

Midlife Madness in FRANCE



23 days - Sept 2016



JOIN US NEXT YEAR FOR 4 GLORIOUS DAYS IN & AROUND PARIS: A MOVEABLE FEAST!

THE RAIN IN SPAIN FALLS MAINLY ON THE PLAIN. Or so they say. But the rain in France (take it from me) falls mainly in Paris. At least it did last time we were there. Europe's glorious **City of Lights** was downright dripping wet. But somehow it didn't matter. The fashion capital of the world was still able to work its magic on us, with its wide boulevards and big-name boutiques ... its crowded cafés and spectacular landmarks ... its passion for eating, drinking and dressing well ...

The first thing we saw from our hotel was the glittering **Eiffel Tower**, illuminated on the skyline like a golden chandelier. And as soon as we'd bounced on the bed and freshened up, it was back down the road for a closer look.

Paris-by-night is truly something else. And a colourful commentary from our guide (Hans, a hilarious Dutchman) helped bring it all alive. We toured the **Place de La Concorde** – a city square to beat all city squares.

The **Louvre**, once the home of French kings and now the finest art museum anywhere, stood darkly in one direction (boasting 30,000 works, if you've got all year ... or just the **Mona Lisa** and **Venus de Milo** if you've only got five minutes). And way off in another direction, we watched the trendy set strolling along the **Champs-Elysees**, Paris's legendary oh-so-romantic promenade.

In yet a third direction, across the busiest, rushingest roundabout in France, we spotted the **Arc de Triomphe** – a monumental archway built to honour those who died in the French Revolution and the wars fought by Napoleon's Grand Armée.

The **Eiffel Tower** (it didn't seem quite so gorgeous close up – more like a giant grey Meccano thingy) was erected over 100 years ago for no particular reason by Gustave Eiffel (which is probably how it got its name). I wanted to take the lift to the first-floor landing, with its city-views and souvenir shops. But, in a restaurant called *La Cremaillere*, our dinner was getting cold ...

Montmartre, highest of Paris's seven hills, (you can count 'em if you've got nothing better to do) is the home of the quaint **Place de Tetre** where the city's pavement artists do their best to charm tourists out of a few Euros. Once we'd eaten ourselves silly, we mingled with the carefree crowd, pretending to know what the locals were talking about and pretending to know a lot more about art than we really did.

Then we wandered up the steps of the famous white-domed, bell-towered **Sacre-Coeur Basilica**. Where the first martyrs of Paris met their deaths. We settled for something less breath-taking: fabulous panoramic views.

Notre Dame Cathedral, on the banks of the Seine, was first on our agenda following breakfast next day. If you're into cathedrals, this is rated one of the world's best – and if you're looking for flying buttresses or cheeky gargoyles, Notre Dame has got lots. Quasimodo, the ugly 'Hunchback of Notre Dame', met Esmeralda, the beautiful dancing gypsy, right here on this spot.

By day, Paris seems overrun by maniac drivers and hurtling cars. But you don't go half way round the world to hide inside. So, armed with a couple of umbrellas plus the few French phrases I could remember from school, my lady and I took to the streets.

But that's another story for another ooh-la-la day ...



Midlife Madness Cruises & Tours

with John & Robyn Cooney and team ♦ www.johncooney.co.nz
booking agent: Roger Glynnan, Lion World Travel
phone 0800 277 477 tollfree ♦ email roger.glynnan@lionworld.co.nz