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RICHARD FRISBIE :: Beyond Here Be Dragons

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Paris - It's more than just an airport.



Duh! Of course it is, I just hadn't seen it before. Too many times my flight landed at the stunningly designed **Charles de Gaulle International Airport** barely in time for me to catch a plane or train elsewhere. Imagine the frustration of admiring the beauty of Paris only on takeoffs or landings, or as a distant skyline seen from a high-speed train. It was a crazy circumstance that had to be remedied. On my last trip to France I did just that.



On the Rue du Dragon, which is a short connecting street barely wide enough for traffic, is a typical Paris hotel - **Hotel du Dragon**. It's redeeming quality was the price (under \$100 Euros) and the fantastic location. It is an easy walk to shopping on St. Germain, extensive gardens, museums and the Left Bank. So the lack of an elevator, room to walk around my bed, space to turn around in a converted hallway bathroom only as wide as the shower stall at the far end of it, and any pretense of civility, were, if not easily, at least sensibly overlooked. I was in Paris for 26 hours. There was no time for regrets.



It was less a question of what to see first, than it was one of "How much can I see?" I was 3 blocks from the Latin quarter & La Rive Gauche (the left bank), one more to **Norte Dame**, the **Jardin du Luxembourg** and the Louvre. There were 2 Metro stops, restaurants and plenty of great shopping on the way to all of them! I was in heaven!



neighborhood.

I window shopped on St. Germain, a beautiful, divided boulevard running parallel to the Seine. I saw thousands of dollars worth of things I liked, but, with the Euro at \$1.59, paying over 100 Euros for a pair of sneakers and four times that for shoes was out of the question. It is a pricey



I walked everywhere. The promenades along the Seine are perfect for people watching and tourists. It was Sunday, so services were on at Notre Dame Cathedral. The ethereal sound of voices raised in harmony with the organ wafted out over the blooming crab apple trees, hushing the tourists waiting at the door for the bells to toll. The sun even peeked out a few times to remind me that a higher power was in control. Paris is beautiful in the Springtime.



I continued on, past the famous bookstalls and flower market, down to the formal gardens beyond the Louvre that make up this end of the Champs Elysees. Everywhere I looked was green and budded, with vast beds of mixed tulips in full bloom. Little boys sailed boats in the pools, lovers spooned, and couples of all ages strolled hand-in-hand down the allees, the many sculptures sheltered by the freshening trees.



The Grand Palais beckoned in the distance. Two massive pieces of a [Richard Serra sculpture](#) defined a gate out of the park. Not guarded as they were in the Guggenheim, in Bilbao, or at the MOMA, in New York - no - these invited the sensuous caress prohibited at the others. I lingered between them, absorbing their strength, smiling as people touched and leaned against the 40 ton curvaceous walls. The French are so sensible about art. Maybe its because they have so much of it to see. I laughed at the lack of restrictions, pounded on the resonating walls and angled my way towards the Arc de Triumpe.



The sight of the Crystal Palace quickly distracted me. I detoured my walk to admire the architecture and the beautiful light coming through the glass roof. There was a book show inside, so I paid a fee and spent an hour admiring the publisher's art from antiquity into the present, imagining the glass hall filled with plants and flowers, while a light rain fell outside. I ate something there, I have no recollection what, sitting on the high steps looking out over the crowded floor of book sellers and their customers. When the sun came out again I left.



I spent a day and a night like this, walking where my nose pointed, eating street food and snacks, drinking the bottle of French wine I purchased in a local shop. A simple meal of ham and cheese, that is - cured Spanish Jamon with slivers of Parmesan - and crusty French bread completed my dining. It was a day for touring, not eating. I bumped into newlyweds being photographed on an elaborate bridge, a band playing while a man dressed as a penis danced, a wine tasting in front of the church, a distant Eiffel Tower, and countless groups of US students on Holiday touring the city, their English sounding harsh after all the murmured French. Paris is such a beautiful city to lose oneself in. I had a blast!



All too soon my idyll ended.
Air France finally had an open seat back to the US, and I had to be on it. On the return flight I slept the sleep of the dead. All the perks of Business class were as wasted on my inert form as my hotel room bed was during my exploration of Paris the night before. I'm safely home in the US now, but I can't wait to go back to Paris!



Official French Government Tourist Office

www.franceguide.com

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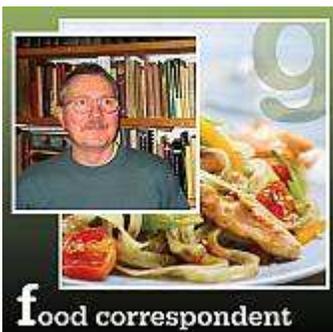
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RICHARD FRISBIE is published twice a month to Gather Essentials: Food. It is a food junkie's take on growing, raising, preparing and - above all else - eating food. Together we'll explore the trends, addictions, equipment and regional specialties that make up the sometimes mundane and sometimes sublime cooking and dining experience. You can keep up with my other postings and Gather activity by joining my Gather network -- I look forward to hearing from you.

You can read all of my articles <http://rfrisbie.gather.com/> or find them with those of the other Food Correspondents, plus celebrity chef content and plenty of other Foodies at <http://foodtalk.gather.com>

BIO - Richard Frisbie writes culinary travel articles, is a columnist for his local newspapers, and

Richard Frisbie is a regular contributor to the many Hudson Valley, Catskill Mountain and other regional New York publications. Online, he writes frequent articles for EDGE publications, GoNomad and Travel Lady, as well as Gather.

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Comments: 28

[David W.](#) Feb 4, 2009, 5:26pm EST

What a treat, a mega montage of Paris. someday.....

[Richard Frisbie](#) Feb 4, 2009, 5:43pm EST

I was such an unexpected treat, David. I spent an extra 3 days in France waiting for a flight home. Overnights in Epernay and Reims gave me my fill of Champagne (not hardly!) and the last night in Paris - Wonderful! I hope you get to go soon.

[Mariana T.](#) Feb 4, 2009, 5:49pm EST

Paris in the spring - oh my dream - love this Richard - felt as if I were there walking by the bookstalls - enjoying the whole world of Paris...will keep coming back to read this. Salud

[Katrina Hall](#) Feb 4, 2009, 5:58pm EST

What a beautiful, beautiful post, Richard! I was in Paris so long ago (and w/boyfriend), I didn't get to a great many places, so much of this was new to me. The light! I noticed the light, so bright, but soft, in the photographs. It must be a photographer's dream! Thanks for a delightful peek into Street Paris!

[Sheryl O.](#) Feb 4, 2009, 6:43pm EST

Oh, what a wonderful visit, albeit a short one! I went to Paris for the first time when I was 16 - stayed at the Hotel St. Germaine, too! It's probably not there anymore, but also lacked an elevator and fancy amenities. But who stays in their hotel in Paris?

It is a magical city full of art and culture and history. I don't blame the Parisiennes for being haughty - they have so much to be proud of. If I went back, I would definitely stay as you did on the Left Bank. I think it truly represents the heart of Paris. Thanks so much for sharing this, Richard. It brought back a lot of happy memories.

[Amanda "middle of nowhere" C.](#) Feb 4, 2009, 6:43pm EST

Paris was nice, but to be honest, I was just a little disappointed. I guess I had heard my mom talk about her dreams of going there all my life. Thanks for sharing the photos.

[Dorine H.](#) Feb 4, 2009, 10:10pm EST

Oh, Richard, you've finally gotten to Paris! It's about time! Your photos are wonderful! The memories they bring back! I wish you'd taken more pix and been more descriptive about your food in the food capital of the world! Can anything warm the soul like a bowl of soup in a Parisian side street bistro? With some local wine, and the meal ended with a perfect pear and some Roquefort? How much time did you spend in the Louvre? Did you climb the tower in Notre Dame? And feel the awe at Paris spread beneath you? Walk in Montmartre at night?

I've been in Paris 3 times, and can never tire of it. Paris never, ever disappoints (despite what Amanda thinks)!

[Sophie S.](#) Feb 5, 2009, 3:59am EST

I am taking down the name of the hotel for Missy and myself. *dreaming*

[Gary L.](#) Feb 5, 2009, 4:33am EST

WHAT A TRIP!
Someday maybe.....

[N. L. D.](#) Feb 5, 2009, 10:06am EST



- [Myspace Layouts, Graphics, and Comments!](#)

[Richard Frisbie](#) Feb 5, 2009, 12:10pm EST

Thanks Mariana - it was impossible to stop walking.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Feb 5, 2009, 12:13pm EST

Katrina - the light was weird - the sky in the photos goes from overcast to clear to partly cloudy and back again. I was in rain gear the whole time and the light was fantastic!

Sheryl - "But who stays in their hotel in Paris?" EXACTLY! I had a companion who read a book in the room while I walked - but she's in Paris many times a year! Me - I was a virgin!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Feb 5, 2009, 12:15pm EST

You are so right Dorine - Paris is beautiful. I was only inside to use wifi to check on flights and to go to the book show - otherwise I was walking everywhere!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Feb 5, 2009, 12:18pm EST

Sophie - You'll probably get a better room than I did, and a better attitude. With my reservations arranged by the French Tourism office I thought it would go smoother. It did not. Outside of Paris the French were wonderful. In Paris they were less "open", less accepting of me.

[Sheryl O.](#) Feb 5, 2009, 1:27pm EST

Virgin or no, I would have to feel very poorly to stay in my hotel and read when Paris is calling just steps away.

[Dorine H.](#) Feb 5, 2009, 1:28pm EST

My last--and longest--visit to Paris was as a guest in the home of a classmate from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (we were both taking the advanced Spanish program for foreigners). Perhaps being a guest of her family made a big difference; I remember Parisians as wonderfully warm and generous people.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Feb 5, 2009, 1:44pm EST

The experience sounds wonderful, Dorine. I'm really glad to hear it.

I'm with you, Sheryl!

[Mariana T.](#) Feb 5, 2009, 5:39pm EST

hi Richard - came back again to view all the pictures here - wonderful - I remember going to France but I stayed in the Southern part - Nimes, Arles, the Golden part, however, later when we were living in Switzerland, I'd go to Abbeville, France - never made it to Paris but the hub did and said certain areas reminded him of the French Quarter and he also said I'd love the old cemeteries...well, someday! Thanks for a trip without leaving the farm. Salud

[Mariana T.](#) Feb 5, 2009, 5:40pm EST

I have to always be out and about amongst people when I travel as well. Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Feb 5, 2009, 5:43pm EST

And it was so nice to be out on a beautiful Spring day! Thanks for stopping by again (and again!)

[Sophie S.](#) Feb 5, 2009, 9:36pm EST

Really?

I always thought it was the total opposite. I have traveled and visited family outside of the city a lot and I have always found that people are incredibly turned off by visitors-- and that's that I don't speak English when I am there, generally I always speak Spanish except when I need to speak to someone in French (my bad French). I've always been met by rude people in small towns.

It might also be that in the larger cities, I take on my city girl attitude and just go about my business, much like I would in Chicago, without much interaction.

[Sonia M.](#) Feb 6, 2009, 2:36am EST

Sigh.....been all over the central, West and Northeastern Spain.....been all over Italy from Milan down to Pompeii.....but I never got to Paris..... Hopefully one of these days...meantime, I will live vicariously through your photos and descriptions....!

[Leah Christensen](#) Feb 7, 2009, 12:40am EST

Thanks for posting this.

[Hixto Ingen](#) Feb 7, 2009, 1:41am EST

Beautiful! Thanks for sharing your pictures with us, Richard.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Feb 7, 2009, 10:59am EST

Aw - Sonia - I hope you get to go soon. Thanks for stopping by.

[Katie Scarlett \(Site Bouncer Wanna Be\) O.](#) Feb 7, 2009, 11:04am EST

Lovely photos and essay Richard.

[T Cheri P.](#) Feb 7, 2009, 9:56pm EST

beautiful photo essay

[Madame Donna C.](#) Feb 12, 2009, 11:38am EST

Richard, this is a lovely glimpse of my favorite city. Some of my family lived in Paris for many years and we were delighted with personalized tours that took us to little known spots and famous monuments. Now I'm just as pleased that they have moved to the south of France so my next visit can be a combination of city (again) and countryside.

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