

# France 2016 - A River Cruise and Land Adventure

by Janet Connery, Rob Connery, Sheri Tiner and Kirk Tiner



## Day 1 - Saint-Germain-en-Laye

After flying all night and arriving at Paris Charles de Gaulle the next morning Kirk and Sheri hopped on the RER train for a trip across Paris to the suburb of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Just a short walk from the train station was the destination for the night, Pavillon Henri IV hotel, specially chosen because it was built from the last remaining part of the palace where Louis XIV was born.

To get to the hotel we walked past the Old Castle and through the New Castle gardens. Our room wasn't yet ready when we reached the hotel so we sat out on the patio and enjoyed the view of Paris off in the distance and the little town of Le Pecq just below us where we were to meet our friends Janet and Rob on the Viking ship Rinda the next day.







After we got checked into our room we took off across the park and into town to explore and keep moving after the long flight.

We walked back through the garden to explore the royal city of Saint Germain en Laye. Founded in the early eleventh century when King Robert II built a monastery close to the forest where he enjoyed hunting. In about 1124 Louis VI built what is now known as the Old Castle which was re built in 1348 by King Charles V and now houses the Musée des Antiquités Nationales. Across the street from the Old Castle is the Church of Saint-Germain built on the site of the original monastery. There is so much royal history in Saint Germain that it's hard to keep track. Another castle was built overlooking the Seine by Henri II in 1556 known as the New Castle. This is where Louis XIV was born in 1638 and all that remains is the bit attached to our hotel. The New Castle was aban-





done by Louis XIV in 1682 when Versailles was completed but it was given to James II of England when he was exiled to France. He and his family lived there until he died in 1701. He is buried in the Church of Saint-Germain.

We wandered the old town, took some photos, visited the childhood home of Claude Debussy and had our first French food, a Croque Monsieur sandwich, at an outdoor cafe.

We headed back to the hotel with a stop for another view of Paris in the distance then settled down for the night.













## Day 2 - Le Pecq

Our second morning in France we enjoyed breakfast in the hotel restaurant with a view of the sunrise over Paris. After we ate, we further explored the hotel and got to go into the one remaining room of the New Castle where Louis XIV was born then walked the gardens for a while before taking a taxi down the hill to meet the ship and join the other half of our travel bunch, Janet and Rob.









We reached the ship in minutes and put away our things in the cabin. A great thing about Viking is consistency, we knew exactly what to expect, only the view changes. We had a nice lunch in the dining room while waiting for Janet and Rob who were sending us messages from Frankfurt, Germany where they were waiting to board their flight to Paris. After a while we decided to join the walking tour of Saint-Germain-en-Laye for something to kill time while we waited... and waited...

Of course the first stop on the walking tour was right back to the hotel we had just left a couple of hours ago and another chance to view Paris in the distance from the garden. We did get to visit the inner courtyard and the chapel of the Old Castle and found out that the beautiful Sainte Chappelle in Paris was modeled after this chapel. Both were built in the early 1200's by Pierre de Montreuil, favorite architect of Louis IX.



During our free time after the tour we ended up back at the same cafe as the day before to get out of the rain.

Once we returned to the ship we made a run to the local grocery store for beer and cokes to stock our cabin fridge and then it was just a short time before Rob and Janet arrived and the group was together at last.















By this time it's too late for all of us to enjoy the local area so Janet and Sheri took a short walk along the Seine while Rob and Kirk got reacquainted.

Sheri introduced Janet to the wonders of the French Monoprix, the store with everything! After admiring the veggie and bread selection we picked up the toothbrush and toothpaste that Rob forgot along with a few other essentials; limoncello, kirsch and beer.

After enduring the boring safety instruction, we attended the Welcome Briefing and met the crew. Janet took the opportunity to corner Iliyan, the maître d', to discuss the merits of vegetarian meals without mushrooms. This cruise will be mushroom free!

At dinner that first night we met Nicola who would be our main food dude throughout this trip. He always brings the most tastiest delights!

After dinner we listened to the Spirit of France musical presentation where we heard the French songs that would follow us throughout our journey. We heard these songs over and over again, it seems all street musicians are required to play these songs constantly.

## Day 3 - Paris







After breakfast we all boarded the bus for a tour of Paris. As we passed the Arc de Triomphe we witnessed the most insane driving as hundreds of cars weave a complex dance in the massive and insane traffic circle.

The bus continued down the Champs-Élysées with all the ritzy stores and past the Palais Garnier, the Opera House and the Louvre. We kept catching glimpses of the Eiffel Tower between the trees and buildings then had our first look at the Louvre.

As part of our tour of Paris we were taught how to tell quality shops from tourist traps, Gothic from Romanesque architecture, and pollsters from pickpockets. Actually that last lesson was more of a direction to yell “No!” and walk quickly away from any girls holding clipboards. I hope this was accurate advice, if not then we may have blemished the sterling reputation of America tourists.

After about two hours in the bus and taking photos on the fly, we finally got out to walk from the Hotel de Ville to Notre Dame for a guided tour of the massive church then free time and lunch!

Notre Dame is where Janet began her gargoyle and stained glass photo collection. An excellent choice since Notre Dame has many gargoyles and some amazing stained glass rose windows.

Often when we paused for even a minute Kirk would start slowly turning in a circle. After a while we realized that this was not some odd disease, instead he was taking hundreds of panorama photos. We would need another whole book to hold that collection

Once the tour was over we wandered the cathedral taking photos then paused outside to stand on the spot that marks the center of Paris. Apparently this is required. We agreed lunch was next on the agenda so we headed to the left bank of the Seine to find some











cheap food and do a little sight-seeing on our own.

We found a cafe with beautiful pastries and sandwiches. Of course the fact that the French don't understand what vegetarian means was proved when Janet asked if a sandwich was vegetarian and was assured that it was, it turned out to have hidden tuna salad. Fish is not a vegetable... but at least there were no mushrooms. Also, even though we were customers, we still had to pay to use the potty. This was the first of many toilets with no seat. What, is there a toilet thief running around France!?

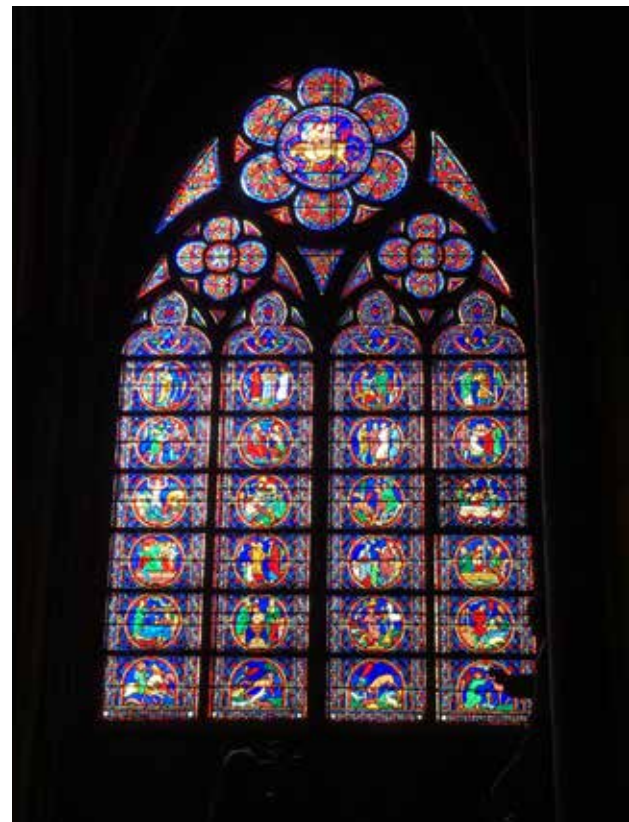
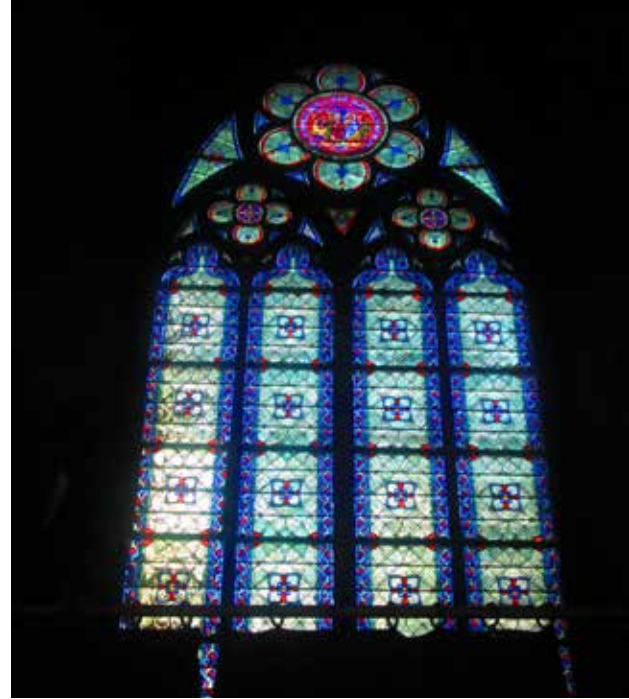
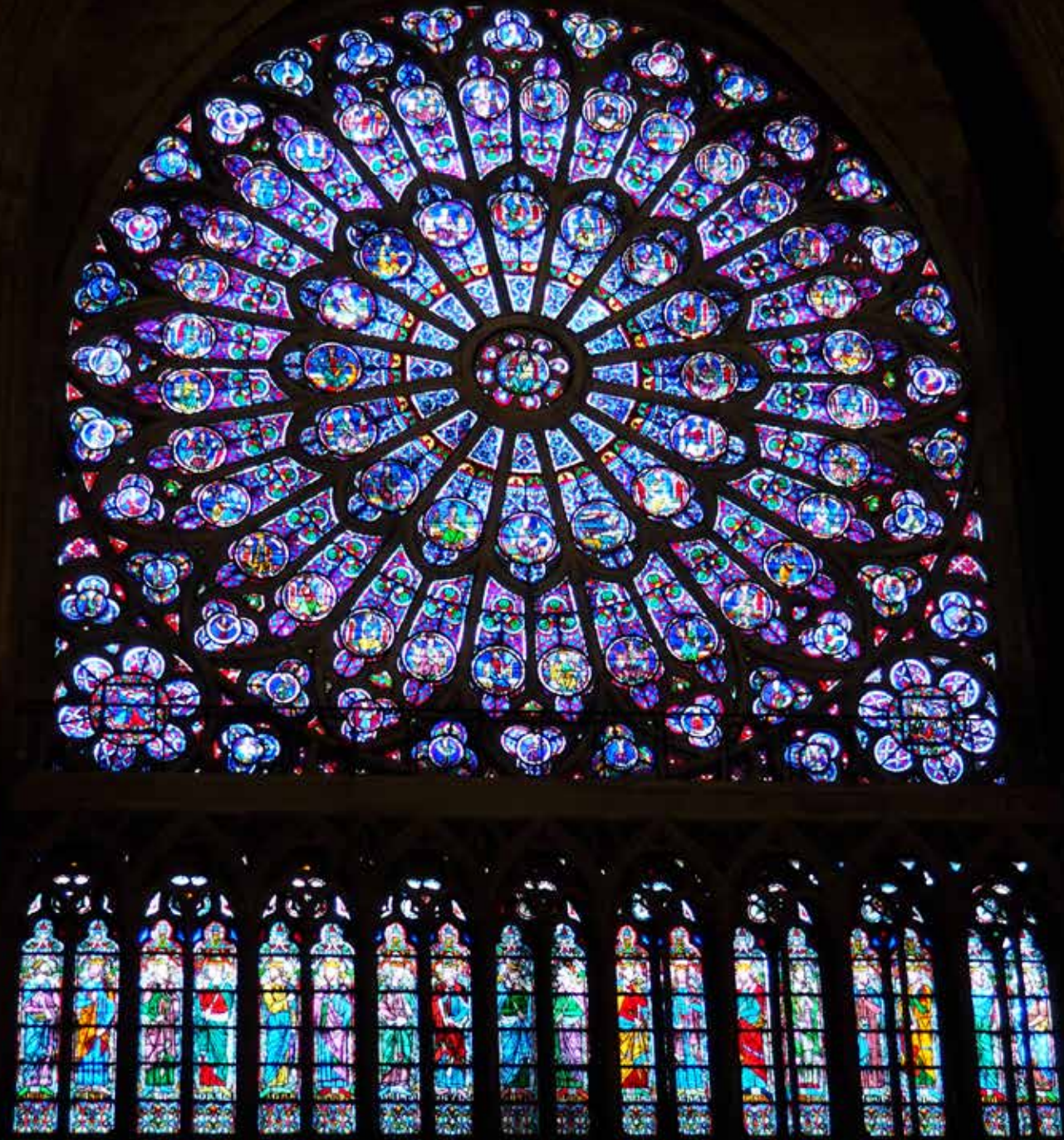
After lunch we wandered the left bank visiting the Church of Saint-Séverin which was begun in the 11th century and has some beautiful modern stained glass windows. We also stopped by the fountain of Saint Michel for a few snapshots and were able to cross two items off our Paris to-do list for later. We also found cheap magnets, a lovely miniature Eiffel Tower and took many photos of everything.



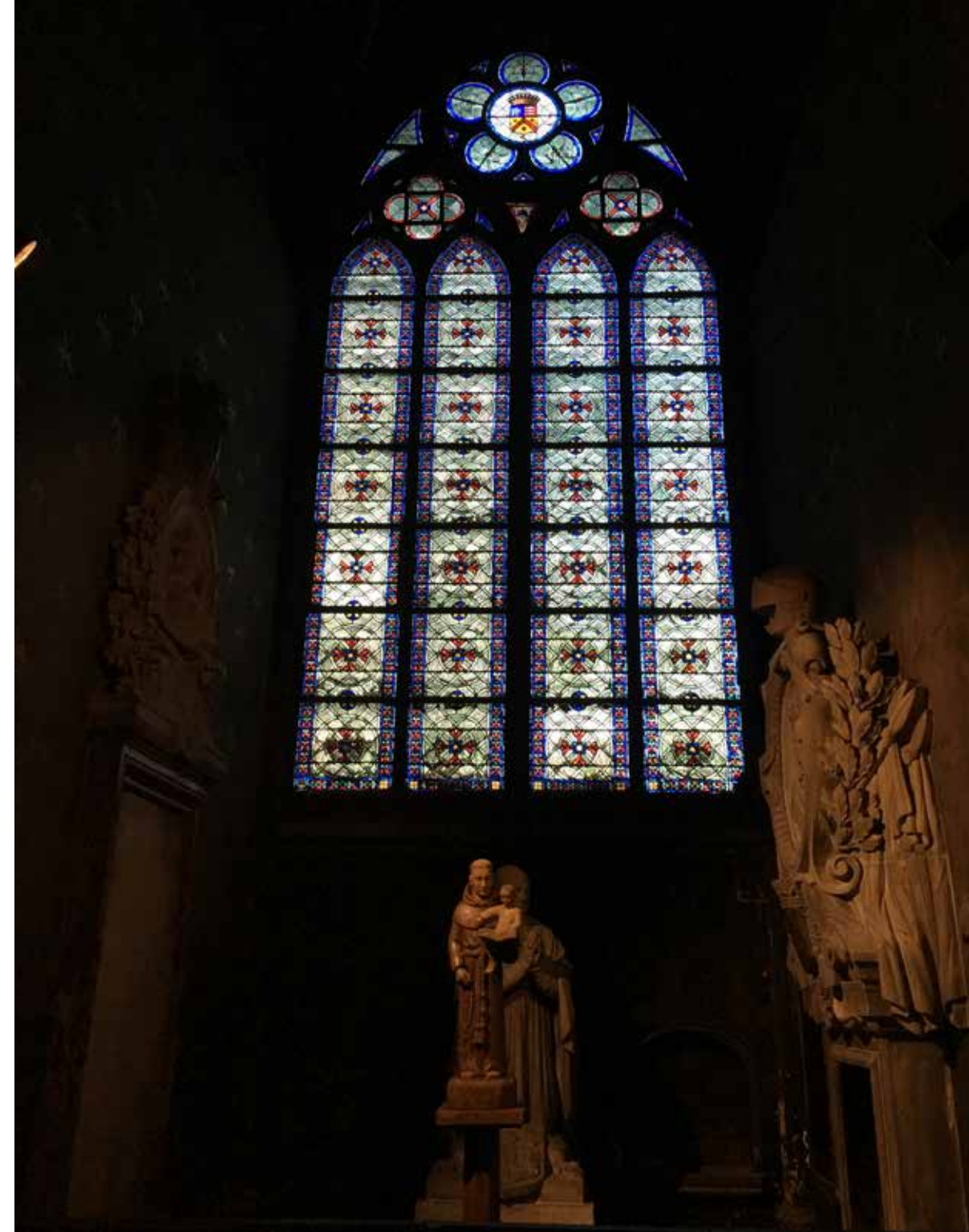




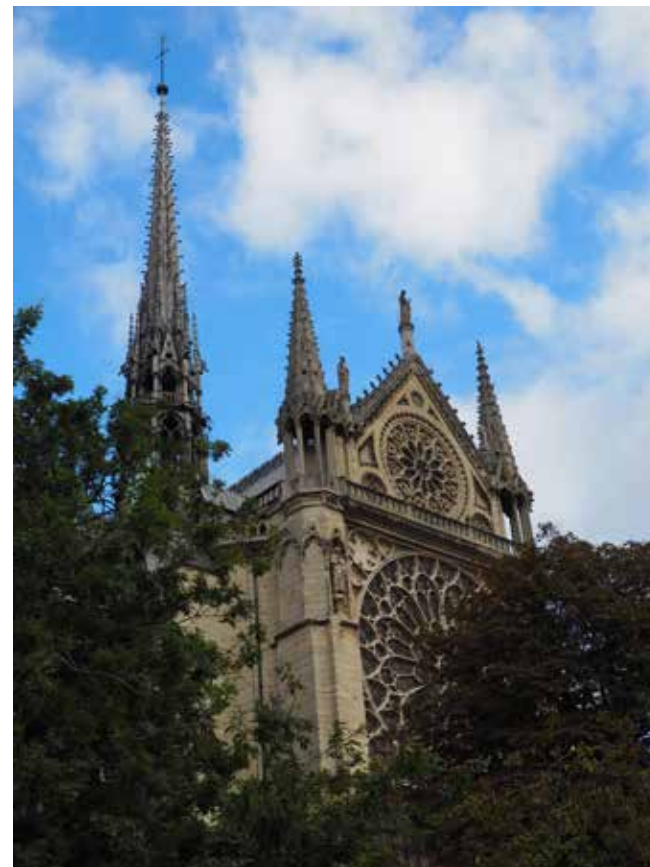












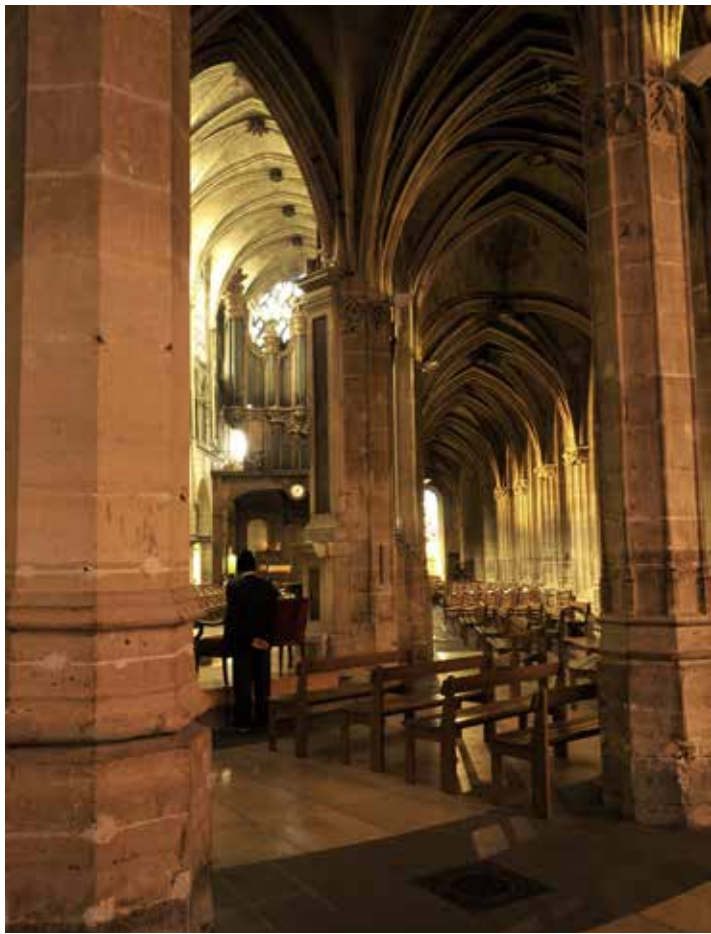
It had just started raining when we met back up with our tour guide in front of the Hotel de Ville so were actually glad to get back on the bus. Away we went to snap more photos on the fly and to pause for photos in front of the Eiffel Tower.





















## Day 4 - Giverny and Vernon



Giverny! One of many highlights of our wonder filled vacation. This is the house and garden where Monet lived and painted for many years. Right after breakfast we boarded the bus that took us from the town of Vernon where we were docked to the tiny village of Giverny to tour the water garden with the famous, Japanese bridges and row boats then through the massive flower garden. Along the way Kirk was treated to what we can only assume was a ceremonial greeting from one of the elderly residents. As our bus passed by she waived and dropped her pants, apparently they go commando in this region.

We started in the water gardens which are the farthest from the house, and worked our way back up the hill. As we wandered through the gardens we took photo after photo of the wide variety of colorful flowers. We were fortunate that so much of it was still in glorious bloom even so late in the year. So many flower pictures! It was easy to see how Monet spent so many years just painting his own garden. Everywhere we turned there was another lovely scene.

After the garden we were able to tour Monet's house. It was filled with typical furnishings of a 19th century French country home and in one room the walls were covered with his paintings. The largest rooms in the house were the studio and the kitchen. It was interesting to see the garden from the perspective of the house, out every window was another beautiful scene filled with color.

After the Monet house and garden tour we had a little over an hour of free time so we visited all three gift shops then stopped at small café where we shared a traditional apple tart with a side of Calvados, the apple brandy native to Normandy. The Calvados was a







nice finish to the sweetness of the tart. Booze before lunch... of course!

We were to meet in the garden of the Musée des impressionnistes Giverny located just down the Rue Claude Monet. While wandering through the garden we saw a glint in Sheri's eyes when she saw it, the most perfect bloom of all these thousands of blooms.



table Rob said something that got Janet so tickled she had a laughing fit. He looked so innocent too... wonder what he said? After lunch we took a walking tour of Vernon and learned how to tell a historic half-timbered house from a recreation, only the homes built later have straight timbers.



It was massive, pink and unblemished. She took a picture. Then she adjusted her position and took another picture. This shot would be the best she has ever taken, if only the flower pointed a fraction of an inch higher. So she reached out to adjust the flower... and killed it. Snapped the stem. So she propped it up and snuck off hoping no one had noticed.

We returned to Vernon and the ship for lunch. At the





We were just a few days away from Halloween which is just in the last few years becoming popular in Europe. We got to see groups of children being escorted around the town by teaches to specific locations where costumed actors acted out stories. Two places we saw this happen where the church and the town hall. We thought it was a pretty fun way to learn about their town and get some exercise.

During this walk we also learn that Ken, our Program Director, is always there. Seriously, he is always there. So we become confi-





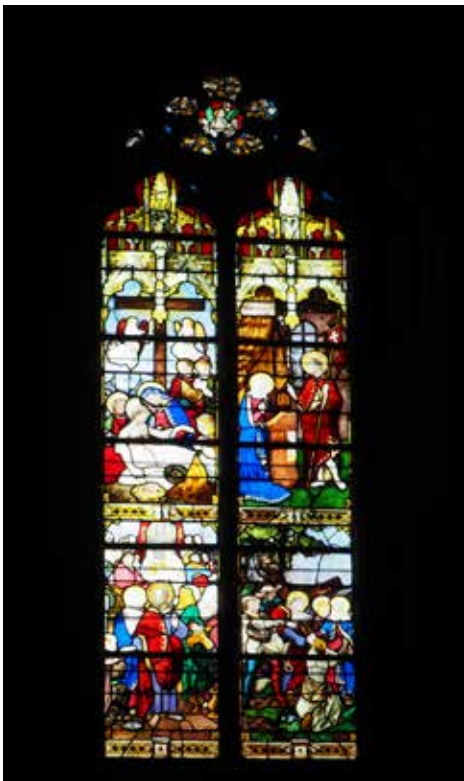
dent that if we were to get lost all we have to do is turn around and we'll see Ken, happily waiting to direct us to any destination or just back to the ship.

At dinner we started to notice that the other diners were afraid to sit with us (was it the endless giggling or the maniacal look in Rob's eyes?). Only Theresa, who was traveling alone, was brave enough to join us night after night.











## Day 5 - Rouen



We spent the morning cruising down the Seine. Unfortunately there was not much to see, or maybe there were many spectacular, life-changing sights if only it weren't for that dense fog. So we relaxed, listened to Ken talk about Joan of Arc, toured the wheelhouse, and enjoyed some hot citrus-rum punch.

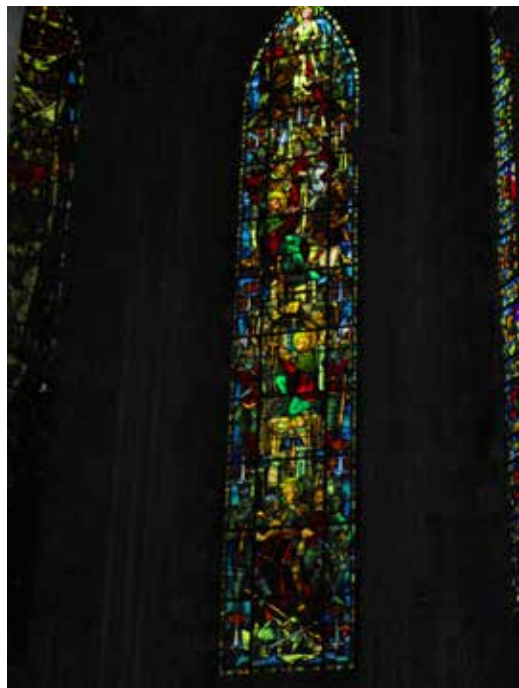
During lunch we arrived in Rouen, actually we cruised completely through the city then they turned the ship around before docking since this is as far down the Seine as we can go.

The walking tour of Rouen showed us the town that is best known as being the place where Joan of Arc was tried for heresy and burned at the stake in 1431. We visited the main cathedral since Viking cannot pass a cathedral without sending us inside. The Cathedral Notre Dame of Rouen is actually interesting because both Rollo, the founder and first ruler of Normandy and King Richard I of England (also known as Richard the Lionheart) are both buried here. Actually, Normandy is filled with places touched by Richard the Lionheart which is not surprising, one of his titles was Duke of Normandy.

Construction was begun on the site of a 4th century church and after many additions, the cathedral as it stands today was finally completed in the 18th cen-











ture. The cathedral was bombed twice during World War II, once by the British, once by the Americans just before D-Day in 1944.

From the cathedral we walked down the Rue du Gros Horloge (the street of the big clock) with 5,000 other tourists. The street is appropriately named since it is actually spanned at one point by a really big clock, the Gors-Horloge,



which is an astronomical clock.

Eventually the street ended at the Place du Vieux Marché, the New Market. The market stalls contained the typical flower, bakery, cheese and fish mongers. Even if you had your eyes closed you could tell what the stall offered based on the scents, pungent and otherwise.

The end of the walking tour was the Eglise Sainte-Jeanne d'Arc, with its spectacular stained windows which came from the 16th century Church of Saint Vincent whose ruins are located nearby. This church, constructed in 1979, is a masterpiece of modern minimalism symbolizing the search for absolute geometric purity and is based on old Norman churches which were designed in the shape of an overturned boat... or maybe it's just the weirdest looking church we've ever seen.







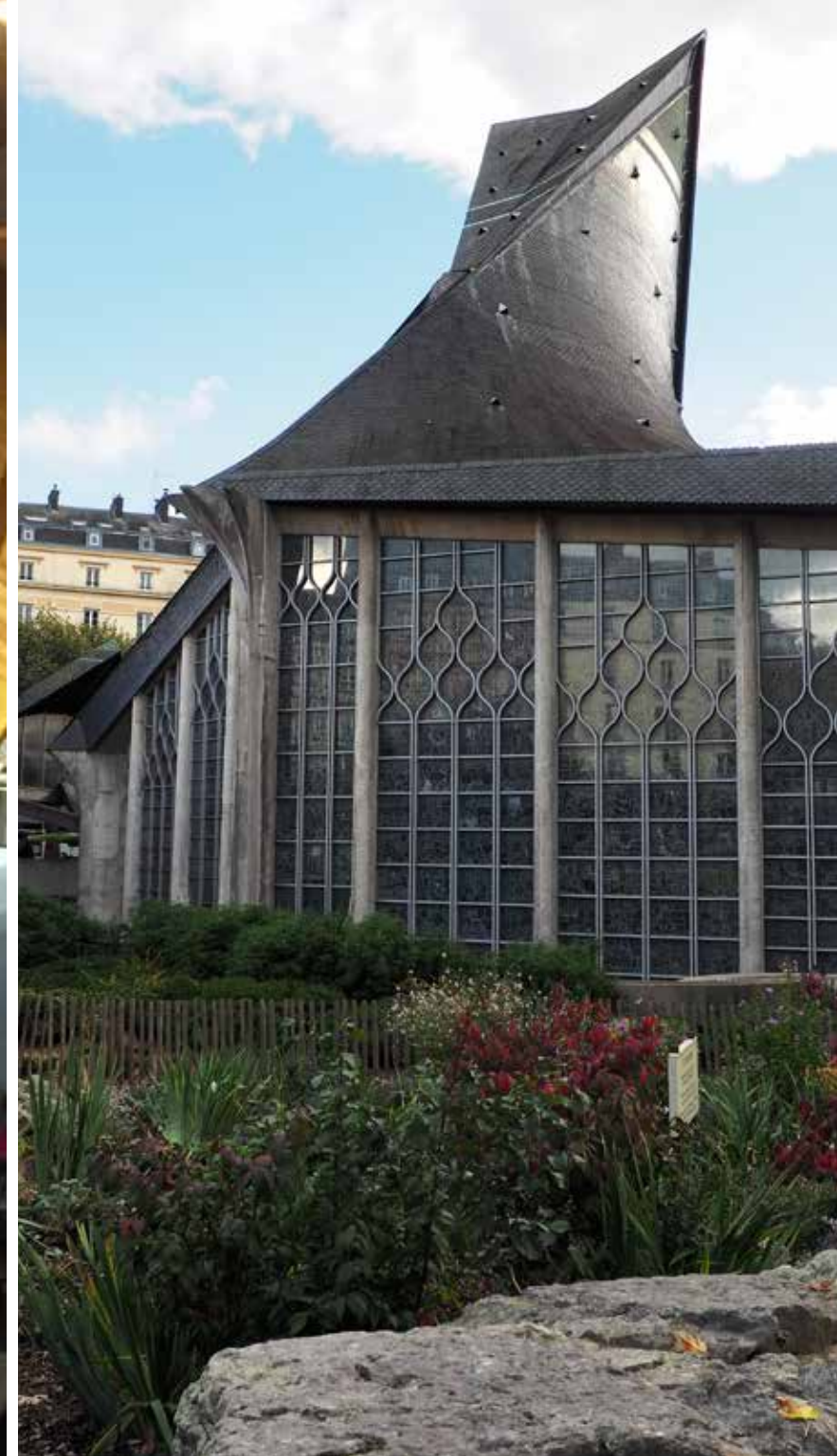
Once the walking tour ended it was time for souvenir shopping. We all optimistically entered the cute little shop across from the funky church. We found magnets and calendars and trinkets and calvados... everything we needed. So we made our selection and stood in line to check out. After about ten minutes Janet had an attack of “if I don’t get out of this crowd I’m going to kill someone” and decided to abandon her planned purchases rather than unleash mayhem on the other shoppers. Janet, Rob and Kirk stood around outside the store waiting on Sheri, after some time passes they walked a bit away from the shop to sit on the remains of the church where Joan was sentenced.

As more time passed we started to discuss how much we missed Sheri, she has been a phenomenal traveling planner and companion. After what seemed like hours we had planned our memorial trip which would celebrate our fallen comrade. Then Sheri exited the store, victorious in her souvenir magnet purchases. There was much rejoicing.

To celebrate Sheri’s return we found a pastry shop where we selected treats to share. There were chocolate tarts, lemon tarts, espresso and more chocolate. Vive la France!











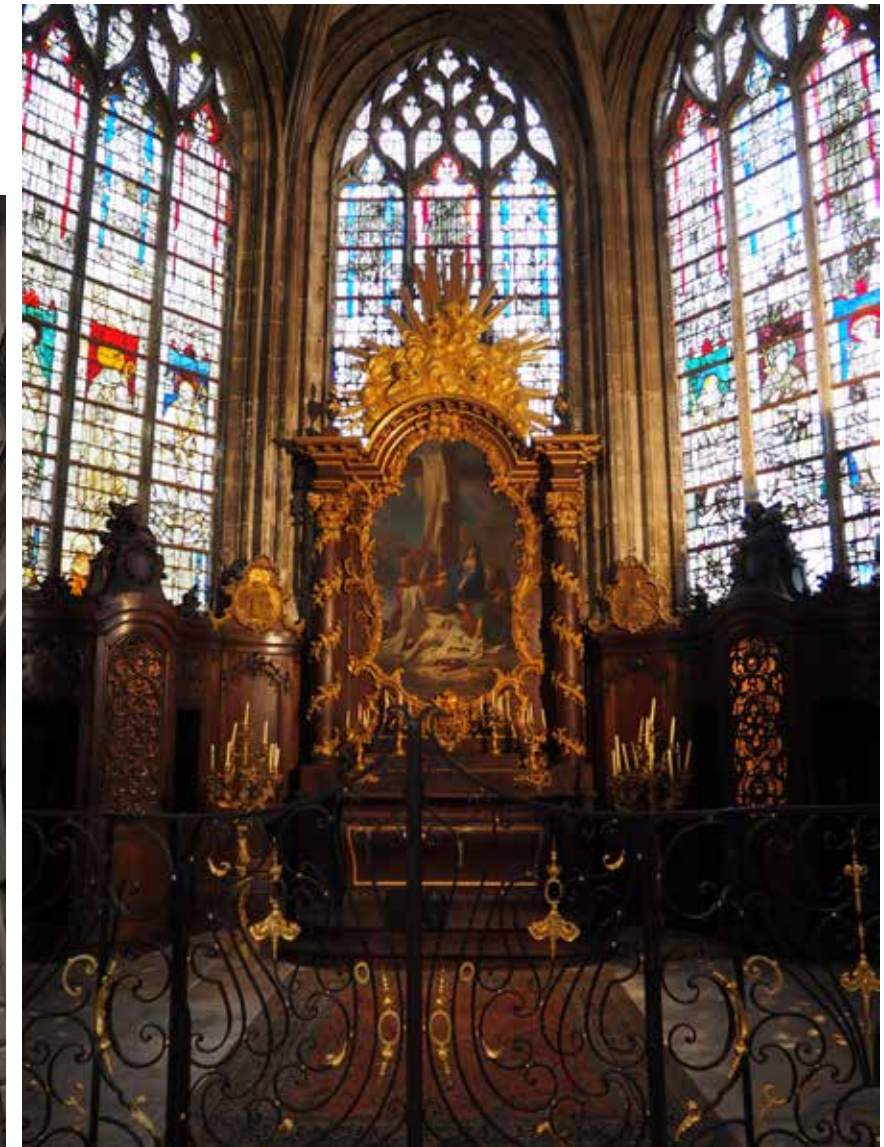
After a few more blocks of walking and checking out old church ruins the guys decided they were ready to return to the ship. Sheri gave Kirk detailed directions for the three block walk back. Janet agreed that the boys would eventually make their way back to the river and find the ship. After all, if they got lost they would just need to turn around and Ken would be there.

Sheri and Janet continued to explore the city, searching for gargoyles for Janet's collection and Cokes to restock Sheri's mini-fridge. More gargoyles were easily found at the Église Saint-Maclou on its strangely lacy appearing façade. We made a quick circuit around the inside, snapped some photos, and walked on.



We found a few oddities along our route including a Tex-Mex restaurant. Very strange thing to find in France. Eventually we located what passes for a convenience store in Rouen and purchased the much needed cokes and made our way back to the ship. Yes, the guys had found their way.

Dinner that night on the ship was the typical Viking experience which means the food was wonderful with excellent service, even if there was a bit of attitude. Our servers had got-



ten used to our insanity and began to play along. The Viking staff will go to any length to make their guests feel right at home.







## Day 6 - The D-Day Beaches of Normandy



We set out early on busses to the D-Day beaches of Normandy. It was quite a long bus ride and our guide provided a lot of information about the events leading up to the D-Day attack on the Germans holding the northern coast of France. While the history was interesting to some of us, others really just wanted to sleep so it was probably a bit annoying.

We drove along the coast first pausing at Juno beach where the Canadian forces landed. We drove on for another 30 minute to arrive at the small village of Arromanches. This is the site of the British built Mulberry Harbor at the site of the Gold Beach landing of British troops. We arrived at low tide so the remains of the temporary harbor were quite visible. The harbor was constructed of floating roadways and pierheads that were manufactured in England and towed across the Channel and set in place. The harbor, during its busiest week, allowed 18,000 tons of goods to be brought in to supply the allied forces in France.

Sheri took a walk down the beach and around the large structures taking pictures while Janet scooped sand into little jars to bring back home and give to the history buffs that won't travel on their own. Even in the cold of late October there were quite a few people on the beach. Including a horse and sulky zooming up and down the beach. Of course there was also a busload of Asian students. They had a large banner and were charging at someone with a camera. Were they reenacting the D-Day invasion?

Kirk and Rob decided it was way too cold for a walk on the beach and headed instead into the Musée du Débarquement to warm up and pick up a little more history. The museum displayed samples of the uni-







forms and weapons used. An antiquated video explained how the allies used the Mulberry harbors.

After our free time we gathered again for lunch in a local restaurant named for D-Day, the “Restaurant 6 Juin Brasserie”. We noticed that the hotel across the street was also named for D-Day, “La Maison du 6”, we joked that this is the French version of a Motel 6, but with a lot more meaning.

Viking is nothing if not efficient. All 190 of us were seated and fed within 45 minutes. Sheri agreed the lunch was good, even if it was chicken. Janet was thrilled when they handed her a note stating that her lunch would be vegetarian with no mushrooms. She ended up with an omelet. Soon we were off again to the busses and on our way to the next stop on the tour.

The German bunkers or “pillboxes” used to defend Normandy were on top of the cliffs between Omaha and Gold Beaches which means it was windy as hell and even Sheri got a little cold. It also meant the guns were positioned to defend both beaches, fortunately they didn’t hit a single allied ship. The bat-



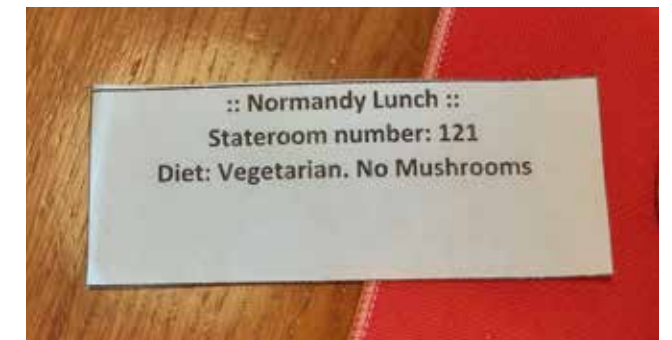
tery was finally knocked out in the evening of D-Day by Allied Naval gunfire and its demoralized garrison surrendered to the advancing British forces the next day.

One of the guns was destroyed but the other bunkers remain relatively un-touched. There are some places we could see the effects of Allied shelling but for the most part the bunkers are as they were left in 1944.

Eventually we got back on the bus and finally reached the American Cemetery and Memorial at Colleville-sur-Mer, up on a cliff overlooking Omaha Beach. When we entered the memorial we first passed through the garden surrounded by the Walls of the Missing listing men who were never found and presumed dead. At that point we were each given a rose to lay at the grave of a soldier who lost his life on D-Day. Next we walked into the memorial where the central focal point is a 22-foot tall bronze statue called “The Spirit of American Youth Rising From the Waves.” On either side are maps and descriptions of the D-Day activities.

















When we finally walked into the cemetery we were overwhelmed with the sheer number of graves. The cemetery covers 172 acres and contains the graves of 9,387 American military dead, most of whom lost their lives in the D-Day landings and ensuing operations.

We reflected on those lost lives as we wandered among the graves. Eventually we each selected one upon which to place the rose we were given when we arrived. The rows of headstones seemed never ending.

There was a short memorial ceremony for our group. A member of the museum staff spoke briefly of the loss memorialized on the site, the American national anthem was played, followed by taps and then we had a long moment of silence. They hold this ceremony often, ensuring these men are not forgotten.

Once again we're on the bus, this time headed to Omaha Beach to see the Signal Monument and the stainless steel sculpture "Les Braves" which stands behind it. It was raining when we reached the monument so Sheri took one for the team and jumped off the bus to



snap some photos. It didn't take her long, the combination of wind off the English Channel and the cold rain were a chilling combination.

Afterward we took a drive down the beach and past the original American cemetery which was actually on a stretch of the beach below the cliffs. There is considerably more space for the beautiful monument and gardens in the present location. On the ride back to the ship most everyone was quiet, even







the tour guide. Either we were all tired or were still in awe of the number of graves we had just visited. When we returned to the ship it was raining and there were the Viking Rinda crew to meet us with umbrellas. We made our way down to our cabins and relaxed until dinner.

The menu that night was typical French with all of Kirk's favorites. Cuisses de Grenouilles à la Provençale, Soupe à l'Oignon, Boeuf Bourguignon and Duo de Mousse au Chocolat (frog legs, onion soup, beef stew and chocolate mousse). What a day!









## Day 7 - Les Andelys



The next morning we cruised out of Rouen and on to our next destination, Les Andelys. We cruised up the foggy river entertained by a demonstration of how to make a French Tarte au Citron, a tour of the ship's wheelhouse and a lovely lunch.

When we finally arrived at Les Andelys we discovered that another ship had taken our dock. While we waited for the Viking crew to repel the invaders we took lots of pictures of the castle ruins high above the town.

In the afternoon we climbed the long, steep hill to reach Château Gaillard, the remains of the castle of Richard the Lionheart of England. The castle was built in just one year between 1197 and 1198 by over 6,000 laborers. Richard's military experience allowed him to build a virtually impenetrable fortress. One innovation was the scalloped walls of the keep. This allowed for archers to shoot through arrow slits from any point in the wall with no dead angles. No sneaking up on this keep. The castle stood solid until after Richard's death.

One story about how the castle fell is that they came in through the bathroom window. Yes, really. Apparently there was an unguarded window in the latrines that the French forces were able to reach and thereby enter the castle.















Some historians think it much more likely that the French entered the castle through the chapel that had been added by John Lackland, Richard's brother who was next in line for the throne of England. John had none of the military skills of his brother Richard.

Whatever the military and defensive reasons for the location of Château Gaillard, the view of the valley below was spectacular. As







we wandered the ruins listening to the tour guide we took many many pictures. From over 300 feet above the river and valley below we could literally see for miles and miles. Kirk documented the experience with many panoramic photos.

After we descended the long hill we walked a short distance into the center of town to see local church, Église Saint-Sauveur du Petit-Andely. The church is actually newer than the Château Gailard, it was built by King Philip Augustus after his defeat of the castle in about 1204.

The guided tour ended at the church and Janet and Rob limped back to the ship to relax while Kirk and Sheri explored a bit further. As Sheri took a break on one of the convenient benches along the river walk she made the mistake of saying 'bonjour' to a nice elderly gentleman walking by. Horror of horrors, he spoke back! In French! Oh boy, what to do now? Eventually, using all 15 words of French (not related to food) she knew, the conversation was over and the nice man went along on his way. Hopefully not terribly offended by Sheri's total annihilation of his language.

Once back on the ship we all rested up for the special Diner d'au Revoir. The menu was a meat and seafood lovers delight of lobster and shrimp bisque, beef







and foie gras or sea scallops with bacon. None of which appealed to Sheri and there was no vegetarian option for Janet. Of course the Viking chef came through with some lovely veggie creations. As always, the desserts were amazing.

Later that evening there was dancing. Sheri was all ready to relax with a book but Kirk drug her out of the cabin to dance in the lounge. Everyone danced. Even Rob and Janet danced. Bad, drunken dancing. YMCA? Mustang Sally? Twist??? Photos were taken, they are well hidden. We should not speak of it.













Day 8 - Le Pecq







We slept in that morning and emerged slowly into Tuesday. Fortunately we have no activities until after lunch because we all woke confused at the songs stuck in our heads, why was Janet humming YMCA?

At some point during the night we had arrived back where we began, at Le Pecq. This was the day we visited Napoleon and Joséphine Bonaparte's home, Malmaison. Joséphine purchased the house in 1799 and lived there until her death in 1814. During her lifetime the estate consisted of over 1,700 acres of parkland and gardens. The house was built in 1610 and completely renovated when the Bonapartes purchased it.

The house changed hands several times after Napoleon's abdication in 1814 and was eventually purchased by Napoleon III, Joséphine's grandson, from the Queen of Spain in 1861. Finally, after war and time took its toll on the house a philanthropist purchased the estate and donated it to the State in 1903. By then much of the land had been sold and there was only about fifteen acres of gardens remaining. The house has been a museum since 1905.

The museum has been furnished to the time period of Joséphine Bonaparte although most items are not original to the house. Only a few of the furnish-











ings were recovered and returned to the house. The house was beautiful but still felt like a home.

The gardens were lovely even though in late October not much was in bloom. Janet found a lone bench in one garden and sat for a while, possibly contemplating replicating it at home? We walked around the grounds for a while and made a stop at the carriage house before heading back to meet the bus for the ride back to the ship.

On the way back our guide pointed out the Marly Machine in the middle of the Seine River and the massive pipes running up the hill. The Marly Machine was the genius invention created to carry water to the fountains at Versailles. The machine



pumped an average of 3,800 cubic yards of water per day. This was still only a fraction of the water that would have been necessary to run the fountains at Versailles. The Marly Machine was in use for 133 years.

Our last night on the ship we relaxed and thanked our lucky stars we weren't going to have to wake up at 3:00 am and head to the airport like the last trip. This time we could get up







at a reasonable time and have a leisurely breakfast while we waited for a taxi to take us to our hotel in Paris where we would start the next part of our adventure.













## Day 9 - Paris

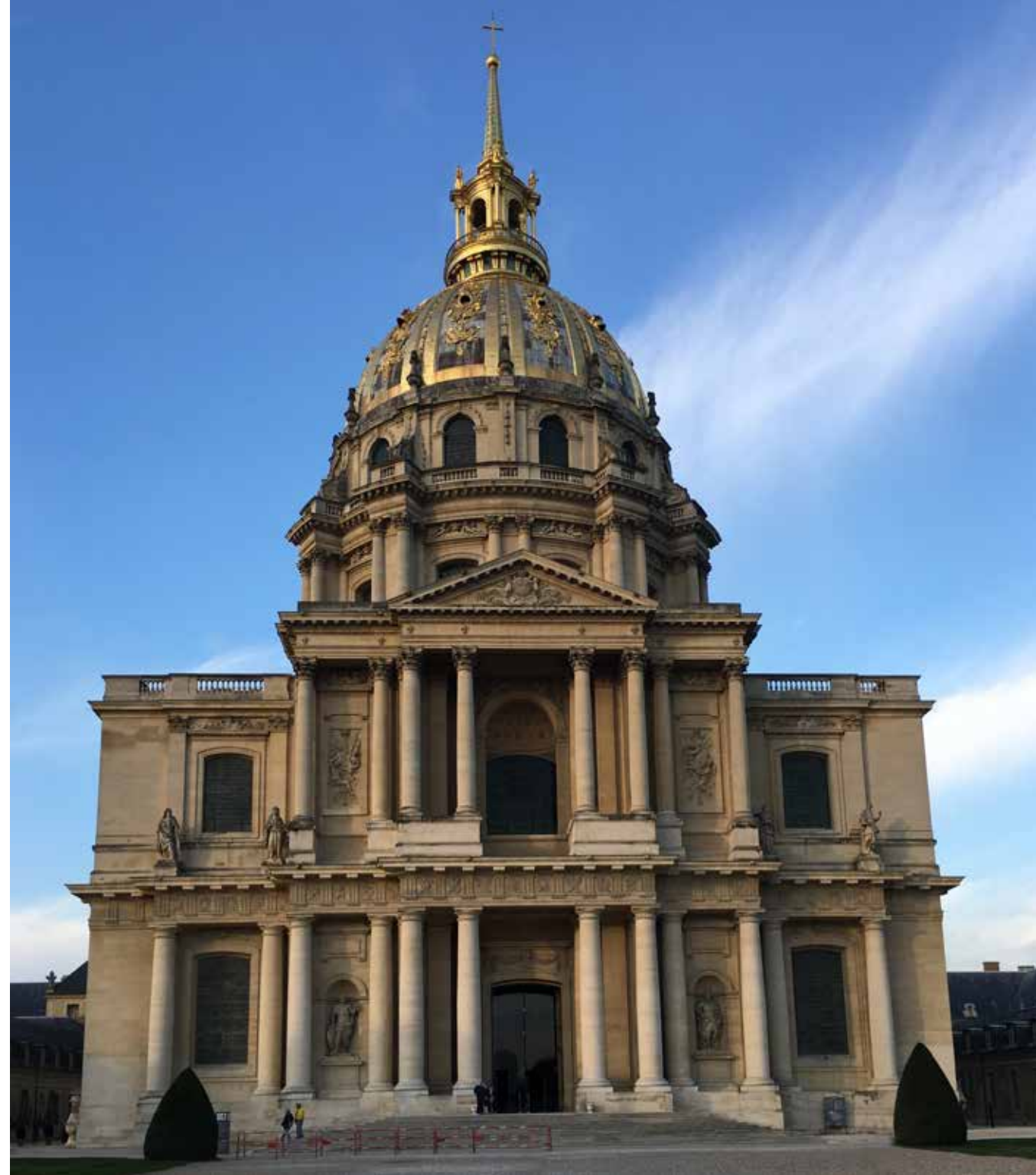


After breakfast we said sad goodbyes to the crew and returned taking care of our own lives. Our taxi arrived right on time and we set off on our next adventure. We got another mini tour of Paris dropping off the other couple who shared our taxi and then the driver happily drove us to the wrong hotel. Both Sheri and Janet had given specific information on our hotel on the written request for a taxi on the departure form. Even that we would all four be going to the same hotel and only needed one taxi. After an argument half in French (the driver) and half in English (the rest of us) about the name of the hotel being the same but different, the driver finally listened to Sheri's directions to the correct hotel and away we went again.

Our second challenge was when it came time to pay. We were one group going to the same destination but the driver insisted we pay 50 Euro per couple. We argued that it was one trip. Again the language barrier made things more dif-





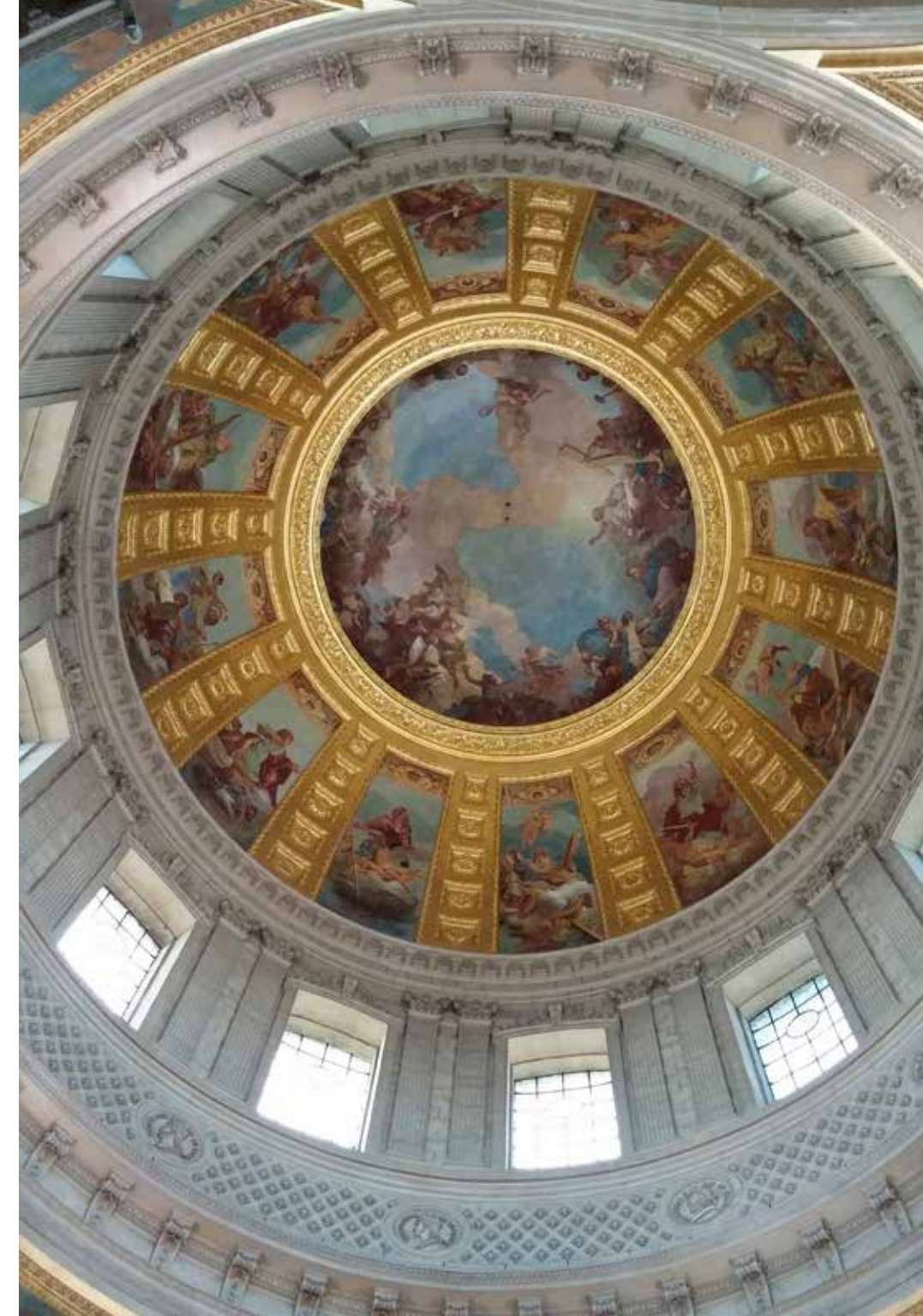


ficult, but eventually the driver showed us the text he had received from someone on the ship that said he would be paid 50 Euro per couple. We went ahead and paid but were thoroughly pissed at the Viking person who sent the text.

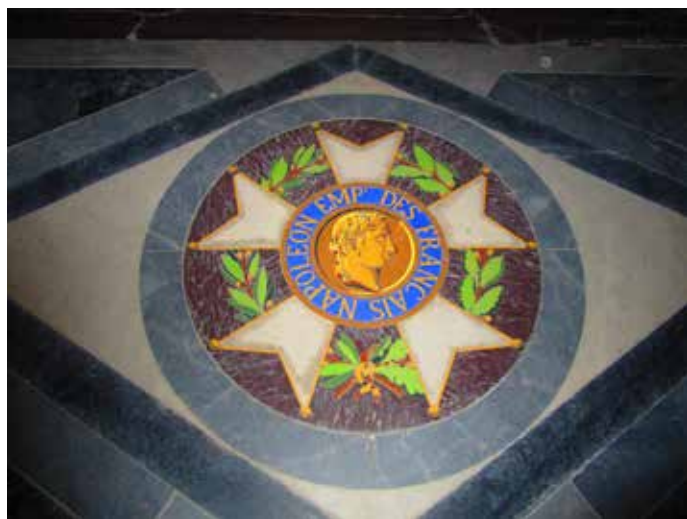
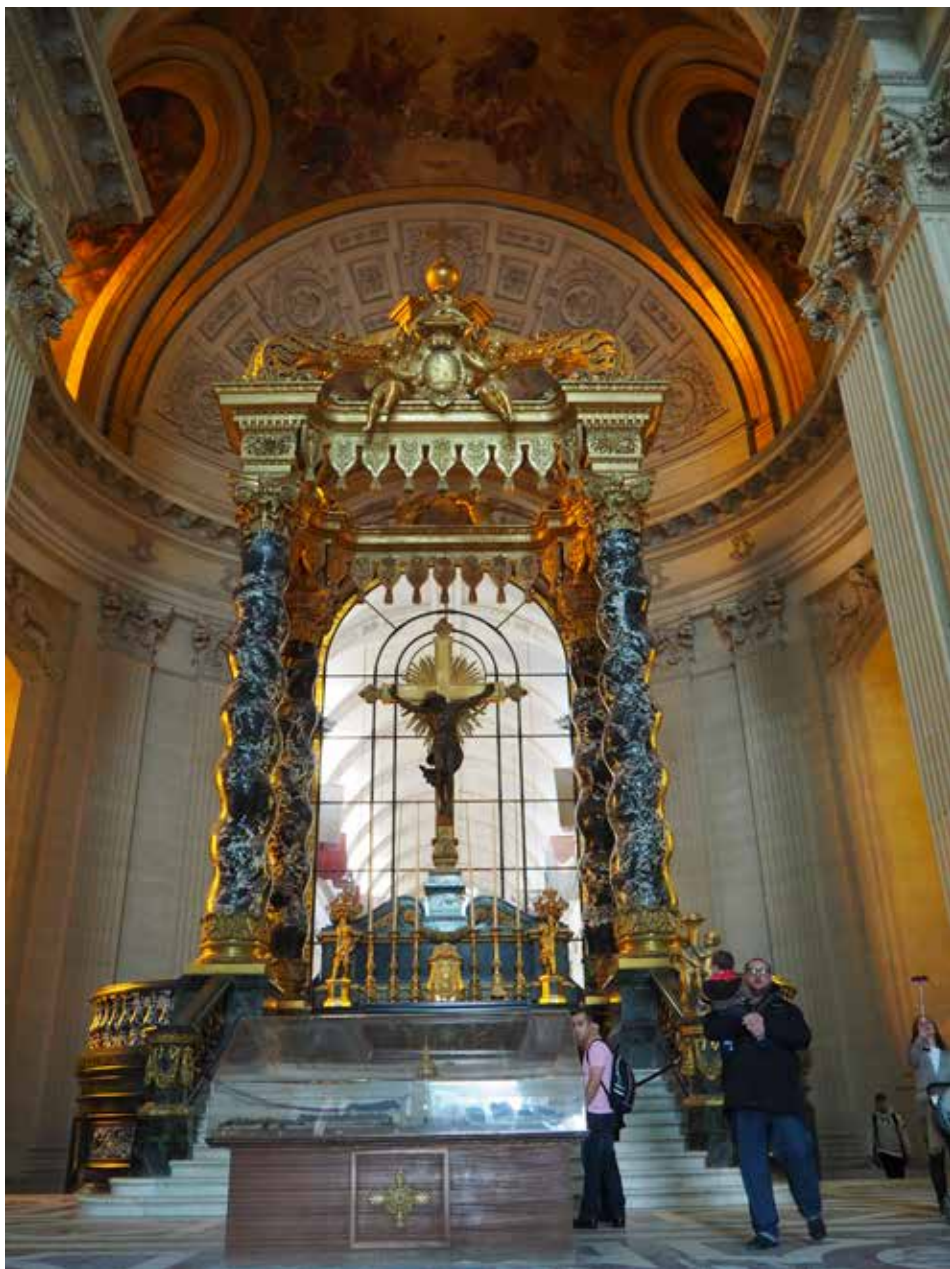
Right after we checked into the hotel we headed out to find the laundromat Sheri had mapped out ahead of time. After ten minutes trying to understand how French laundromats work and translating signs we successfully washed and dried a enough clothes to last the remainder of the trip.

On our way back to the hotel with our clean laundry we picked up sandwiches for lunch. After a picnic in the hotel Janet and Sheri headed across the street to the Gare l'est (East Train Station) to pick up museum and metro passes from the tour office. We had big plans to see as much of Paris as possible in four days. We would get very familiar with the Paris Metro.

First on the to see list was Napoleon's Tomb, since we had just spent the day before at his home. This is a massive building that also includes a military museum which we totally skipped. The tomb is in The Dome Church, sort of a church inside of a church. The Dôme des Invalides was built between 1677 and 1706 with ornamentation to glorify Louis XIV. During reign of Napoleon the church became a tomb. Several others are entombed there but Napoleon's massive red quartzite tomb holds the place of honor directly under the dome. The church is massive and the marble floors with detailed inscriptions are amazing.











We moved on to our next destination a few blocks away, the Rodin museum, only to find that they decided to close early that day. So we changed our plans and headed to the Louvre.

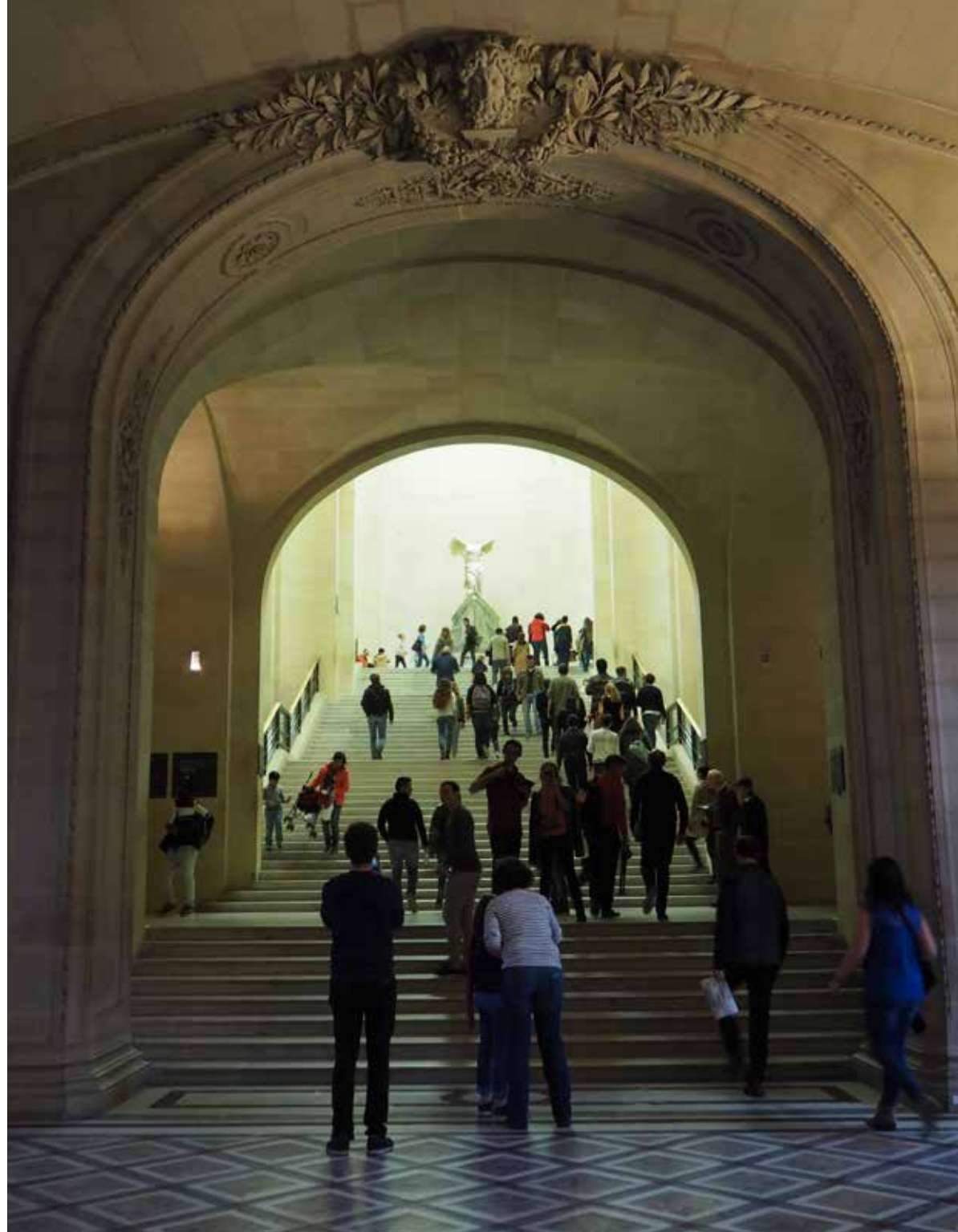
The Louvre is gigantic, the largest museum in the world. There is no way we could see it all so we tried to plan our path to see the highlights. We gathered our energy and attacked the Denon wing with Greek and Roman sculptures and paintings by French and Italian masters. We climbed many stairs to see the Winged Victory and then followed the signs through the maze of galleries stop-







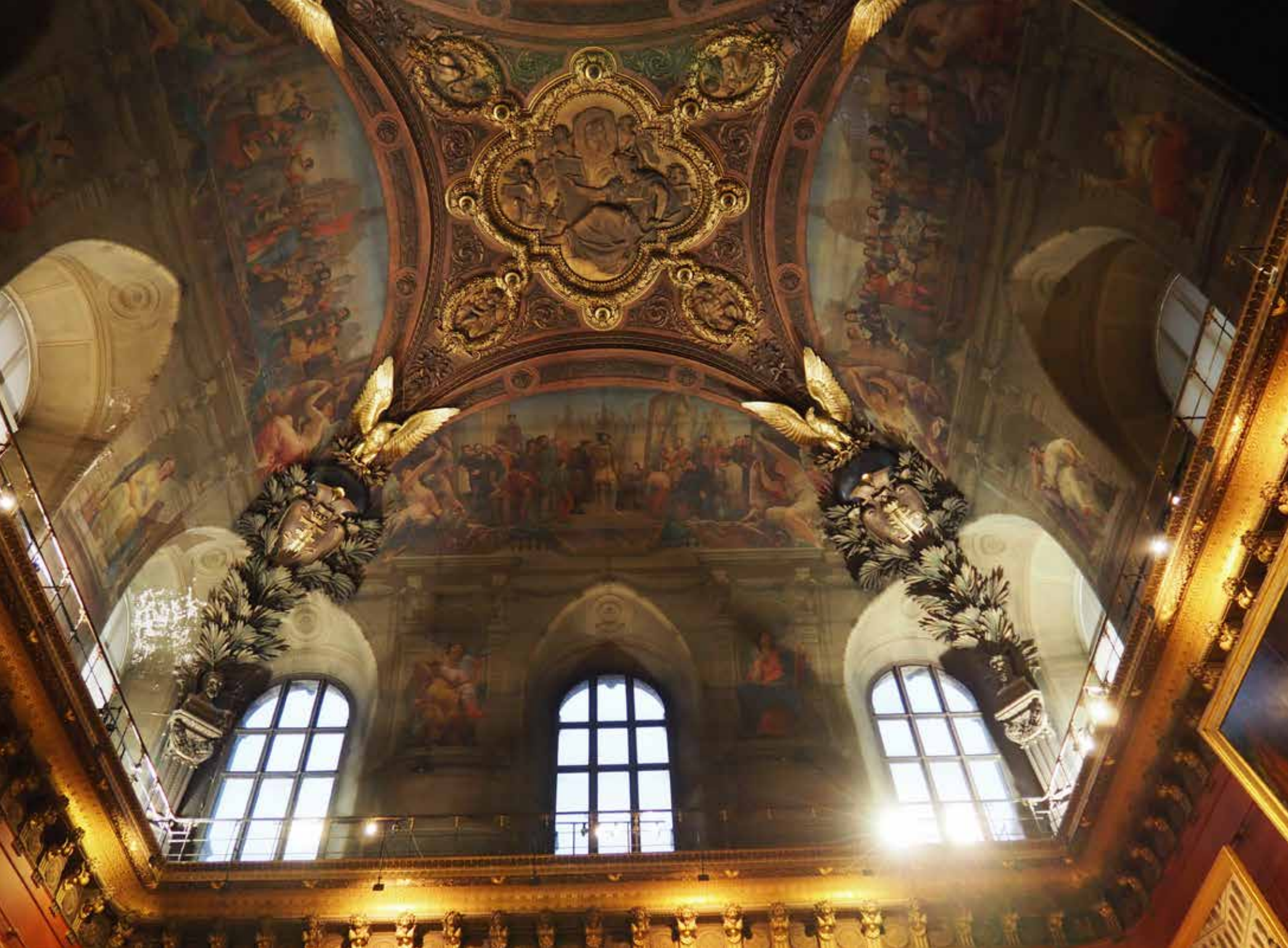




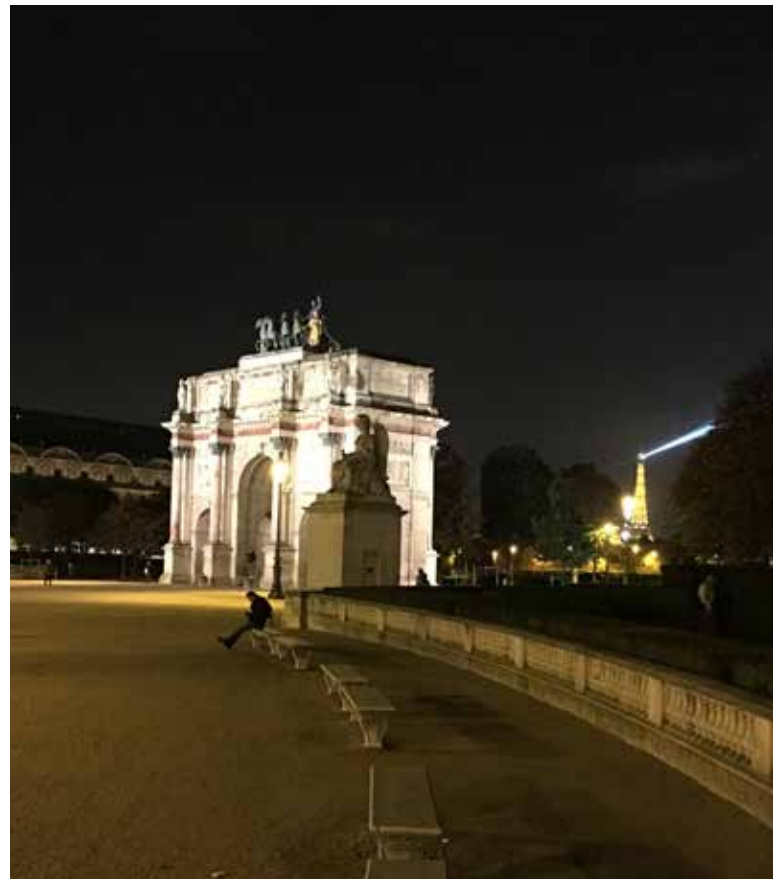
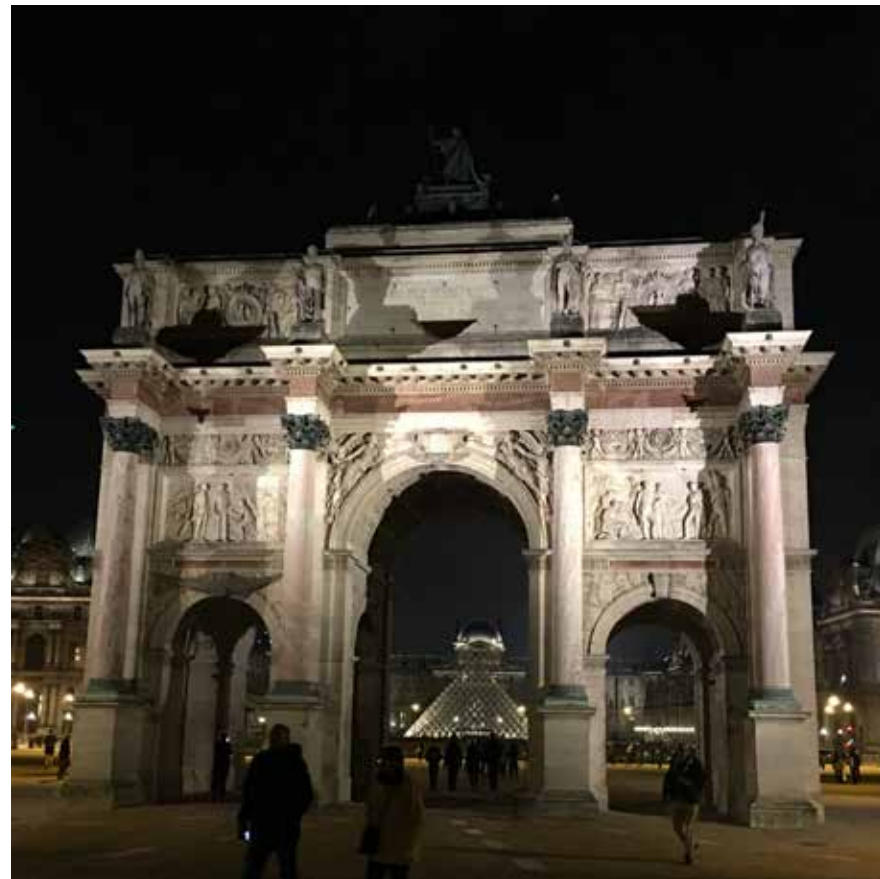












ping occasionally for a rest. Eventually we reached the star, the prize, the petite Mona Lisa (La Joconde) hung demurely holding court for her hundreds of visitors. Strangely most people were facing away from the famous painting. Ah, the joys of a selfie.

We walked about three fourths of one floor of one wing with many pauses to admire the art and the palace architecture (AKA rest stops) and called it quits. Three hours was about all our feet could stand in the Louvre and Sheri was totally sick of being too hot.

We decided to check out the outside of the museum/palace to cool down and snap some more photos before making our way back to the hotel on the Metro and finding some dinner.







Day 10 - Paris





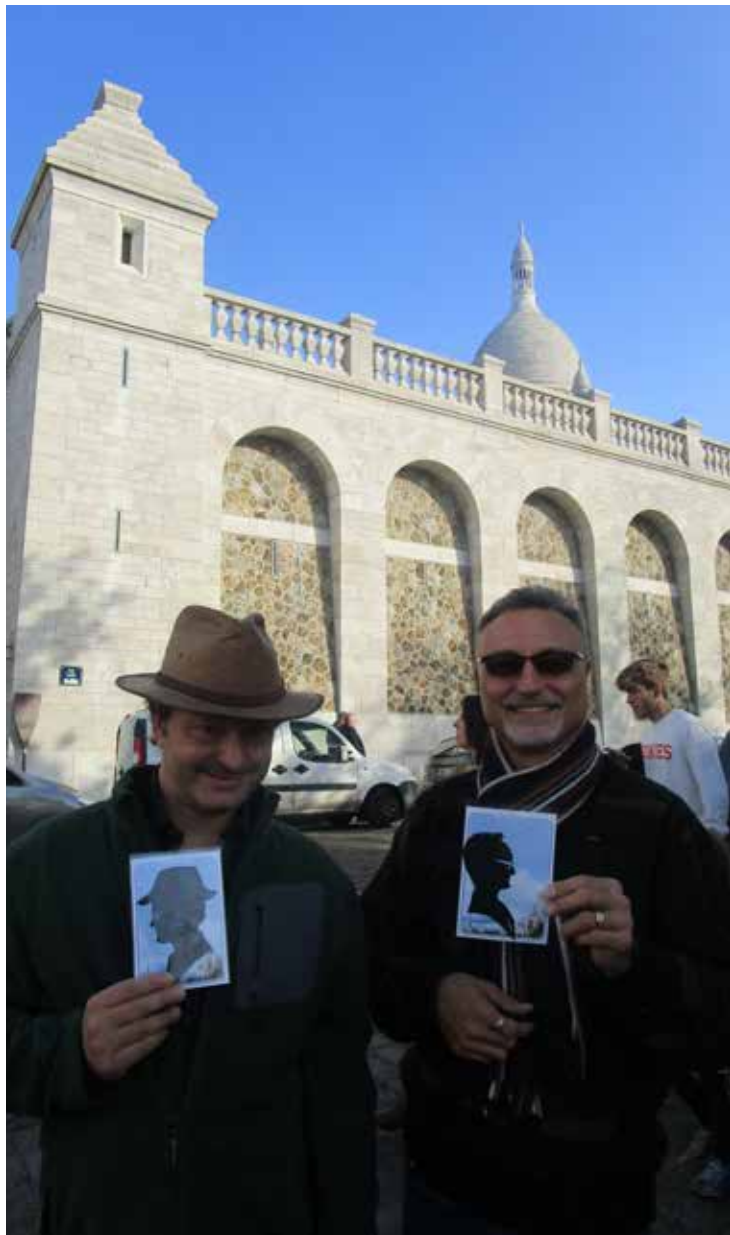


Our first full day on our own in Paris! We decided to start with a walk through the Montmartre area. We took the Metro to the deepest stop in Paris, Abbess. It's possible to walk up the stairs to street level but why bother when you can take the elevator?

Our first stop is just steps from the Metro the Place des Abbess with the “Le mur des je t’aime” (The wall of I love yous), a tiled wall











on the side of a building of where “I love you” is written in 250 languages, a protest to “a world marked by violence and dominated by individualism”. We waited patiently for the crowd to clear enough for us to take a few pictures of ourselves before the next mass of tourists fresh off the metro arrived.

We continued our walk up the hill, with several breaks to admire the architecture. We paused for a break near the studio where Picasso lived and worked for eight years. We wandered past cafes and souvenir shops until we reached the main square, where dozens of artists carry on the tradition of Montmartre as a haven for artists. At the beginning of the twentieth century, during the Belle Époque, many artists had studios or worked in or around Montmartre, including Salvador Dalí, Amedeo Modigliani, Claude Monet, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Piet Mondrian, Pablo Picasso, Camille Pissarro and Vincent van Gogh. All around the square there are lovely paintings on display to entice the tourists.

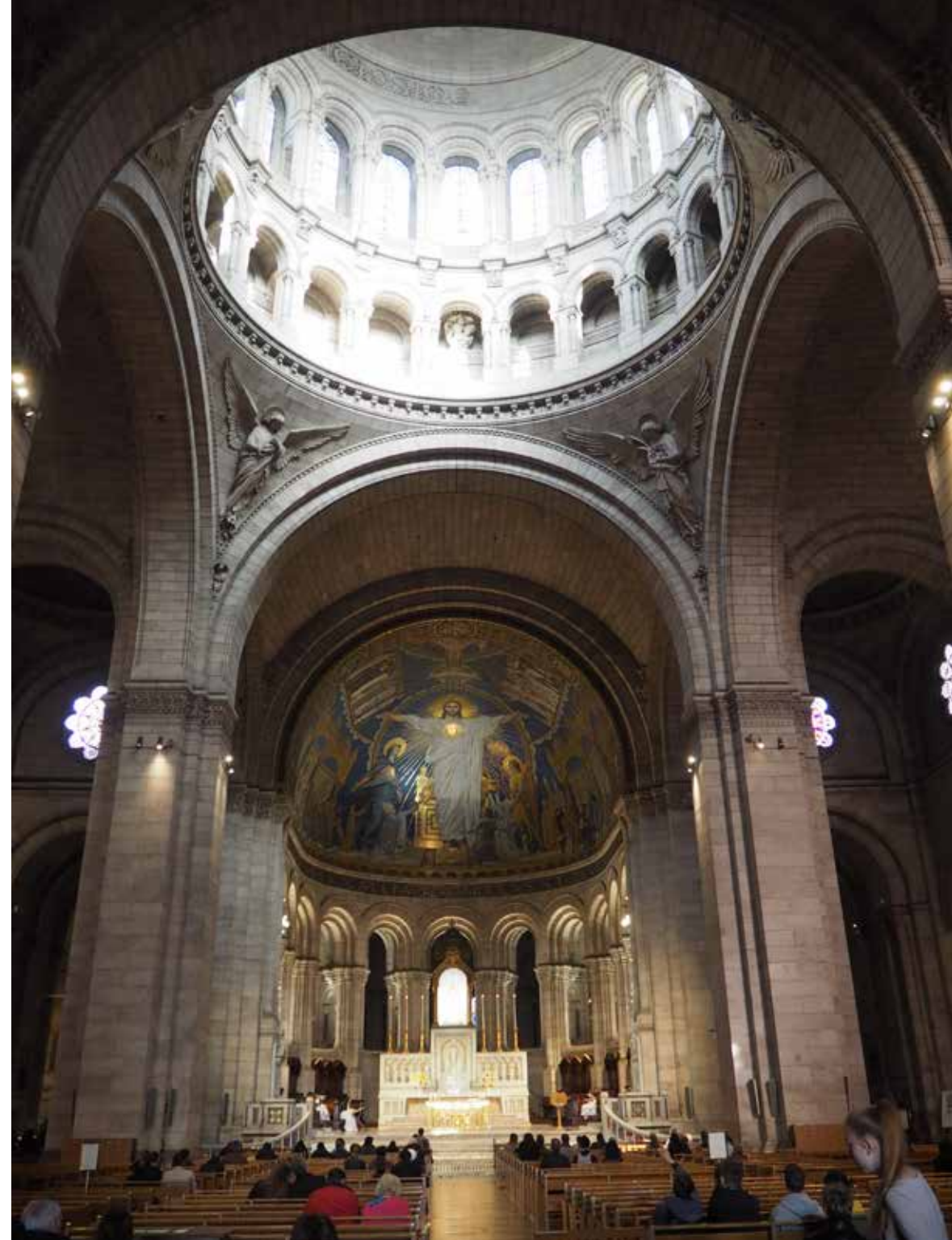
After 15 minutes there Sheri and Janet realized that they had lost sight of the guys, which was not good. They appeared shortly with smiles on their faces and a story of this really nice man they were speaking to who suddenly produced silhouette pictures of them, hat and all, which they felt obliged to purchase. They wouldn't say how much they

paid. Curious.

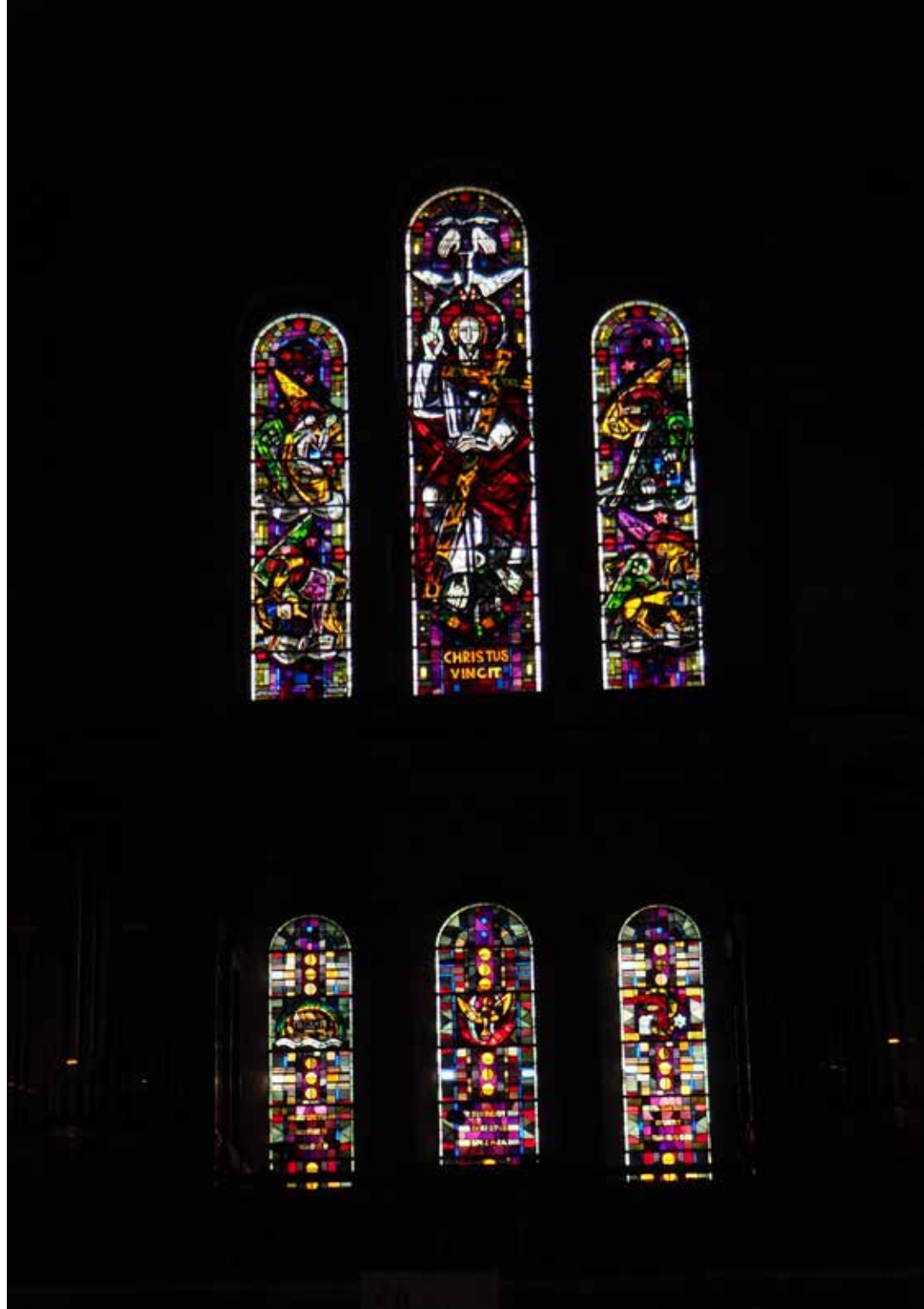
We continue to the top of the hill. On high ground we get a spectacular view of the city, or it would've been spectacular if not for the lingering fog. Oh well, lots else to see.

We visited the Sacre-Coeur Basilica, a relatively new addition to Paris at only a century old which is now the crowning glory of the hills of Montmartre. This massive cathedral had lots of stained glass to admire and the morning sun shining through from the east really made them glow. There were also many comfy pews to rest upon. We were treated to the nuns singing during our visit which made wandering the church a special experience. After a check of our Metro passes to make sure it was free, we decided to take the funicular down the hill rather than the eight ga-gillion steps. We located the nearest Metro stop which was in Pigalle, the red light district. Ooo-la-la! We paused for a look at the Moulin Rouge and Le Chat Noir and then we were back in the Metro and off to the Latin Quarter.

We stopped at a street vendor for some really yummy crepes and paninis to gather our energy and had a picnic in the park adjacent to the Cluny museum. Then we are off in search of the actual entrance to the Cluny Museum, which is currently under renovation. After fol-







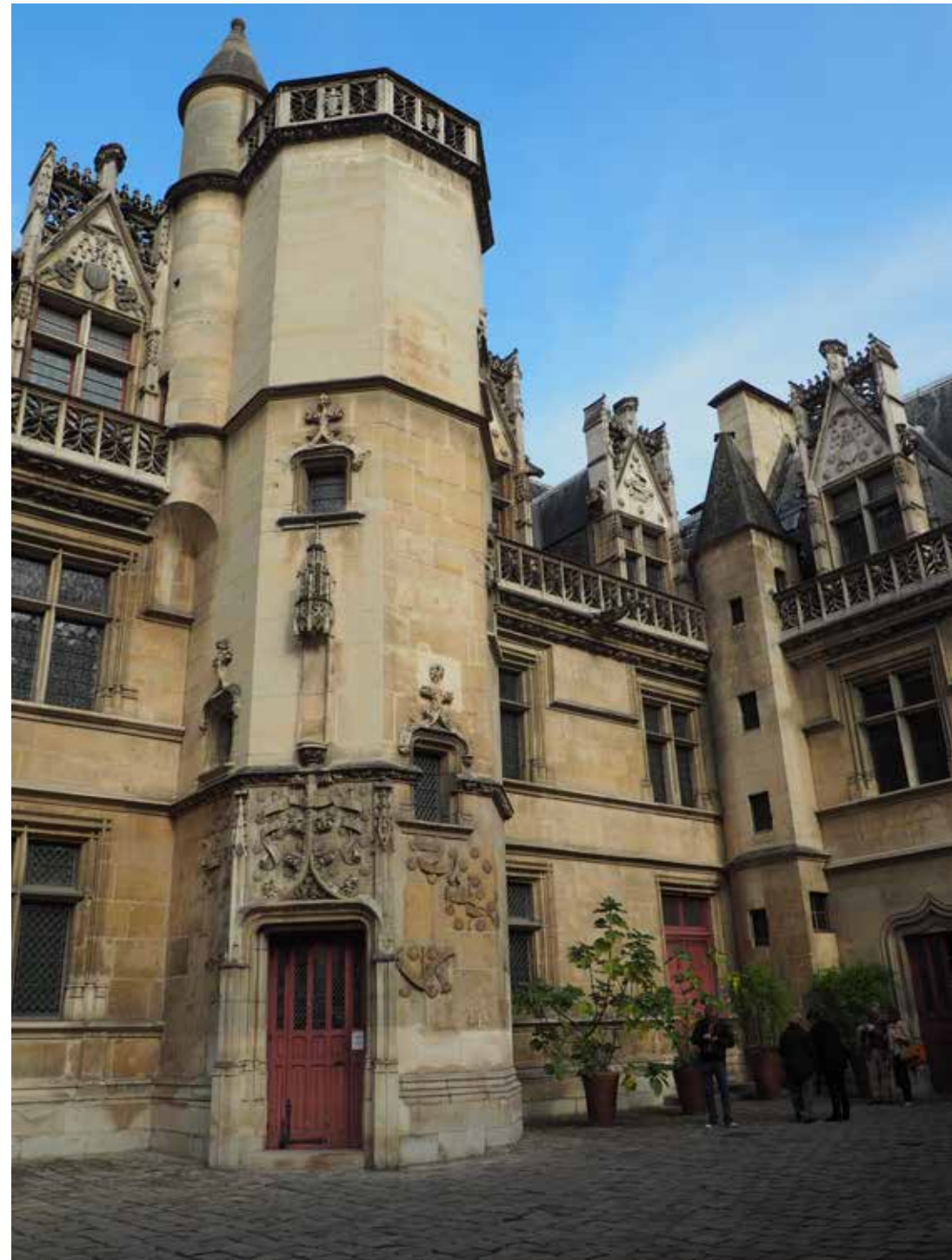




lowing several misleading signs we find the temporary entrance then wandered aimlessly from room to room in the confusion of construction and missing staircases. Of course the museum is housed in a historic building, like most in Paris. It was once the town house of the Abbots of Cluny in the late 15th Century. After viewing stained glass and a collection of remnants of statues from Notre Dame, we found the highlight of this museum, the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries. These six gorgeous, wall-sized tapestries show a lady tempted by the senses and were woven from wool and silk around 1500.

Our next stop is Sainte-Chapelle, a highlight of any trip to Paris. Kirk and Sheri had visited twice before and were still excited to see it again. It's just that amazing. This chapel features 1,113 stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Bible so the room glows with so many colors. It's impossible to explain this remarkable monument, so the pictures must stand for themselves.

We hopped back on the Metro and after a nice, early dinner at a restaurant by our hotel we debated what to do. Somehow Janet, Kirk and Sheri found the energy to visit one more museum, the Musee d'Orsay. Rob opted out of this one, he had experienced enough art for the day, not to mention stairs. This massive museum is housed in a former train station Gare d'Orsay built between 1898 and 1900. The art is primar-



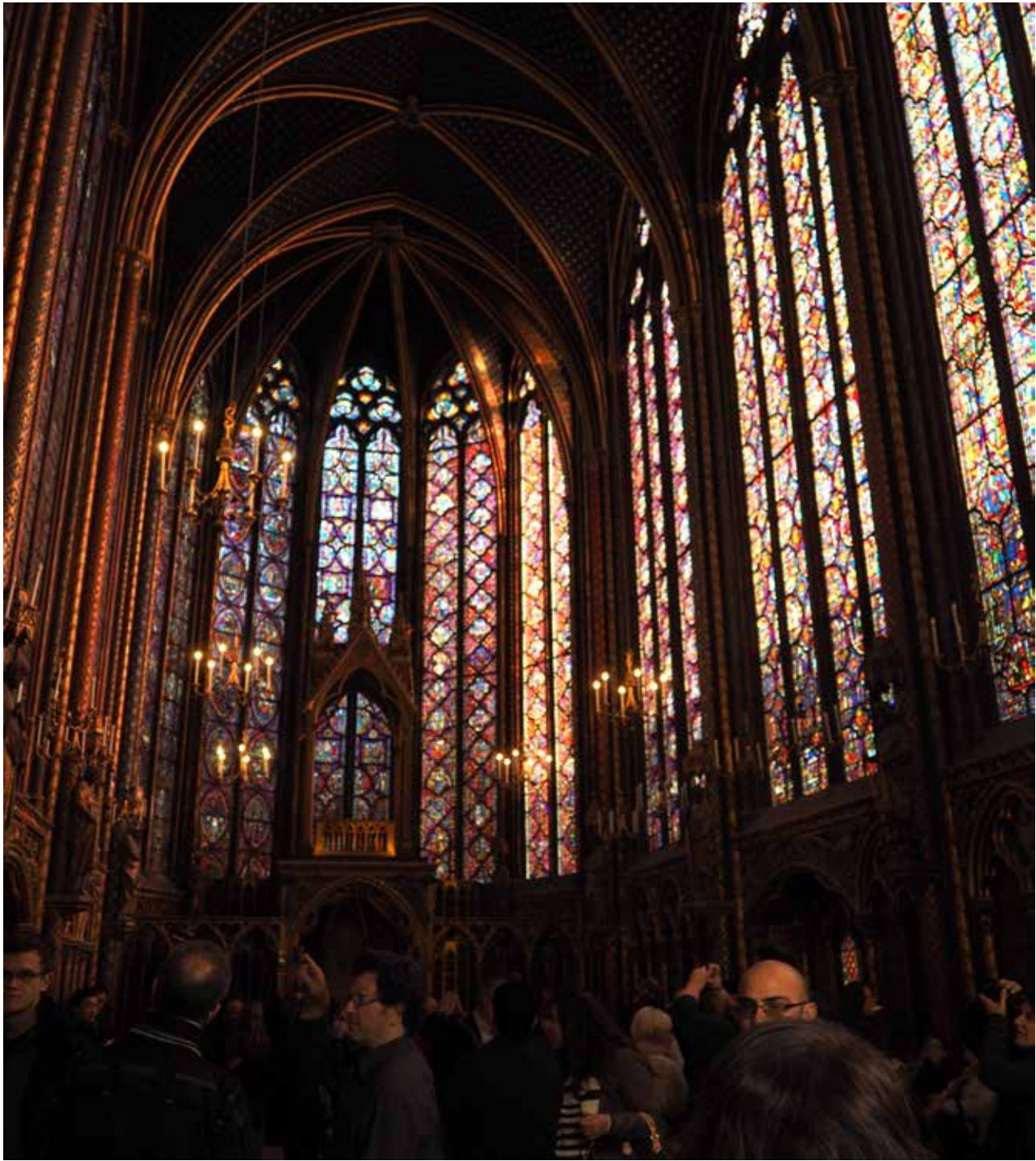




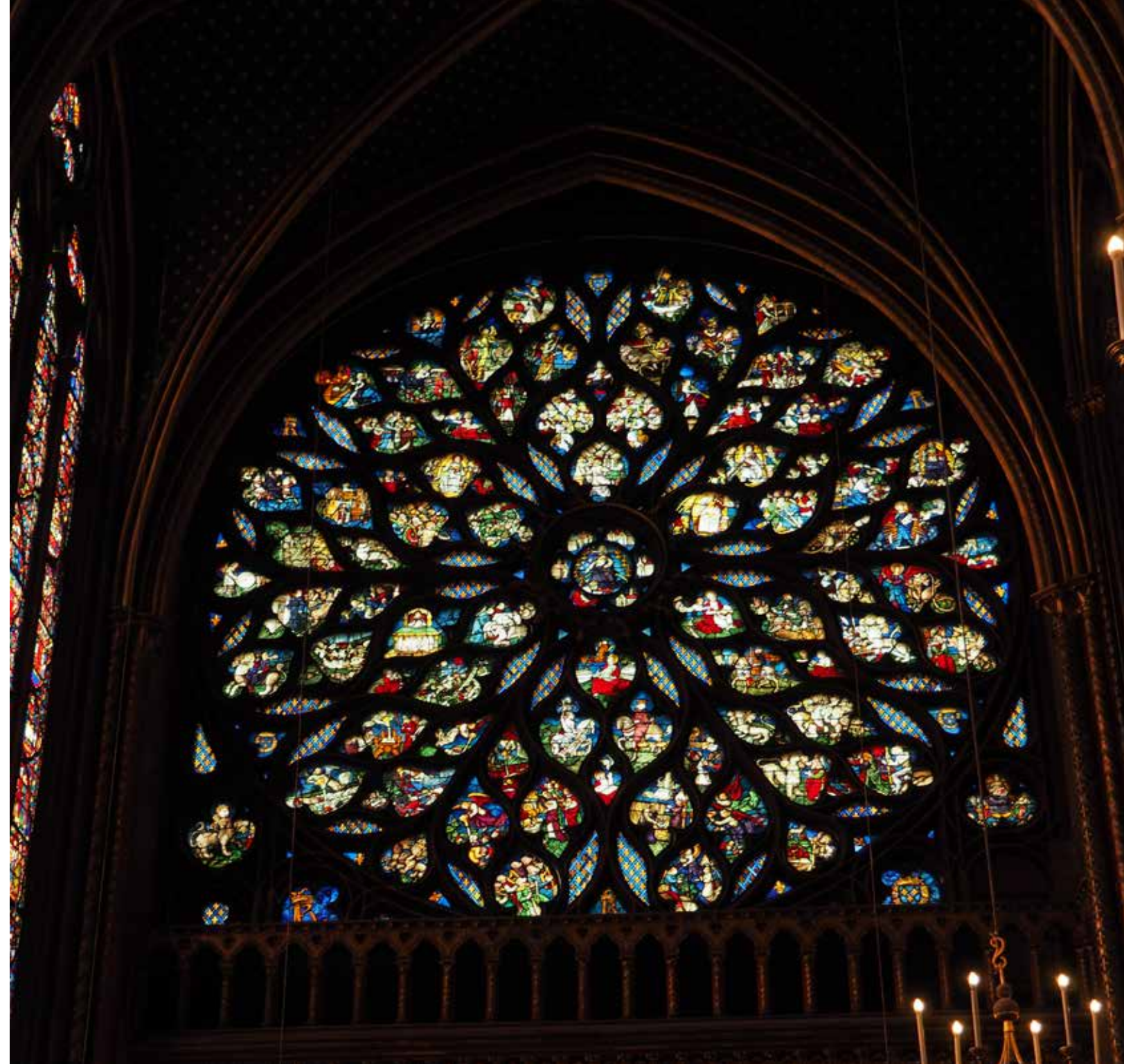
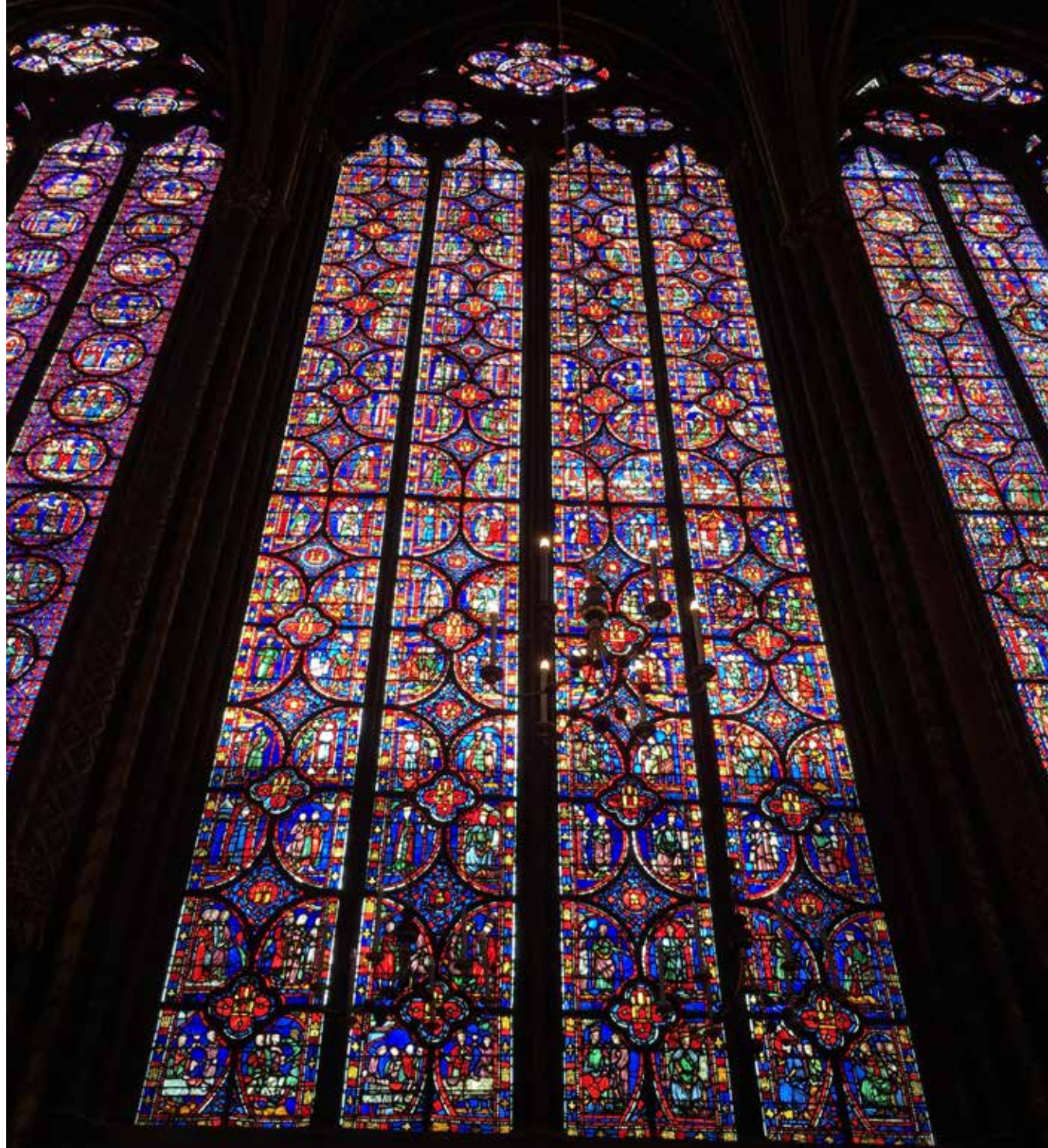


















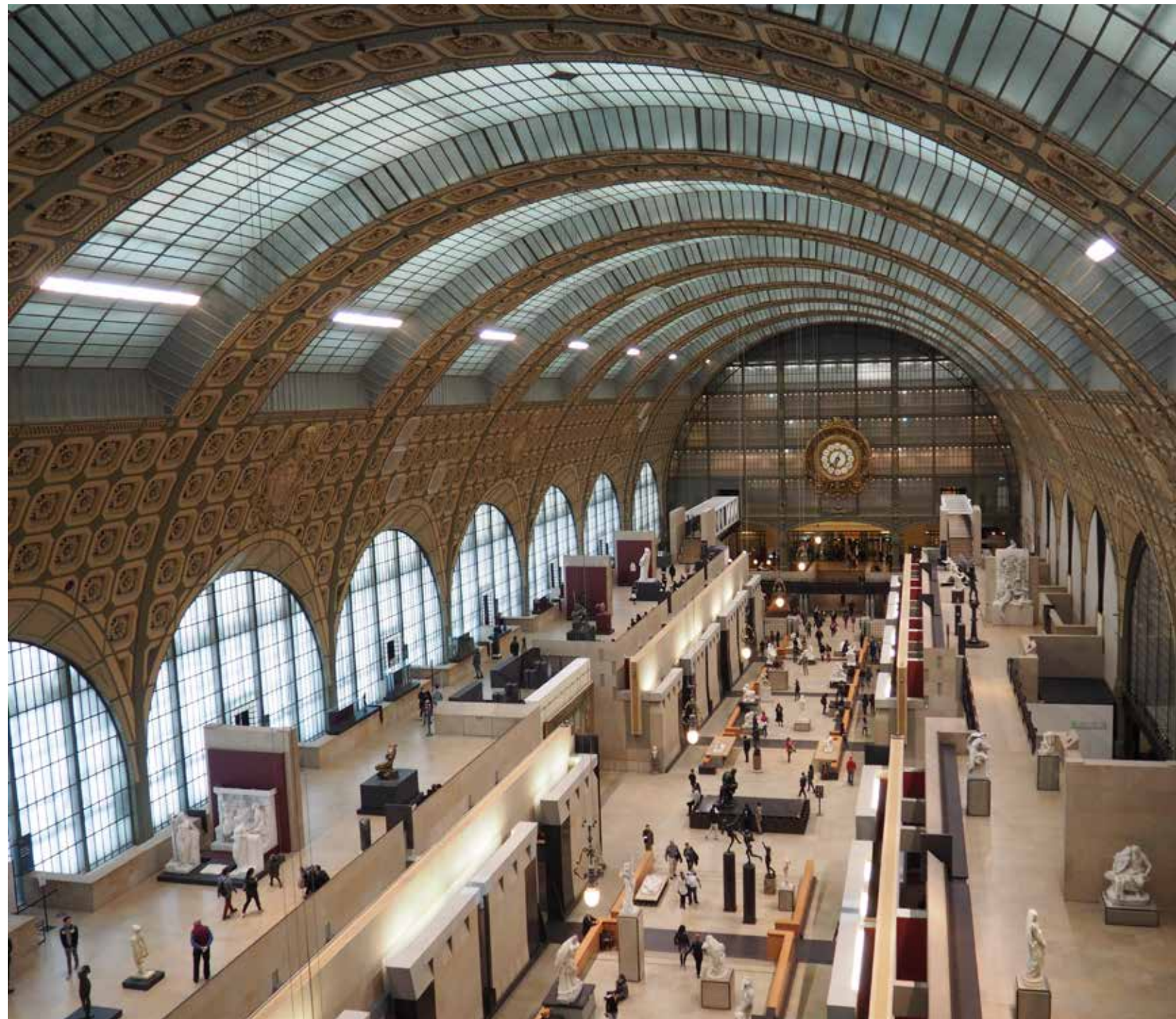


ily from the last half of the 19th Century and includes artists such as Delacroix, Manet, Monet, Degas, Cézanne, Renoir, van Gogh, Gauguin, Munch, Whistler, Rodin... so many pieces of art that it is truly overwhelming. Also we saw the second of five replicas of the Statue of Liberty scattered around Paris. The d'Orsay is Kirk's favorite museum in Paris. It's huge but manageable unlike the Louvre and the architecture of the building is really a big part of its appeal. The massive clock at one end is a beautiful focal point. The station became unusable for trains by the 1940's and was set for demolition in the 1970's when instead it was put on a list of historic monuments and eventually turned into a museum that opened in the 1980's.

We returned to our hotel, happy but totally exhausted.













## Day 11 - Paris



After a good night's sleep we gathered our energy to explore more of the city. We started with the Le Marais district, and finding the well-hidden Picasso museum. Rob opted out of yet another art museum and settled in for more snoozing. Janet, Kirk and Sheri wandered the narrow streets of Marais, maps in hand, trying to find the museum. Even though none of us were particular Picasso fans, the museum was worth the trek. museum displayed his art as it progressed through the years, including paintings, sculpture, ceramics, and other graphic arts. As usual, the building housing the museum was old and interesting, parts of the exhibit even took us to the heavily timbered attic. Joy of joys, there was an elevator!



We left the museum and walked a few blocks to the Place des Vosges, the oldest planned square in the city. It was the prototype for all residential squares of European cities. All around this square the architecture is uniform, red brick buildings with stone inserts, a nice bit of consistency in a city filled with contradictions.

We went back to the hotel to pick up Rob and went to see something much more to his liking, the Musée des Arts et Métiers. Right after we walked in the front gate the guys get in trouble for standing on a statue. Well, they were standing on the base, the low, very wide base. Hey, it was the Statue of Liberty and they wanted their picture with her! The guard didn't think they needed to be quite so close to the lady. That was number three of the four copies of the Statue of Liberty we saw in Paris, the fourth was inside the museum.

The museum is housed in buildings that once were the Priory of Saint-Martin-des-Champs, a Benedictine monastery until the French Revolution. This museum was all about inventions and machines. We saw early incarnations of flying machines, bicycles, cars, factory automation and even a model of the Marly Machine that took water from the Seine River to Versailles. The former church has multiple levels where cars are displayed along with the fourth Statue



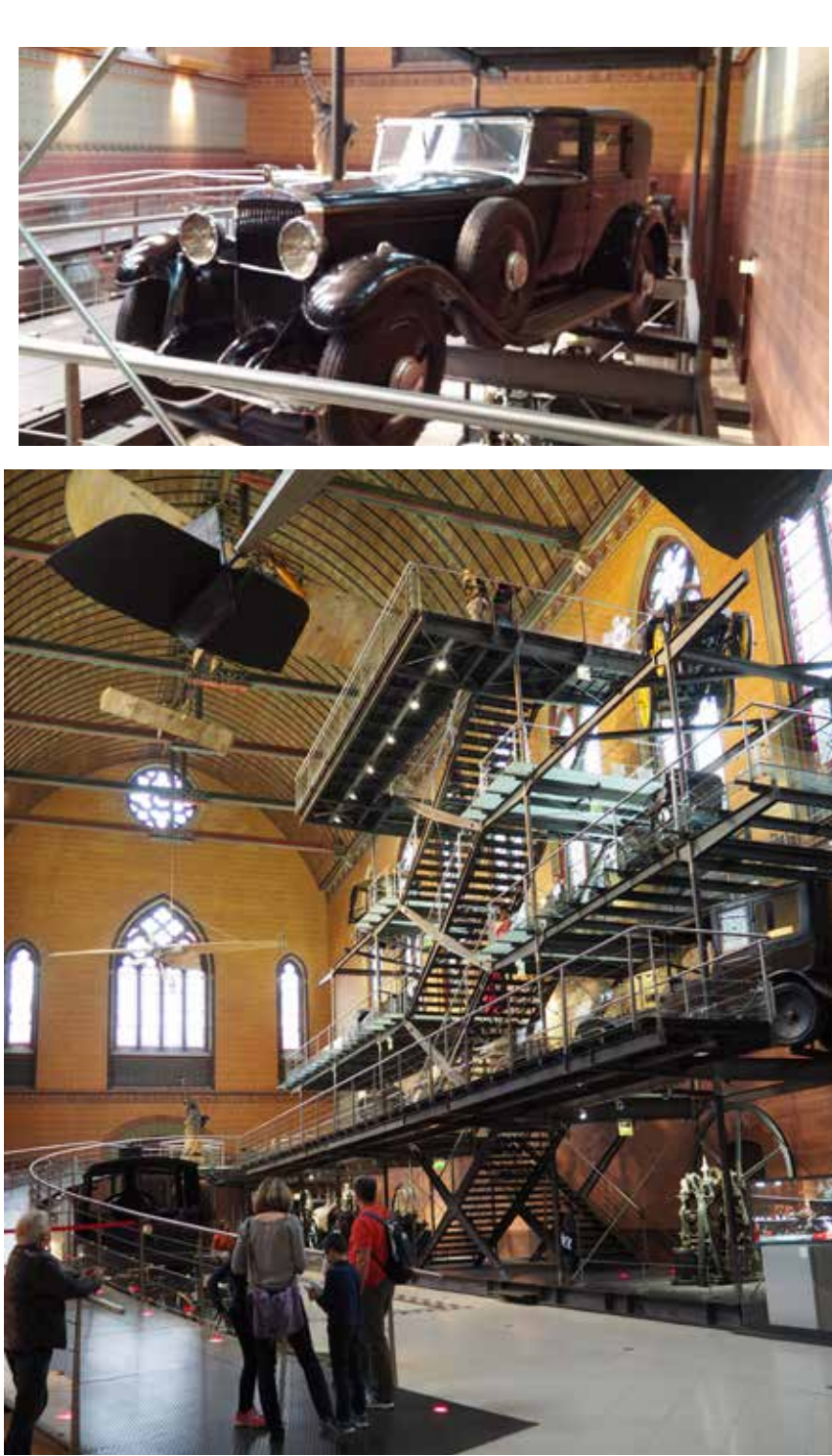


of Liberty. There was an early Apple computer on display in the communication section which made Sheri feel old, she used to have one that was an even older model... when it was new.

Sheri and Janet were ready to see some more art but the guys were totally done with museums for the day so after some detailed Metro directions and passes in hand, Rob and Kirk were off to try to find the hotel. Sheri and Janet headed back to the Louvre to explore the Decorative Arts exhibits.

The Louvre stands on the foundations of what was originally a royal fortress. They have excavated the original foundations of the 12th century structure which we toured by walking half way around the underground area. Then it was up and through miles of Egyptian art and sculpture on our search for the shiny and sparkly things. Finally we arrived at the decorative arts, these are the rugs, drapes, furniture, jewelry, vases, enamels, silverware, glassware and other accoutrements of the wealthy. The rooms of the palace are furnished as they once might have been when the kings and queens of France lived there showcasing the architecture as well as the objects. We were totally impressed until we reached the apartments of Napoleon III, then we were awestruck. The chandelier in the first room would fill most suburban living rooms completely. Everything that wasn't fabric or a painting was gilded and overdone. Beautiful but just too much.

The Louvre is huge, after two visits and about eight hours we may have seen 20% of what the museum has to offer. We had enough after finally finding our way to the exit and stopped for a snack, a drink and









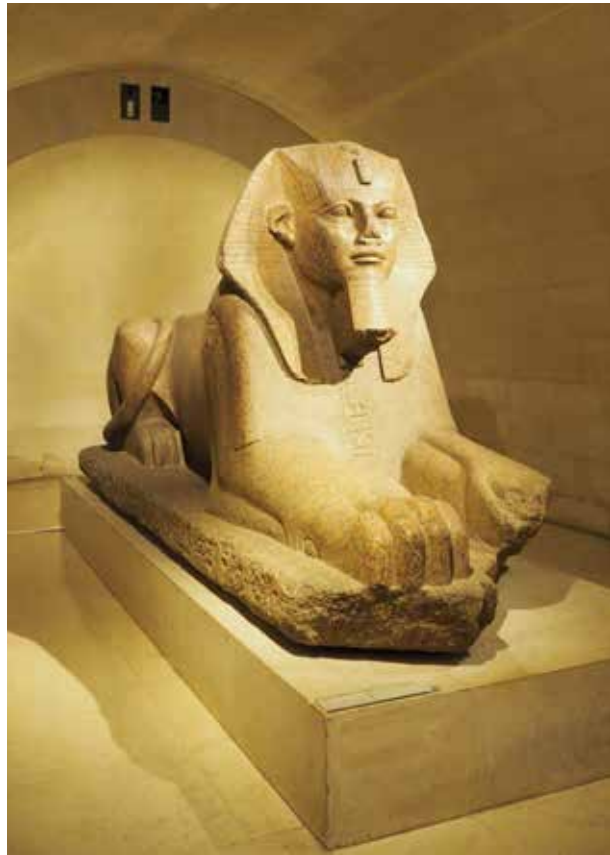


some Advil. We had told the guys we would be back at the hotel no later than 10:30 pm and not to worry until then. By this time it was after 7:00 pm and we wanted dinner so, without the dedicated meat eaters along, we headed for an Indian restaurant and vegetarian fare. It was there that we met our next challenge in Paris. An Indian menu translated to French. Good thing we had some experience with Indian food because we were totally stumped by the French translation. We got some lovely food were finally done for the day.

When we got back to the hotel we found the guys hanging out watching TV. French TV. Huh... Kirk said they had talked about what would happen if we hadn't gotten back by our designated time. They had no idea what they would have done waited some more? Sheri suggested that the English speaking hotel desk clerk might have been some help.







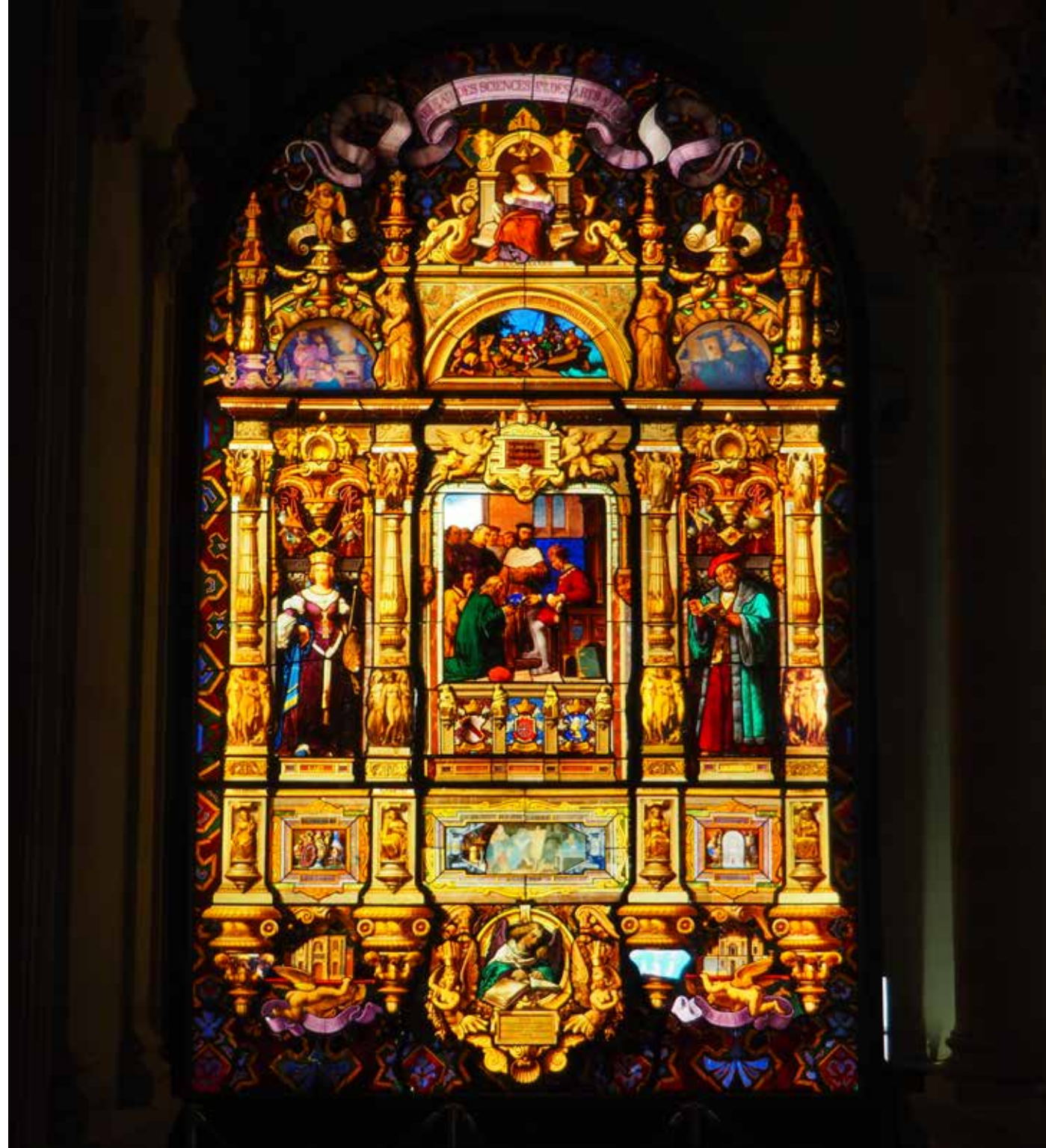


















## Day 12 - Paris and Strasbourg



Our last day in Paris and so much left to do. We checked out of the hotel and stashed our bags for pickup later and headed back into the Metro for the Tuileries garden and the Musee de l'Orangerie. This museum features two rooms of eight huge murals by Monet of the water-lily pond we saw in Giverny. This collection, a few of the 250 oil painting by Monet known as the Nymphs, features the lily pond from morning until dusk. Seeing photos really didn't do the exhibit any justice. We were awed by the huge oval room where we were literally surrounded by Monet's garden pond. After spending a good amount of time with Monet we explored the rest of the museum. One surprise was that they had the painting 'American Gothic' by Grant Wood. They told us not to take pictures of it. They were too late.

We roamed a bit through the Place de la Concorde snapping pictures of the Eiffel Tower in the distance until we all decided lunch was on the agenda. So off we went on a quest for the perfect café for lunch, which is where we discover that Rob is now addicted to onion soup. Kirk had one more meal of boeuf bourguignon and Sheri had a lovely stinky cheese (Camembert) sandwich. Poor Janet got stuck with another omelet.

Our last stop in Paris was supposed to have been the first. We finally made it back to the Rodin Museum and actually got to go inside. The museum is Auguste Rodin's former Paris workshop, Hôtel Biron, which was owned by the state and had housed other artists such as Henri Matisse and dancer Isadora Duncan. Rodin agreed to donate his work and his art collection on the condition that the property be turned into a museum and that he had the right to live there the remainder of his life. Rodin's most famous works are there including 'The Thinker', 'The Kiss' and 'The Gates of Hell'. Much of the sculpture is in the large garden which has lovely trees and plenty of places to sit











and enjoy the views of both the sculpture and the golden dome of Napoleon's tomb.

Our last stop in Paris was to pick up our bags from the hotel then head across the street to the Gare l'est train station. There we said our goodbyes to each other and to Paris. Janet and Rob caught a taxi to their hotel near the airport to relax before their flight home in the morning. Sheri and Kirk to caught a train to their next destination, Strasbourg, to meet Ulrich and Anne Seeberger for the









next stage of their adventure.

The train to Strasbourg was a TGV, France's high speed train and luckily the seats were in first class so the two hour ride was a pleasure. Train travel in Europe is an excellent way to travel. When Sheri and Kirk stepped off the train in Strasbourg, Ulrich and Anne were right there to meet them and away they went to the hotel Au Fil De l'Eau, a small, 20 room hotel with a great restaurant. When we arrived at the hotel Ulrich informed us that our Strasbourg connection, Claudine Seeburger, and her family would be meeting us for dinner in one hour and by the way, none of them spoke English. Surprise!

After an hour relaxing Kirk and Sheri headed downstairs having no idea what we'd gotten ourselves into. In the dining room we were greeted by Ulrich and Anne who introduced us to Claudine and her husband Jean Marc Seeburger, then Jean Marc's sister Sonia and her husband Michel Ganzetti. Apparently Jean Marc and Sonia are from a line of Seeburger/Seeburger related to Sheri's family from Switzerland. New family! Too bad we couldn't hold a conversation without a translator.

Dinner was fun, Kirk and Sheri sat at one end of the table with Ulrich and Anne as translators in the middle and the new friends at the other end. There was much French spoken at the far end which got translated to German for Ulrich and Anne then to English for Sheri and Kirk. Then the reverse happened. It took a while but we started to get to know each other about the time the last bottle of wine was emptied.









## Day 13 - Strasbourg







Our first morning in Strasbourg we met Ulrich and Anne downstairs for breakfast and to find out the plan for the day. Sheri had told Ulrich before the trip that our only agenda was having fun and a good visit. Ulrich had contacted Claudine to find out what was good to do in Strasbourg and boy did she have some ideas! We found out later that she had even suggested the hotel.

About the time we finished breakfast Claudine and Jean Marc arrived to show us the town. We parked the cars at the local rail station and took the train into the heart of the city to walk the streets of the old town. Strasbourg is an amazing mix of French and German culture. This is especially obvious in the architecture of the old town where sometimes it looks like France, sometimes it looks like Germany. Kirk and Sheri had been there before while on a Viking cruise down the Rhine but were on a guided tour with no time for lingering anywhere. We





had the time on this trip to explore more, stop for a hot chocolate and a lot of stops for translation from German to English. We even spent some time in the shop where Sheri bought gingerbread on the last trip.

As we were walking along Sheri noticed the shop she had stopped in quickly on the visit two years ago. Right as she was telling Kirk about the place Claudine opened the door to walk in. It turned out that the shop Mireille Oster Pain d'Epices was owned by Claudine's cousin! We all bought some wonderful pain d'epices (spice bread) and even made it home with some.

After our city tour Claudine and Jean Marc invited us to their house for coffee and cake. They had a lovely home just around the corner from the hotel. After stuffing ourselves we went back to the hotel to relax for a couple of hours before dinner. Once again, Claudine had a plan, we were going out for the Alsatian specialty, tarte flambée (in French) or flammkuchen (in German). In English it translates to flame pie or flame cake. We called it damn good pizza but not where anyone else could hear. Don't let the French or Germans hear you call it pizza. They insist it is very different.

We drove to the restaurant Chez Georgette in the tiny town of Eckwersheim, about 20 minutes from our hotel, where Jean Marc swore was the very best place for tarte flambée. Not that we've had more than one to











compare it to but we had to agree it was excellent. The way it's served for a group is in several courses. The first is rather mild with, fromage blanc or crème fraîche, thinly sliced onions and lardons. The second course is about the same with a lot of garlic and the third has a strong cheese such as the local Munster. They're served in this order so that the flavors build, leaving the strongest for last. We also had a dessert pie with apples which was actually flambéed with Calvados after they set it on the table. It's a good thing there were six of us and the pies weren't too large, we left totally stuffed and happy. Definitely ready for our beds.

















## Day 14 - Strasbourg and Orschwiller



At breakfast Ulrich laid out the plan options. He's very good at making plans so we let him run with it. The first option, and the one we chose, was to visit Château du Haut-Kœnigsbourg at Orschwiller, about 30 minutes from Strasbourg. It took us a little longer than that because the GPS sent us through a couple of roundabouts over and over and over again. We made it, eventually.

Built in the 12th century, the Château du Haut-Kœnigsbourg changed hands many times over the centuries, for one period it was a holding of the Hapsburgs. The castle sits on the top of a mountain at an altitude of about 2,300 feet overlooking the Alsace plain with views in the distance of







the Black Forest in Germany. From the other side of the castle there were fantastic views of the Vosges Mountains. The castle was completely restored by Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany in the first decade of the 20th century using historical documents for the most authentic work possible.

The castle was huge, enormous, gigantic! Kirk and Sheri were thinking there were certainly a lot of stairs in the place. Everything seemed to be leading up and up, were we never going to go down stairs? Ulrich and Anne made every step, you'd never know they were in their 70's!

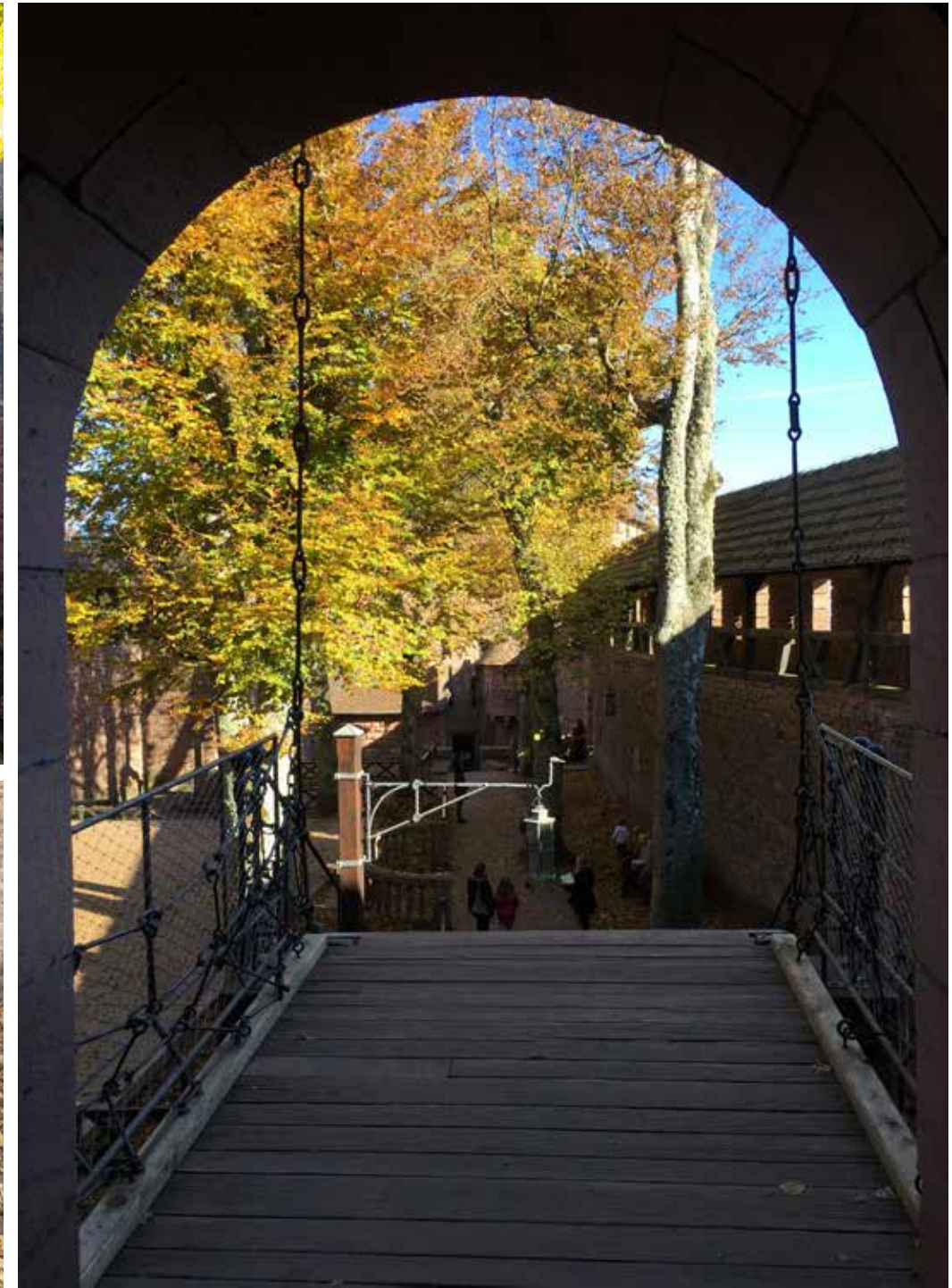
The place had so many rooms we couldn't count. A chapel, a great room, bedrooms, rooms we had no idea what they were for. There were several courtyards, an armory and battlements at the top with cannons. How in the world did those get all the way to the top?

We were all completely worn out by the time we made it all the way through the castle, fortunately there was a café on site where we could get something to drink and some excellent desserts to snack on. We all just needed to sit a while.

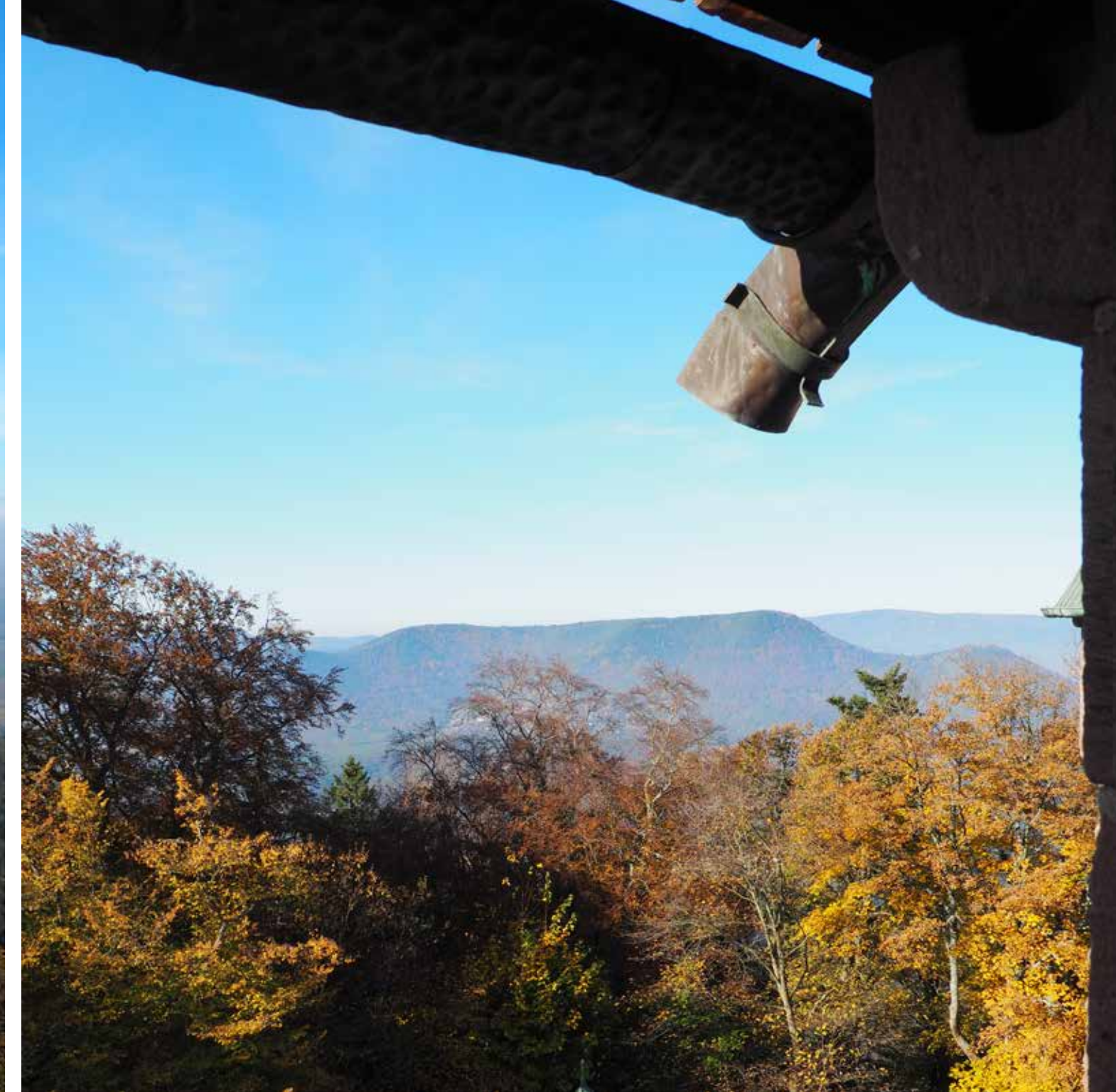
Once we reached our hotel we were all ready for a little relaxation time before we were to go to Claudine and Jean Marc's house for dinner. Castles are lovely but living in one on a mountain top would















certainly give you one hell of a workout every day. Worse would have been being a servant!

Claudine and Jean Marc had gone all out for the dinner party. Sonia and Michel were there as well as Claudine's sister and brother-in-law Sylvie and Francis Klauth. Fortunately Francis and Sylvie spoke some English so it wasn't quite as challenging as the first night. Even Claudine and Jean Marc had relaxed a little and pulled out their limited English so we were communicating better there too.

Dinner was truly amazing. We started with a course of smoked salmon on baguettes which even Sheri ate a bit of. The main course was another Alsatian specialty, Baeckeofoffe (wild boar marinated overnight in white wine, then stewed with potatoes and carrots). The crock this dish was baked in took both Jean Marc and Claudine to remove from the oven. It's huge and heavy and has a fitted top to keep all the lovely juices in for a wonderful gravy. It's a lot like an American pot roast.

Of course as with any dinner in Europe, there was plenty of wine. Really good local wines. Alsace is known for their wines and is a popular wine tourist destination. A lot like the Napa Valley in California but with more history.

The conversations were all over the place. Sylvie and Francis are professional ballroom

dancers and we got to see video of one of their competitions. That's about the time the tablets and cell phones came out as translation tools. Someone would type in their own language then display the resulting translation. Sometimes the translation led to a lot of laughter.

Finally Sheri started remembering some French words and Sonia and Claudine remembering some English and got into a great conversation about cooking. We had to break out of smart phones again to convert metric cooking temperatures but for the most part, an onion is an onion and we understood that we all loved garlic.

All of this talk of food led to friending on Facebook and the promised exchange of recipes. It seems both our new French friends and our old German friends had a taste for Chili con Carne. Who would have thought?

That dinner made our last night in Strasbourg a very special experience. Something we never expected and totally enjoyed. Claudine and Jean Marc were excellent hosts, going above and beyond for us. It's a night we will always remember.





## Day 15 - Strasbourg and Paris



Our last day in Strasbourg Sheri got up early to take some pictures of the swans in the canal across the street from the hotel. At breakfast we made a plan, well, Ulrich offered a couple and we decided to go with which ever one he wanted. The intent was to take a boat ride on the River Ill (ILL) around Strasbourg but found out when we got there it would be a two hour wait for the next tour. We decided to go to the old town for more pain d'épice instead. After our walk it was back to the hotel for a leisurely lunch before gathering our bags and new treasures so Ulrich and Anne could take us to the train station for our trip back to Paris. Ulrich insisted they wait with us and walk us all the way to our train car, there were many hugs and thanks for taking such good care of us and chauffeuring us around and then away we went. This time we were going to the Paris airport to relax before our flight home in the morning.



A very nice feature of the European trains is that there are often stations in the major airports. We were able to go directly to the airport then use the airport transportation to our hotel. The bad thing is, Charles de Gaulle airport can be absolute hell to find things in. There are just enough signs to send you off in the wrong direction so it took a bit of effort to get from the TGV train to the airport train even though they're in the same area but on different levels.

Checking into the Hilton was a breeze and we had taken advantage of a points upgrade to get on the executive floor which gave us access to the lounge for free food and drinks.





## Day 16 - Going Home

It was a pleasure not to have to get up before the crack of dawn to make our flight. We had plenty of time to go downstairs to the lounge for a free breakfast then get a shuttle to the terminal. As always seems to be the case, our flight was departing from the farthest end of the longest terminal so there was quite a bit of walking but enough time to browse the duty-free shop for some last minute goodies to take home. Even some lovely stinky Normandy cheese for Sheri.

Our flight was on time and drama free although very long. Arriving home and going through customs wasn't even too bad. Maybe it was just that we were so happy to finally be back in Texas!



## The Optional Excursion

by Robert Connery

It was a sunny day in the French town of Rouen. The Viking River Cruise Ship Rinda was moored at the dock and Janet and Rob were in their cabin room gathering their belongings to prepare for the optional trip into town. Rob had his fleece ready, slipped over his arm in case the weather outside changed suddenly and warranted the extra layer of warmth the garment afforded.

Janet had her camera in hand, her travelling bag over her shoulder and lastly her pickpocket-proof purse at the ready in case they were innundated with those petition-bearing street thieves that descended upon the unwary like seagulls on tossed out bread crumbs.

In the room across the hall Kirk and Sheri were also preparing for the optional excursion. Kirk had his camera set to record even more panoramic views of the French countryside and the wonderous vistas they offered, and Sheri had her large, comparatively heavy (with respect to the other of today's technological pinnacles of telecommunications, the smart phone) yet quite formidable marvel of photographic technology, her camera.

She could take pictures of things that hadn't happened yet it was so fast, and the amount of pictures it could store would stagger the mind! Rob was across the hall thinking about just how many pictures Sheri's camera could hold (and purposefully staggering his mind) when he also thought, "why the hell the French can't stock a bathroom with a damn toilet seat?" and suddenly Rob heard a hypnotic and melodious voice inside his head: "As a reminder, we will be meeting outside the ship in fifteen minutes;" a smooth, calm, friendly and cheerful voice soothingly called out over the Viking Ship Rinda's Public Address system. "Once again, we will be meeting outside in 15 minutes, it is now nine fifteen, please have your boarding passes and your devices, and we will begin the optional..." \*BZZZT!\* \*BZZZZT!\* the PA system suddenly spouted noisily, and after a moment the lights went out, and the PA went silent.

Shortly thereafter the voice came back (along with the lights) and said, "Sorry about that! There was an odd flash of light and then everything went dark- anyway, be outside the ship with your boarding passes and your communication devices in 15 minutes!" Rob was relieved. He wasn't really hearing voices, it was just Ken- the friendly cruise director! It was time to go, Rob and Janet then went out into the hall to head upstairs.

The hallway was dark, and as Janet and Rob left their room, Kirk and Sheri (who were just across the hall) were leaving theirs, and the open doorway let in just enough light into the dark hallway from the room behind them for Rob to see their silhouettes. Rob could easily make out the Viking horns on Kirk's helm as they readied for war. Wait a minute, what the.. Viking horns? Readied for war? What was THIS???



The hall began to slowly glow brighter with a soft golden light that accentuated the patterns in the carpet on the floor of the hallway, the details on the walls, the doorways of the other cabins of the Viking Ship Rinda. As the glow increased, Rob, now called Rolf- his battle helm was the head of a wolf, the shoulders and back were pelts from other great wolves, sewn together to form a mighty war talisman of protection for it would offer him great speed and agility in battle.

In his right hand he held not a fleece but instead a mighty sword, Volgunnar, forged in the hot fires dedicated to Odin, heated to a temperature rivaled only by the blacksmith cowards in the stone walled towns to the south, peopled by weaklings who called upon the swords of their protectors to defend them.

In his left hand he carried a war prize from a previous invasion, a bronze shield weilded by a man who didn’t know the proper way to hold one. It was just as well, Odin was good to those who fought bravely!

Falling in step next to Rolf was his wife Janet , now called Jorunn. Her helm was a leather construction that resembled a horse’s head, with her now long, golden flowing hair streaming behind her like a mane. Her shoulders were protected by a chain mail mantle that was filigreed with gold, she wore dark brown leather leggings with matching fur-lined boots, and in her hand she weilded a golden axe.

They got to the end of the hall and to the stairs, and everything changed back to normal. “what the...?” thought Rob, wondering what he ate too much of (or not enough of) to make this happen. Kirk was still wearing a horned helm...

Kirk, who was now called Keld, looked at his battle companions strangely. “Are we not preparing for a reaving?” he asked Rolf quizically. Sari, who was Keld’s battlebride, beat her sword against her breastplate. “Perhaps they have the battlefear- my companions are not cowards are they?” she jokingly asked, spitting the word like is was a poison to her lips. “Uh, no?” Rolf said back, hoping he sounded a lot more confident than he suspected he did. “I uh- LONG for battle?” Rolf said, and it seemed to appease Sari, for now. They stepped into the sunlight and onto the stairs...

Rob, Janet, Sheri and Kirk walked out into the bright sunlit deck of the Viking ship Rinda and took in the town’s scenery, sizing up their quarry and prepared to plot out the day’s activities. There were many sights to see, things to marvel at, and foods to sample. This was a Viking optional shore excursion, and they were determined to have a good time!

# About the Authors

AKA A Bunch of Crazies

## Janet Connery

An accounting wiz by day, Janet relaxes with her kitties in the evening while plotting and plan-ning interesting travel adventures. She is a dedicated protestor against all things mushroom and can reduce even the strongest waiter with her stare should he be attempting to place mush-rooms in front of her.

## Robert Connery

Known for his exceptional abilities to make anything into a sci-fi adventure. Robert can make the most boring museum into a surreal experience. He is much acclaimed for his signature quote, “this belongs in a museum!”

## Sheri Tiner

Navigation is her passion. She is at her best in the depths of a subway maze leading the way to the next adventure planned by Janet. It has lately been understood that Sheri should not be allowed to roam freely in gardens, particularly where there are innocent rose bushes with perfect blooms.

## Kirk Tiner

His ability to seek out and consume onion soup is un-matched. Kirk has recently graduated from following Sheri through the subway to Novice Navigator by being able to locate the cor-rect stop for his Paris hotel with no wrong turns.