



## UTHRO Travels: Paris to Normandy

*All images by Beth Watson unless otherwise indicated*

Our group of 21 traveled with Vantage Cruise Lines to France for a few days in Paris and a river cruise on the Seine River from Paris to Normandy. After an overnight flight, we arrived in Paris in the early morning of October 18<sup>th</sup> for three and a half adventure filled days in the city of light. Upon our arrival, Vantage picked us up at the airport and we checked into the Paris Marriott Opera Ambassador Hotel. We wasted no time immersing ourselves in the delights of Paris! My small group choose to visit the Galleries Lafayette near the Opera House. The view from the terrace of the top floor is breathtaking. It provides a panoramic view of Paris from the Eiffel Tower to Sacre Coeur, the exquisite white church on the hill.

On day 3 of our tour, Vantage provided us with a morning panoramic tour of Paris including a stop at the iconic Eiffel Tower. After our tour, Vantage gave us lunch money, and we were off to visit the sites. My companions and I choose a visit to the Pantheon in the Latin Quarter. Originally built as the

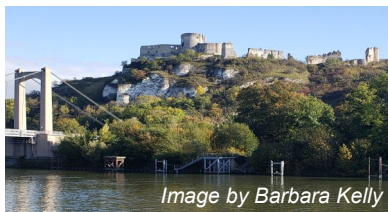
Church of Saint Genevieve it was transformed after the French Revolution in 1791 into a mausoleum for distinguished French citizens. Among those entombed in the Pantheon are Voltare, Rousseau, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and Marie Curie. We picked a lovely outdoor café for lunch and then strolled the Latin Quarter. Of course, we stopped for dessert! A quick metro ride back to the hotel ended our excursion.



Day 4 found us on a Vantage provided guided tour of the Louvre which included works by Botticelli, Rembrandt, and of course, da Vinci's Mona Lisa. The Louvre contains over 38,000 pieces of art work exhibited in an area of 72,735 square feet. It would take a year to see everything! After the Louvre my companions and I choose to lunch at a small brasserie. The French Onion Soup was fabulous! Then we were off for a tour of the Palais Garnier (Opera House). The Palais Garnier was built for the Paris Opera from 1861 to 1875 at the behest of Napoleon II. The Opera House is a must see in Paris!



Day 5 started with a 2 hour walking tour of the Le Marais. The Le Marais is home to the most intact medieval and prerevolutionary buildings in Paris as well as galleries galore and trendy cafes. Our walk took us to the Palace des Vosges, considered by many to be the most beautifully built square in Paris. It was built by Henry IV and Napoleon considered it a jewel of Paris. Palace des Vosges was considered "the" place to live in Paris. Victor Hugo lived at #6 while he wrote Les Misérables. We were also introduced to the rich Jewish history of the Le Marais. After our walk, Vantage treated us to a lunch cruise on the Seine. Later that afternoon we boarded the Seine Princess for our river cruise. The evening entertainment was an onboard movie, "Midnight in Paris".



*Image by Barbara Kelly*

Day 6 we discovered the wonders of Les Andelys and Rouen. Les Andelys is the medieval village with the ruins of Chateau Gaillard, a fortress built by England's Richard the Lionhearted in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to protect his holdings in Normandy. The ruins of the medieval castle sit 300 feet about the village of Les Andelys. Many of our brave souls choose to hike up to the ruins. We also toured the city of Rouen, the capital of the region of Normandy. It is a city rich in medieval history including the fiery death of Joan of Arc. Our guided tour included a visit to Rouen Cathedral with its Tower de Beurre (butter tower) financed by the sale of indulgences for the consumption of butter during Lent. Richard the Lionhearted's tomb rests in the Cathedral and contains his embalmed

heart. We viewed the Gros Horloge, an astronomical clock dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. We concluded tour of Rouen with dinner at La Couronne, located in one of the many timber houses that line Market Square and is the oldest auberge (inn) in France. It is also the inn where Julia Childs ate the meal that inspired her culinary adventure. We experienced a culinary treat of a lifetime!



*Four Rouen Images from Google*

Day 7 we traveled from our ship by bus through the small villages and breathtaking views of the Normandy countryside to the beaches of Normandy where Allied troops landed on D-Day, June 6, 1944. We drove to the coastal village of Colleville-sur-Mer to the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, burial site of nearly 10,000 American soldiers. Walking among the white crosses is a stark reminder of the sacrifices our military men and women make daily for our freedom. We were privileged to take part in a solemn wreath laying ceremony honoring those who had fallen and the veterans in our group. It began with the playing of our National Anthem and ended with Taps. There was not a dry eye in our group. For me, this was the highlight of the trip.

After a wonderful lunch and locally produced hard cider, we headed to Pointe du Hoc, site of a German battery that was destroyed by U.S. Rangers who scaled the sea cliffs in a daring attack. Then we continued to Omaha Beach, where the U.S. Army infantry prevailed in the face of fierce resistance. Through each step of our journey our local guide reiterated many times the admiration and heart felt gratitude for the part that the Americans played in the liberation of France. The ride back to the ship through the peaceful Normandy countryside was a time of reflection.



Day 8 began with an onboard informative lecture about World War II and the Normandy landing by a local expert. After lunch we were off again through the Normandy countryside to tour the Fecamp Benedictine monastery to see how the Benedictine liqueur is produced. Benedictine is a blend of 27 spices and herbs and quite delicious!

Day 9 was spent cruising the Seine and enjoying the sites along the Seine. Onboard we deepened our understanding of Parisian food culture with an informative lecture and sampled Macarons and chocolate, oh la la! The afternoon was spent with a lecture on the wine culture of France and of

course a lot of wine tasting. After dinner we were treated to a Cancan performance. Two of the guys in our group even got into the action! After the entertainment, we took a late night cruise on the Seine through Paris. From the top deck, we had to lay down on our lounge chairs to go under some of the bridges, but we got the best pictures of the lights of the Eiffel Tower.



Day 10 was spent in Giverny where a walking tour introduced us to French provincialism at its finest. Our guided tour led us to Monet's house and gardens. Viewing the magnificence of the countryside and the gardens, it is easy to see where Monet derived his inspiration. After our tour, we were whisked back to Paris and comfortable once again at the Marriott.



Day 11 in Paris was our day to explore on our own. My companion and I choose the Musee d'Orsay which has one the finest collections of Impressionism paintings in the world. The d'Orsay happens to be one of my favorite museums in Paris. After a late lunch in a small café where we met some fellow Texans, we were off on a walk along the Seine to the Shakespeare Bookstore and a little souvenir shopping. That evening we were treated to a wine-pared farewell dinner at La Ciel de Paris. La Ciel de Paris sits on the 56th floor of one of the tallest buildings in Paris and the view at night is breathtaking. What a way to end a fabulous trip!

My fellow travelers so enjoyed this trip, they want a way to keep in touch and share memories and pictures. I have established a Facebook Page entitled UTHRO Travels. All UTHRO members are welcome to join the page on Facebook. Where will UTHRO Travels take us next??????? Stay tuned.

Barbara Kelly