <http://bonviveurjersey.com/restaurant.html>

⁶⁴ <http://www.vikingrivers.com/>

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closes including locks and museums. We will miss one stop and then have two days in Paris. Scotti and I were already wondering what to do with one day in Paris and now have two to ponder. After the briefing the crew made a point of circulating through the lounge to shake hands or greet each of us personally.

We ate dinner with four other ladies. They had all come from the States to the boat so it was not very lively. Dinner was a six course affair and I left before desert.

Monday, April 27. We had an all day tour to war monuments of Normandy. Scotti wasn't feeling up to par so stayed behind. We drove to Arrmanche-les-Bains⁶⁵ where the allies built an artificial harbor to service the allied troops after they came ashore. The huge concrete pieces were shaped on barges and towed across the channel. After the Allies came ashore the barges were put into position and sunk forming a huge artificial harbor. A bad storm moved in during the midst of the operation so it was not 100% perfect but good enough that supplies were reaching the army within two or three days. The small museum of the 6th of June was full of dioramas showing the construction of the harbor and also of aspects of army life.

We were led to the 6th of June Restaurant for a so-so tour type meal. Then it was back on the buses for the rest of the tour. This is also when the rain began.

We drove to the American Cemetery at La Corville⁶⁶. Despite the pouring rain we walked in to view the graves lined up in military precision. Then I heard the Star Spangled Banner and felt the emotion of it all. 9387 men died here to make France free. 307 are unknown. There are several cases of brothers but they are not buried together. One father and son are here. General Roosevelt, nephew of the president, is here. He died of a heart attack. Next to him is his brother Quentin who lost his life in WW1. Fritz Niland was the last surviving brother who inspired the movie Saving Private Ryan⁶⁷. His two brothers are buried here. One couple was over 20 minutes late getting back to the bus. It turned out later that he had actually been here on D-Day

There are another 4000 American graves in St James Cemetery in nearby Brittany. The British lost men too but they are traditionally buried where they died so their cemeteries are much smaller. Over 21,000 German soldiers lie in another cemetery

Our next stop was Omaha Beach⁶⁸. This was a bungled operation. The air force came in and bombed the heck out of the German gun emplacements but due to a timing error did it after our boys came ashore so there was a huge loss of life among the first platoons. Our guide said the beach was covered with khaki clad bodies. Even if they were not already dead a tide soon drowned what survivors that there might be.

We went on to La Point du Hoc⁶⁹. Here on a high hill was a German armament. They were bombed so heavily that even 65 years later the bomb craters are 20 feet deep. It was really raining hard at this point so I beat a retreat to the bus.

What should have been a two hour ride back to the ship turned out to be three! The highway was almost closed by a traffic accident. I was so tired I did not go for dinner but Scotti brought me wine and a dinner back from the dining room.

Somewhat revived I did make it to the lecture on Impressionists. Christine Roland had slides of the Seine painted by various artists. While her delivery was very erudite and it was hard to follow I did get a lot out of it.

Tuesday, April 28. We bused a half hour to Honfleur that is across the river from Le Havre. Honfleur⁷⁰ is a medieval town that used to be walled. A fishing village it is now a tourist Mecca with half-timbered houses and narrow little streets. The guided walk was somewhat frustrating for even with the radios, it was hard to get away from those 100 intimate friends also taking the tour to take pictures. At last we came to St Catherine's wooden church with its separate belfry, the largest wooden church in France. We were happy when the tour ended and we could wander on

⁶⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrmanches-les-Bains>

⁶⁶ <http://246thcombatengineers.org/modernnormandy.htm>

⁶⁷ <http://inkpot.com/film/savingprivateryan.html>

⁶⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D-Day>

⁶⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pointe_du_Hoc

⁷⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honfleur>

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our own. It was highly photogenic although so cold Scotti ended up buying some gloves. We also stopped and had hot chocolate. There were some interesting galleries and of course numerous souvenir shops.

Back on the ship we had a light lunch in the lounge and then cast off. We locked through the Tancarville Canal⁷¹ and under the Normandy Bridge to the Seine River.

The river is lovely and snakes along making our route over twice as long as the crow would fly. Once a much wider river it has silted in so flat plains on either side leads back to the foothills of the original riverbed. The tidal bore comes as far upriver as Rouen.

They had a cooking demonstration of a lemon torte in the lounge and of course we got to try a piece.

After dinner they had a half hour guided tour of Caudebec-en-caux⁷². While the medieval city was mostly destroyed in the fire of 1940, the guide pointed out the 15th Templers building which houses a small museum. It looked about ready to fall down. The lovely 15th-16th century Notre Dame Cathedral in flamboyant gothic style was embellished with many carvings on its walls. Last she pointed out the market square. This whole tour was done at the pace of a galloping horse and I was glad to get back aboard. Scotti had opted to go see the Maritime museum instead.

Wednesday April 29. We awoke to finding the ship docking in Rouen⁷³. She is so quiet that we had heard nothing during the night. Our guide today was Christoph and he was the best we have had. He walked us through every detail of Rouen starting with the magnificent cathedral painted so many times by Monet. The ambulatory was closed so I was happy Scotti and I had viewed this a week ago. He explained that the priests to let more light in had removed some of the stain glass. There are however still stain glass windows that were removed during WW2 that have not been reinstalled due to the cost. Several times he lamented that the powers to be spend all the money on Paris and let Rouen renovations languish. Christoph pointed out many details we had missed like the small private courtyard to one side.

The great clock was built in the 14th century and its one hand mechanism still works! A lower panel in the clock changes every noon to depict the roman god of the day.

There are still many half-timbered buildings built so that the street is very narrow beneath the overhangs. During medieval times these would have been mud with the slops of the city. Today they are cobblestoned.

Unfortunately sometimes a lovely half-timbered building butts up on a modern concrete one and the effect is startling. Rouen has never been able to become a UNESCO city because of the mélange of architectural styles.

In the main market square we were shown where Jeanne d'Arc⁷⁴ was burned at the stake. A quiet garden marks the spot. It is right behind the modern Joan of Arc Church. The church, built in 1979, is shaped like a fish and is very beautiful. They have put in stained glass windows that came from churches now destroyed. There is a statue of Joan of Arc in the rear (she was made a saint in 1920) and a decorative arched metal shelf that I believe is supposed to represent the fagots that burned her forms a sort of shelf for candles.

We were told the story of Joan of Arc. Historians have not been able to determine that her name was Jeanne although there seems some justification for the name d'Arc. Her age is also uncertain although the usual recount of her visions and leading the French to liberate Orleans is usually placed at 17. She was captured and taken to Rouen where she was convicted for heresy and burned at the stake. Her ashes were thrown in the Seine River.

We said goodbye to Christoph. We went to a cyber café where I could finally access and answer my email. The connection on the ship is so slow that most of the time I cannot even get on line and once on line I am then cut off. I wonder if the wireless chip in the computer is wearing out. It is almost five years old.

⁷¹ <http://www.tagweb.co.uk/grehan/tancarville-canal.html>

⁷² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caudebec-en-Caux>

⁷³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rouen>

⁷⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_of_Arc

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We picked La Toque d'Or Restaurant⁷⁵ right on the square. It was half-timbered both exteriorly and internally. The rest room was in the basement but charming enough I even took a picture of it. For lunch I had a bouillabaisse. Although the food on the ship is great it was nice to try a different chef.

Then Scotti and I toured the Jeanne d'Arc Museum⁷⁶ with its dioramas and many depictions of the saint. Only the German representation showed her in armor. We came back to the ship for a priceless afternoon at leisure.

Thursday, April 30, 2009. We were having breakfast as the ship docked at Les Andelys⁷⁷. Overhead we could see the ruin of Gaillard Castle⁷⁸, once the home of Richard the Lionheart, built to protect Rouen from the French.

I would have loved to join the group that climbed up to see it but was dissuaded by the description of a very steep trail, Scotti made the climb and promises me pictures. I explored the small village and the gothic Church of St Sauveur. There were a number of half timbered houses but this town like Rouen will never meet UNESCO standards for there is modern architecture mixed in the old.

After an hour the climbing group returned and we loaded the buses for Giverny 45 minutes away. Ann Marie our guide gave us the complete story of Claude Monet's life⁷⁹ as we walked around the gardens. He was born 14 November 1840 in Paris. He first was known for his charcoal caricatures. Then he met Eugene Boudin⁸⁰ who became his mentor and taught him to use oil paints. Disillusioned with the traditional art taught in the Universities he started to work with other more inventive painters of his time. These new techniques turned into Impressionism.

What amazing color there was in the garden! The lily pond was not in bloom (that comes in July) but there was a riot of lilies, pansies, rhododendron and so forth. Following the Japanese garden we toured the scented garden with its beds laid out in precise rows. Again the riot of color saturated our senses and made me wish to take up a brush and start painting again! These flowers were not rare specimens but things anyone could grow at home. We are so lucky that the sun finally came out.

Roger Taylor fell in the gardens causing us all some concern but he and his wife were whisked away by ambulance to the hospital. We were relieved when he rejoined the ship at lunchtime sporting a large bandage on his temple.

When Monet first came to Giverny⁸¹ he found the house in which he was to spend half of his life⁸². It was pink in color and thus no one wanted it. He started the gardens that are still laid out to his original plan. The house was just as when he died in 1926. There was a reception room with copies of his paintings on the walls floor to ceiling. Throughout the rest of the house Japanese paintings hung. Upstairs we were shown two somewhat stark bedrooms. A yellow dining room led into the blue tiled kitchen. Since he had two children by his first love and she had six by her first, I couldn't help but wonder where the children slept!

The tour ended with the gift shop. Scotti bought me a lovely Monet umbrella and I bought a small print though I have no idea where I will put it.

We had cokes in the nearby teahouse while we waited for the time to board our buses. The ship had moved on to Mantes-la-Jolie⁸³. We got to where the rendezvous was supposed to be and no ship! There was a bit of consternation and then we started down the riverbank looking for it. We then spotted the Viking Seine but she was underway and going the other way! After some backing and filling we finally connected.

⁷⁵ <http://www.toquedor.fr/>

⁷⁶ <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/musee.jeannedarc/indexanglais.htm>

⁷⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Andelys

⁷⁸ <http://les-andelys.com/chateau-gaillard/>

⁷⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Monet

⁸⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eug%C3%A8ne_Boudin

⁸¹ <http://giverny.org/>

⁸² <http://giverny.org/monet/welcome.htm>

⁸³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantes-la-Jolie>

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We had the buffet lunch in the lounge and then had a wheelhouse tour. Our young captain showed us what all the instruments were and even let me toot the horn. Between GPS and radar it would be difficult to get lost on the river. In fact much of the navigation can be done by moving a finger.

And so we came into Paris about 10:00 pm.

Saturday, May 1. The group was offered a city tour and a Seine boat ride but since we had done this just a week before we decided to make an excursion to Chartres. We walked some blocks to the metro and then had to make a change at the Etoile. A man playing an accordion entertained us on the train. We had a quick lunch in one of open-air cafes and then went to the ticket office to get our tour tickets.

Such a crowd was in the street outside! They were waving flags and singing the French National anthem around a statue of Jeanne d'Arc. We were told it was a right wing extremist group but all was peaceful. The bus however could not get to the pickup point and we were marched three blocks away. Many demonstrations are going on in Paris today.

We lucked into the front seat of the bus because of my infirmities! Amazing what a cane will get you!

It's about an hour and a half drive down to Chartres⁸⁴ on the Eure River. The cathedral was one of the stops on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella. It is known for its beautiful blue stain glass windows.

Our guide Elizabetha was very good. She described the reconstructed front doors. They show 16 kings supposed to be the kings in Jesus' ancestry but there theory was that these might represent to kings of France and even showed a short figure that could be Pippin the Short. Each of the three doors represented one facet of Jesus life.

Inside the cathedral we were given earphones similar to what we have had on all our Viking tours. We walked slowly around the cathedral while she described the facets of Jesus life depicted in the glass. Some of the glass had been cleaned in recent years and the beautiful colors were magnificent. Some of the windows were given by the guilds in town. The one that the shoemakers gave depicted people getting fitted for shoes at the bottom.

There was a side chapel where the relic of the veil of Mary is enshrined. There is also a statue of Mary in another chapel. I was amazed that the statue looked dark with grime but my Sony camera caught it looking like it was spotlighted. It's the most forgiving camera I ever saw.

In the front of the nave was a curious maze marked on the floor. It was designed so penitents could walk it and meditate. I had never seen this inside a church before.

We found an ice-cream shop on the way back tot he bus so I had my pistachio fix for the day.

Back in Paris they let us off near the river and we walked the Rue George V back up to the Champs Elysee looking for a restaurant. It seemed to be the Italian part of town so it took a while before we found a not too expensive French restaurant, Chez Clement Elysees⁸⁵ and had a good meal. We taxied back to the ship.

Saturday, May 2. They had offered an optional tour to Vaux-le-Vicomte⁸⁶ since Versailles promised to be a zoo this May Day weekend. Our guide Laurens told us about Nicolas Fouquet.⁸⁷ He built a beautiful castle south of Paris and had a huge party. Louis XIV came and was jealous. He determined to build the more magnificent Versailles. He had Fouquet arrested and tried for treason. Then he stole Fouquet's architect, and painter to build his own Castle. Vaux-le-Vicomte was sold to a family that held it for over 200 years. It is now owned by a private family who live in the old servant's quarters and tries to maintain the castle by having paid admissions

I had never heard of this castle despite having been to France many times. I loved it. It looks like a miniature Versailles and is complete with formal gardens similar to Versailles.

⁸⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cathedral_of_Chartres

⁸⁵ <http://www.chezclément.com/anglais/index.php?page=el>

⁸⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaux-le-Vicomte>

⁸⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolas_Fouquet

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We toured the first floor of the castle that is furnished in the period of which it was built. Tapestries hang on the walls. Statues and furniture are displayed. There is one statue of Louis XIV that was stolen and buried in a garden in Belgium waiting for a time when it could be sold. Fortunately it was recovered and is one of the few statues of Louis extant the rest destroyed in the French Revolution.

The Kings bedroom was complete with a canopied bed on a platform so people could come and have an audience with the King. It was kept for the King in case he might come calling. A later owner had a young wife and she decided to make the room her own.

Throughout the castle were life size figures dressed in period costume. In the dining room it seemed as if you were watching a 17th century ball going on.

In the basement we were shown the kitchens and the pleasant servant's dining room. I got the feeling that the guide didn't approve of all this pantomime but I rather enjoyed it, even the figure with the squirrel on his shoulder. The squirrel was the emblem of Fouquet and there were renditions of this furry animal in the stone carvings and in the tapestries so why not one on the shoulder of a manikin.

At the end of the tour we walked though the carriage house with a wonderful collection of carriages. Most were 18th and 19th century but there was also a Roman chariot.

We were back on the ship for lunch. Some had been bound and determined to see Versailles, even though it was not recommended, and went there instead. It was so crowded they sold their tickets to people behind them in the line and returned to the ship.

Spent the afternoon resting and packing. There was a gala farewell dinner.

Sunday, May 3, 2008. We were on the 8:30 am departure from the ship. It all went smoothly although I had rather a long walk when we got to terminal 2E to find Delta's business class check-in. Then a fairly long wait for a wheel chair, but eventually I got to the Business class lounge. My schedule read an 11:30 departure but it was 1:40 before they picked me up to take me to the gate. There must have been a schedule change.

I was interested that our route to the United States took a lower trajectory than usual for we came over Bermuda.

In Atlanta we had to wait a half an hour for a gate. Then after clearing immigration and customs, we got to baggage claim only to wait another half hour for the bags to come from Concourse E. The man pushing my wheelchair said it was because a bad rainstorm had hit and they could not handle the luggage in the pouring rain.